

# An Investigation into the use of Digital Marketing and Social Media platforms by Independent Musicians in Ireland

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## **Abstract**

Independent musicians have become the fastest-growing segment of the recorded music industry today. This has, in many respects, been aided by the digitalisation of music and the advancements in digital technologies such as improvements to home recording equipment. Independent musicians are making use of these digital mediums along with the help of new forms of communications, digital marketing techniques and social media in order to make a name for themselves within the industry. However, successful independent musicians still remain in the minority. Which brings into the question, are these new mediums as beneficial as they suggest.

Very few studies have focused on independent musicians and their use of digital marketing and social media, especially in Ireland. With this in mind, the purpose of this dissertation is to investigate this use with the objective of determining if there is an over-reliance on these mediums. This research seeks to understand the motivations behind independent musicians use of these technologies and whether or not they believe they are too dependent on them.

This study employed qualitative research methods in the form of content analysis and semi-structured interviews. The participants of the interviews were all Irish-based independent musicians. From the research, key themes were identified and categorised. The findings concluded and revealed that independent musicians were dependent on new mediums to aid in navigating through the music industry. However, it was found that this was a necessity in today's digital age.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **1.1 Introduction**

#### ***1.11 Digital Disruption***

According to Halttunen “*digitalization has been producing new ways of life, changing and replacing the previous ones*” (Halttunen, 2016, p.9). This transformation has been felt across every industry, and the music industry is no different. Which has resulted in systematic changes occurring within the music industry due to a technological disruption. Gartner.com defines digital disruption as “*an effect that changes the fundamental expectations and behaviors in a culture, market, industry or process that is caused by, or expressed through, digital capabilities, channels or assets*” (Gartner.com, 2020, p.1). Digital disruptions create instabilities in old approaches, business practices and conditions eroding the normal boundaries in which the value proposition of existing goods and services are both created and delivered (Skog & Sandberg, 2018; Karimi & Walter, 2015; Weill & Woerner, 2015; Rauch, Wenzel & Wagner, 2016). The music industry has, throughout the ages, experienced a number of disruptions, mainly surrounding the development of new media in which music is consumed and distributed. Traditionally music was consumed in a physical format such as cassettes, however, now with the introduction of file-sharing and streaming services, music consumption has changed drastically (Aguiar, 2017; Koh, Murthi & Raghunathan, 2014). This has created opportunities for the eager musicians to make a break into the music industry.

#### ***1.12 New Order: A New Digital Order, Not the Band!***

Digitalization has changed the outlook of music and has become the new standard of music marketing (Florina & Andreea, 2012; Salo, Lankinen & Mantymaki, 2013). This has had a drastic effect on both the consumer and in particular, the independent musician. Independent musicians are musicians who act independently from and without the help of recording labels by applying a Do-It-Yourself approach to creating and distributing their own music (Hesmonhalgh, Jones & Rauh, 2019; Geoghegan & Meehan, 2014). Prior to the digitalisation of music, independent musicians struggled to distribute their own music, relying on options such as merchandising booths after live performances as their main channel of distribution in many cases (Hracs, 2012). However, this all changed with the digitalisation of music, which has directly affected the recorded music industry, as new digital means for distribution and production have shaken the foundations of the *old* music industry, arming independent

musicians with new ways in which to circulate their music (Lozic, 2019). Social media platforms, in particular, have “*created a new structural and spatial order*” where independent musicians can create, produce and release music through digital means (Hracs, 2012, p.443). Also new software-enabled recording equipment along with the advancements in the quality of home-recording methods have significantly helped lower the cost to market and the production of music for independent musicians (Leyshon, 2009). This has led to a “*flattening effect on the industry*” enabling “*a much higher number of musicians to enter the industry and function as independent producers*” (Hracs, 2012, p. 456).

However, although independent musicians are arguably becoming more digital, due to the new ease of entry into the recorded music industry, many still question the utopian assumption that digital technologies aid in guaranteeing success. As it would be fair to say that successful musicians still remain in the minority. Digital technologies offer independent musicians a new way to break onto the music scene. Yet, alone they may not guarantee the success that independent musicians desire. In fact independent musicians are still “*required to perform a wider variety of tasks*” outside of creativity (Hracs, 2012, p. 457). In other words, non-musical practices (Brown, 2012). Baker suggests that in order to make the difference independent musicians need to put “*smart marketing practices into actions*” (Baker, 2013, p. 8). Taking on a new marketing mindset means that independent musicians are now having to adapt to changes in consumer behaviour along with ensuring they are effectively utilising online marketing tools to maximise their chances of success.

With that in mind, this dissertation aims to delve deeper into the lives of independent musicians to ascertain a better understanding into their use of digital marketing and social media tools. The authors seeks to gain insight into their views on these practices and platforms and how effective they are in achieving their musical goals.



## **1.2 Research Questions**

The main research question this dissertation aims to address is:

1. Are independent musicians in Ireland over reliant on digital marketing and social media tools to help promote their music?

From this main research question, three sub-questions have been identified to be answered also:

1. What motivates independent musicians to utilise digital marketing and social media tools?
2. How do independent musicians measure value in using online tools?
3. Do independent musicians feel they would be at a disadvantage if they opted not to use online tools?

## **1.3 Research Objective**

There is a very limited scope of research on independent musicians and their use of online tools. Some have discussed this topic such as Haynes and Marshall (2018), however, there is an obvious gap in the literature. Much of the research carried out in this area has been done so separately, with studies on independent musicians and the concepts of digital marketing, respectively. Furthermore, the author has found no such study carried out on Irish independent musicians to date. Thus highlighting another gap in the current literature. The objective of this dissertation is to determine if there is an overreliance on the use of digital marketing and social media tools by independent musicians.

## **1.4 Layout of Dissertation**

**Chapter 1 – Introduction:** The introduction offers up a preliminary insight into the main topic of this dissertation. The chapter outlines the research questions along with the core aim of the research objective.

**Chapter 2 – Literature review:** This chapter examines the existing literature concerning to the research question. Through an in-depth review of the literature, theoretical concepts pertaining to the digitalisation of music, digital marketing, independent musicians, music piracy, promotion and social media are critically analysed and discussed in order to form a basis for the research.

**Chapter 3 – Methodology:** This chapter outlines the methodological approach that was taken. This chapter discusses the research philosophy, research design and data analysis along with identifying the key methods that were used for this study.

**Chapter 4 – Findings:** This section presents the findings from the primary research that was undertaken. The aim of this chapter was to illustrate the key findings in relation to the research questions along with highlighting key themes that were unearthed from the study.

**Chapter 5 – Discussion:** This chapter focuses on a discussion of the findings. The aim of this chapter was to analyse and discuss the implications of the findings with regards to literature review and the research objectives.

**Chapter 6 – Conclusions:** This chapter focuses on conclusions drawn on from the research and the wider study. Along with identifying the limitations the researcher faced along with recommending suggestions for further research.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### 2.1 The Independent Musician

#### 2.1.1 Being “Indie”

As Haynes and Marshall note “*musicians’ can be a diverse group*” (Haynes & Marshall, 2018, p.1979). The musicians we are most familiar with are those who are signed to music labels. Labels provide musicians with job security, financial resources, routes to market and means to survive in the long-term (Hracs, 2012). Thus, affording them with more opportunities to become well-known. However, although household names such as Bob Dylan and the Rolling Stones may be at the forefront of the more recognisable side of the industry. There are millions of musicians who operate away from the mainstream, many who are unsigned to any label at all, who are known as independent musicians (Gao, Delava, Doyle, Shingler & Stearns, 2009). There are only a handful of definitions of independent musicians, however, some scholars have presented some clarification. Wang proposes that independent musicians are “*musicians who seek to create art outside of this traditional framework, bypassing the control of powerful production and distribution companies and studios*” (Wang, 2016, p.2). Similarly, Hesmondhalgh and Meier (2015) suggest that independents within the music scene are those who are non-corporate, lacking any financial prowess to aid in their success. Brown (2012), however, noted that the idea of independence can be viewed from two perspectives. The first viewpoint is that being “*indie concerns production, distribution, and promotion on the artists’ own terms, free from the interference of other interests—particularly those of traditional record labels*” (Brown, 2012, p.524). On the other hand, “*independent*” music can be viewed more from the “*anti-establishment views in the tradition of the founders of rock and roll*” (Brown, 2012, p.524).

This second point is important to note, as there is a distinction between independent music and independent musicians. Independent or Indie music is a genre of music. It similarly has roots in breaking away from the commercialised side of the music industry, becoming a self-regulating genre of music. The indie genre was spearheaded by the band Black Flag in 1979, who recorded, released and promoted their own music (Carradini, 2018; Azerrad, 2001). Indie music was synonymous with rejecting the mainstream, however, over the course of time this changed. This has led to many confronting the idea of its commercial rebellion. With many questioning the genres true independence, as it is processed with a degree of professionalism

that benefits from a relationship with the mainstream music industry (Tarassi, 2018; Bannister, 2006).

However, although the genre has since commercialised, its ideology still rings through with more and more independent musicians surfacing. Hibbett highlighted that indie music set the tone as it is not just “*an aesthetic genre, but as a method of social differentiation*” (Hibbett, 2005, p.55). This philosophy has led to a steady increase in the number of independent musicians over the last few years. In fact, it was discovered that independent musicians were the fastest growing segment of the global recorded music business (Daniels, 2019). The “*concept of independence*” is actually “*more important in popular music than in any other cultural form*”, and because of this, independent musicians are becoming more common (Hesmondhalgh & Meier, 2015, p.1).

### **2.12 Do-It-Yourself Musicians**

Much of the literature surrounding independent musicians focuses on the Do-It-Yourself (DIY) aspect of musicians. There is an element of entrepreneurship attached to being an independent musician in that vein (Haynes & Marshall, 2017). As Wang notes “*rather than having their music and themselves produced by the culture industry, indie musicians promote a more bottom-up approach of making music*” (Wang, 2016, p.2). McLean, Oliver and Wainwright (2010) further this sentiment when they highlight that independent musicians take on a multitude of roles in comparison to their more established colleagues. Hracs highlights this difference by illustrating how those working “*under the major label model*” dedicate the majority of their time to “*creative tasks such as song writing, recording and performing*”, whereas, those dedicated to the independent model are responsible for “*non-creative tasks*” which would fall under three main categories; business tasks, managerial tasks and technical tasks (Hracs, 2012, p.457). This DIY approach means that independent musicians have to act as composer, distributor, manager, musician and promoter in order to get noticed (Mclean et al., 2010; Oliver, 2009). Which in essence, according to Hracs and Leslie, encapsulates independent musicians as “*independent entrepreneurs*” who are responsible for managing their own brand and image (Hracs & Leslie, 2014, p.69). Although they assume more of the burden, this freedom can actually be more beneficial. As musicians who are attached to major labels often relinquish much of their creative control over to the label (Hracs, 2012).

### **2.13 Promotion**

The DIY culture in which independent musicians operate in, creates a space for those who desire to make a living from music “*to become involved in multi-tasking to a very high degree and also to become interconnected in a network based upon a strong system of reputation and trust*” (Tarassi, 2018, p.217). This means, as several studies, (Mclean et al., 2010), (Oliver, 2009), (Hracs, 2012), (Hracs & Leslie, 2014), suggest, that independent musicians, in order to financially benefit from their craft, need to adopt a number of roles that would otherwise be taken care of if they were attached to a corporate label. Pre-internet, independent musicians were confined to likes of live performances, the odd radio spot and if they were lucky a tv appearance, to get noticed (Haynes & Marshall, 2018). Therefore their sole concern was their music being the driving force. However, now with the changes in communication and the growth in digital technologies, independent musicians have more to consider. Aside from the business tasks (Hracs, 2012), independent musicians have to carefully manage their reputation, engage in promotional activities and self-market themselves due to the new digital landscape.

Promotion is one of the key components of the 4P’s, product-led, and 7P’s, service-led, marketing mix (Ivy, 2008). The goal of promotion is to make consumers aware of products or service and to generate participation in or the use of these products or services (Thackeray, Neiger & Hanson, 2007). According to Kotler and Keller (2007) promotion has three primary objectives: product awareness, persuading purchases and finally reminding consumers of the product or services to encourage repurchases. When it comes to promotion from a music perspective, the principles of the marketing mix would apply when independent musicians are aiming to promote their music. Although there have been some studies such as Fountoukidis (2015) who have briefly discussed promotion from a musicians point of view, both established and independent, much of the literature surrounding music and promotion leans more so towards utilising music as a promotional tool rather than its own promotional needs.

### **2.14 Branding One-Self: Self-Branding & Self-Marketing**

Today’s independent musicians are operating within a digital reputation economy where notoriety and value is credited on being known, liked, and respected for their opinions and actions (Klein, Meier & Powers, 2017; Hearn, 2010). They in essence, have a reputation to uphold both online and offline, which can act as a crucial factor in achieving success. As Dutta and Bhat note “*reputation is a valuable asset that is built with long-term investment of*

*resources, effort and attention to customer relationship*” (Dutta & Bhat, 2015, p.54). In order to create an identity or image along with managing their reputation, independent musicians now need to engage in self-marketing. Self-marketing refers to the activities undertaken by an individual in order to make themselves known in the marketplace (Resnick, Cheng, Simpson & Lourenço, 2016; Shepherd, 2005). The idea of self-marketing is closely related to the concept of self-branding (Resnick et al., 2016; Ward & Yates, 2013). Hearn explains that self-branding is *“the self-conscious construction of a meta-narrative and meta-image of self through the use of cultural meanings and images drawn from the narrative and visual codes of the mainstream culture industries”* (Hearn, 2008, p.198). Independent musicians, today, need self-brand to define who they are as musicians. This is critical, as the new digital music landscape has given rise to a promotional culture in which the concept of branding and self-branding are crucial for marketing and promotional purposes (Klein et al., 2017; Hearn, 2010).

## **2.2 The Digitalisation of Music**

### ***2.21 From the Disk to the Drive***

Music has been consumed in many varying formats throughout the last 40 to 50 years. As Bonner and O’Higgins highlighted the evolution started *“with vinyl being the prominent format up to the 1960s, followed by the emergence of the tape cassette in the 1970s, followed closely by the CD in the 1980s”* (Bonner & O’Higgins, 2010, p.1342). As Music sales declined in the 1970’s there was a growing need for a new medium (Pikas, Pikas & Lymburner, 2011; Daniel, 2019; Peek, 2010). The CD became that medium and it caused a seismic shift within the industry by becoming the pioneering format in converting music from analogue to digital (Daniel, 2019). As Alexander notes CD’s *“were the first element in the industry’s shift to digital technology”* (Alexander, 2002, p.153). Although the CD’s introduction was met with angst from many *audiophiles* due to the CD’s apparent poor sound quality, it represented a time of change in the manner in which music was to be enjoyed moving forward (Daniel, 2019; Downes, 2010). By the end of 2002, the CD became the prominent medium for music consumption with sales making up around 95.5% of the total revenue generated through music sales (Routley, 2018).

However, the CD *“inadvertently established a digital culture”* that paved the way for the digital future of the music industry (Daniel, 2019, p.159). Being a digital format meant that files could be easily copied or *ripped*, as it was commonly known, from the CD, making it easy for users

to copy and transfer files (Dholakia, Reyes, Ian & Bonoff, 2015; Sterne 2012). The ability to extract files, although seen as revolutionary at the time, ultimately led to the CD's downfall. The capability of ripping and transferring files was present ever since the CD was released, but it was not that common. However, this all changed with the development of the MP3 (Alexander, 2002; Eiriz & Leite, 2017).

## **2.22 Streaming**

There has been a very evident shift from *physical music*, such as CDs, to new digital technologies which have dramatically altered the way in which we consume, listen to and interact with music (Koh et al., 2014; Leenders, Farrell, Zwaan & ter Bogt, 2015). Fuentes, Hagberg and Kjellberg noted that the digitalization of music “*evolved through a series of transformative phases; from vinyl’s to CDs, from CDs to mp3s and from mp3s to streaming services*” (Fuentes et al., 2019, p.484). Eiriz and Leite noted that streaming services represent a “*further step in the digital distribution of music*” (Eiriz & Leite, 2017, p. 881). This new way of listening has further emphasised the shift to a more digital future of music. Today 79% of the total revenue made by the music industry is generated through streaming services, according to Recording Industry Association of America (Tableau, 2020). From an independent musicians perspective, streaming services have offered up new opportunities too. Hesmondhalgh et al. (2019) discuss this when they identify that there are two types of streaming services; mainstream services that partner with rights owners and services that allow for the upload of music by anyone. Companies such as Soundcloud and Spotify have created spaces for musicians to upload their music. These platforms can be referred to as “*producer-oriented*” as opposed to “*consumer-oriented mainstream platforms*” (Hesmondhalgh, 2019, p. 2). However, it has been argued that, although these services offer independent musicians a new avenue for distributing music, the financial benefit from doing so can be quite small. Simon highlighted that the odds of being financially successful through streaming platforms for musicians was very much dependent on a “*significant volume effect*” (Simon, 2019, p. 539). In other words, these platforms favoured the more popular and well-known artists over the independents.

Areas in **gray** represent music sold in **physical** format, whereas areas in **pink** represent music sold in **digital** format.

Total Revenue made by the American music industry Adjusted for inflation, 2017 US dollars

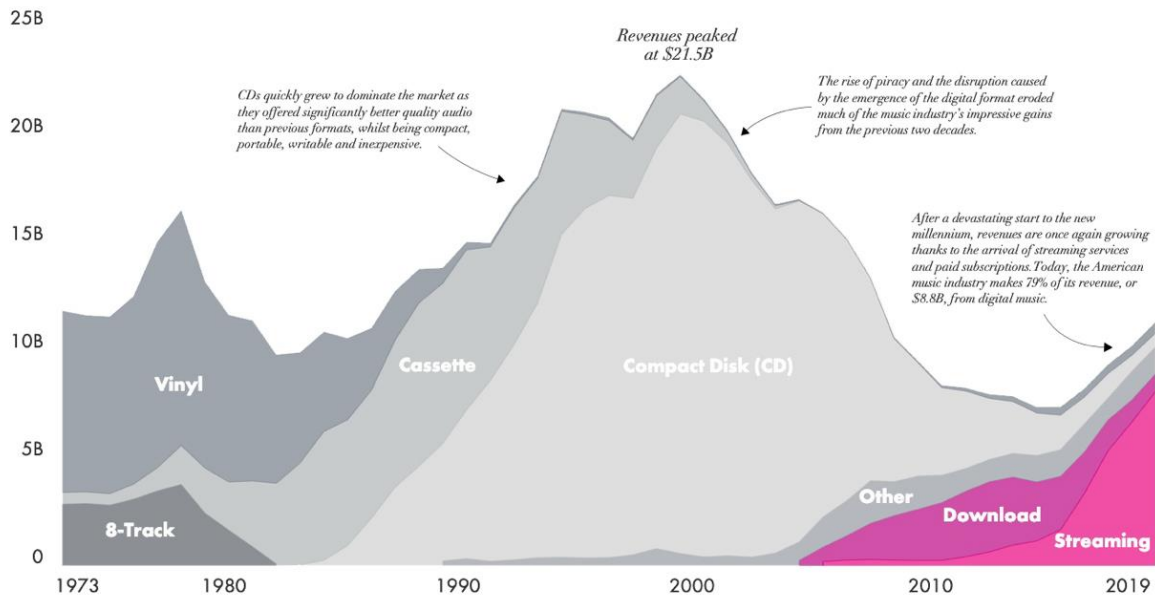


Figure 1: Image obtained from Tabeleau.com (2020)

## 2.3 The Changing Face of Music

### 2.3.1 Music is “like Water”

Music, in the very beginning, was performed and enjoyed in a live setting, and then it was “recorded, duplicated and distributed as an actual physical product” (Skoro & Roncevic, 2019, p. 280). However, there has been a *marked change* in the way in which we consume and experience music (Hesmondhalgh & Meier, 2018). Music is no longer limited to a physical format. There has been a shift towards more digital means due to an increased use in the internet which has drastically altered the way in which music is produced, distributed and consumed (Vaccaro & Cohn, 2004; Molteni & Ordanini, 2003; Arditi, 2019). The digitization of music made it possible to make an infinite number of copies and own almost every song ever released. Kusek and Leonhard (2005) suggested that music is now *like water* as it is so plentiful. It is now everywhere and is accessible on various platforms (Arditi, 2019). This has led to a number of implications for musicians. On one hand, it has meant that their music is more easily accessible. However, it has also brought about many issues such as copyright breaches, illegal downloading and piracy issues. Although, in many respects, independent musicians are generally not as financially sound as established artists, they still need a revenue stream to continue performing and recording. The music industry holds the key in many respects and



when that is put into jeopardy it can have a detrimental effect on an independent musicians' prospects.

### **2.32 Music Piracy**

The internet has paved the way for “*several mechanisms, both legal and illegal, for consumers to consume music without paying for it*” (Koh et al., 2014, p.366). With this new paradoxical balance between legal and illegal means of obtaining music, consumer choice has become more varied than ever before. Which has increased the level of music piracy that takes place. Today, music piracy is associated with the free exchange of MP3 files online in which no royalties are paid to the artists or record companies (Levin, Dato-on & Manolis, 2007). However, it must be highlighted that the unlawful copying of music has been a problem ever since music was first recorded. Odou and Bonnin noted that “*the first accusations of ‘piracy’ appear to date from the 1920s at the time of the appearance of music reproduction techniques using cylinders*” (Odou & Bonnin, 2014, p. 118). McLeod also highlighted how the phrase “*Home Taping is Killing Music*” was a “*slogan invented and heavily promoted by major labels to combat the unauthorized duplication of music in the early-1980s*” (McLeod, 2006, p.521). Home taping was a practice in which consumers would copy music from cassette tapes and CDs that they purchased onto blank cassettes at home (Bottomley, 2015).

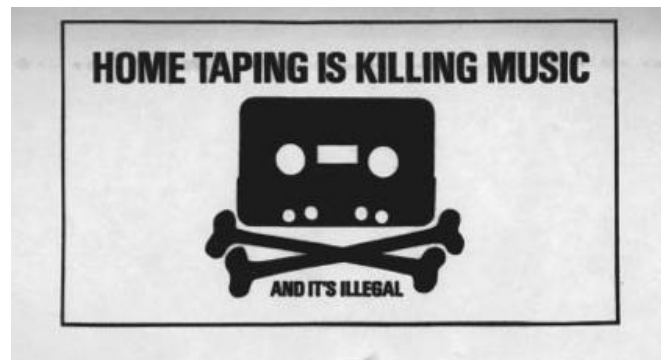


Figure 2 : Image obtained from Bottomley (2015, p.127)

The increased use in technology, however, changed people's attitudes and views towards music from both a cultural and societal perspective (Brown & Krause, 2017; Wingstedt, Brändström & Berg, 2008). Peer-to-Peer (P2P) networks, such as the infamous Napster.com, which “*enable resource sharing directly between autonomous individual network users*” became more frequently used due to their ability to share music files over the internet with ease (Asvanund,

Clay, Krishnan & Smith, 2004, p.1). Although, these networks did not encourage illegal file-sharing, they offered up a platform to do so. This led to distribution of digital music through P2P networks to “*become one of the most popular internet activities*” (Vaccaro & Cohn, 2004, p.46). This altered the perceived social norms of obtaining music through legal and illegal means drastically. LaRose and Kim noted how generally “*norms act through the judgmental process component of the self-regulatory mechanism*” (LaRose & Kim, 2007, p.269). However, in the case of music piracy, the norms of consumer behaviour are tested. Many have highlighted how the new age of digital music has challenged social norms and how music has been swept up in a new cyber-culture where consumers have been socialized into a culture that is accepting of piracy (Taylor, Demont-Heinrich, Broadfoot, Dodge & Jian, 2002; Kinnally, Lacayo, McClung & Sapolsky, 2008). This has become a major threat to the music industry due to the internet enabling its growth and effectively allowing it to become omnipresent (Cesareo & Pastore, 2014; Robertson, McNeill, Green & Roberts, 2012). Which has become a source of much distaste to record companies who view it as an illicit and unethical practice, which deprives them of compensation (Levin, Dato-on & Rhee, 2004).

The majority of the literature focused on issues pertaining to music piracy with regards to established artists rather than independent musicians. As independent musicians are generally on the other end of the spectrum financially, in comparison to their established colleagues, it could be argued that they view music piracy in a much different light. They may, in theory, be more in line with the thinking that there are some positives from this practice and the use in P2P networks. Much of the research on file sharing and music piracy focuses on the negative connotations of the practice, however, there have been a number of studies that have examined the positive side. For example, Oberholzer-Gee and Strumpf conducted a study in which they found that the transfer of digital music and file sharing “*had no statistically significant effect on purchases*” of physical music mediums (Oberholzer-Gee & Strumpf, 2007, p.38). It has also been suggested that “*file sharing may also shift the demand curve out and can, in principle, stimulate legal purchases*” (Waldfogel, 2010, p.307). The effects of digital technologies and the influence of music piracy have stripped away a great deal of the boundaries for independent musicians also, that would have been present when music was predominantly sold in a physical format. As Andersen and Frenz discovered, file-sharing actually helped to “*create a range of new business opportunities*” for artists that would not have been possible with physical mediums (Andersen & Frenz, 2010, p.735). There are also people known as *samplers* who download music illegally in order to preview the music before purchasing it later legally (Dörr,

Wagner, Benlian & Hess, 2013; Bhattacharjee, Gopal & Sanders, 2003; Peitz & Waelbroeck, 2004). Which arguably could be viewed as a positive for independent musicians as it, in theory, creates new opportunities, as Andersen & Frenz (2010) suggested. This *try-before-you-buy* concept will be revisited in section 2.45.

## **2.4 Digital Musicians**

### **2.41 Digital Marketing**

The growth in the use of the Internet has made it one of the most important marketplaces for the transaction of goods and services today (Leeflang, Verhoef, Dahlström & Freundt, 2014). This has created a digital economy which has altered the way in which businesses are run, how we communicate and how marketers engage with consumers (Saura, Palos-Sanchez & Suárez, 2017). The internet has paved the way for a new era of marketing; digital marketing. Digital marketing is a new approach to marketing that is helped by the use in digital technologies (Taiminen & Karjaluoto, 2015; Järvinen, Töllinen, Karjaluoto & Jayawardhena, 2012; Liu, Karahanna & Watson, 2011; Rowley, 2008). Digital marketing makes use of digital distribution channels, such as computers and smart phones, to promote products and services (Smith, 2012). Its use of mass media has made it a popular option for businesses and marketers alike in recent times (Khan & Siddiqui, 2013). Its popularity can also be attributed to its perceived ease of use, low cost and its ability to reach new and existing customers more effectively than traditional marketing (Taiminen & Karjaluoto, 2015). However, although an attractive route, it has been argued that digital marketing is a practice with only marginal gains (Milbank, 2013). Rowley (2008) notes that there has been a cannibalisation of traditional business models with marketers preferring the use of digital means rather than conventional techniques. Marketers are now becoming more heavily invested in using digital marketing to build their brand and convince consumers to buy (Verissimo & Borges Tiago, 2014). This has led to the digital marketing marketplace to become a more level playing field with everyone having access to the same technology (Milbank, 2013). There is a divide, however, between free and paid for options which can be the catalyst in standing out from the crowd. Digital media from a digital marketing perspective can be viewed in three ways; owned, earned and paid media (Lovett and Staelin, 2016). With that, there has been an increase in “*freemium*” platforms, in which “*customers can get a basic version of a product or service for free and switch to a premium version with additional features by paying a price*” (Gu, Kannan & Ma, 2018, p.10). These types of platforms remove a lot of the barriers of entry to the market,

allowing for more cost-conscious entrants to join the marketplace. One form of digital marketing that is heavily used as an entrance point is social media.

### ***2.42 Social Media***

Social Media has become an integral part of daily life, changing the lines of communication and the consumption habits of consumers (Yuksel, Milne & Miller, 2016). Social media makes use of internet-based technologies that enables users to share and create information through virtual communities and networks (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Safko & Brake, 2009; Li, Kim & Choi, 2019). This has changed the dynamics of communication, from the traditional one-to-one communication to a one-to-many type of connectivity (Patino, Pitta, & Quinones, 2012). Social media platforms create highly interactive spaces via which individuals interact with one another, share, co-create and discuss on a global scale (Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy & Silvestre, 2011; Flew & Iosifidis, 2020). These spaces open up opportunities for businesses “*to engage in timely and direct end-consumer contact at relatively low cost and higher levels of efficiency than can be achieved with more traditional communication tools*” (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, p.67). This mean that consumers are no longer passive participants in the marketing process and with that businesses are now adapting to more social media driven business models defined by customer connectivity and interactivity (Hanna, Rohm, & Crittenden, 2011). However, although, social media offers a new avenue to connect with consumers more directly, many have argued and discussed the issue in calculating its return-on-investment (ROI) (McCaughey, Baumgardner, Gaudes, LaRochelle, Wu & Raichura, 2014). This difficulty can often be related to the choice of social media platform or tool being used and the determination in which offers the best return (Li et al., 2019). Although there are questions surrounding its ROI, social media usage has been, and continues to be, adapted and utilised at a rapid rate in comparison to any other form of media (McCaughey et al., 2014). The majority of literature surrounding digital marketing and social media tends to lean more towards business practices and marketing, and few discuss the impact of these practices from an independent musicians point of view. This research project will aim to address this gap in the literature.

### ***2.43 Social Media Musicians***

As discussed in section 2.2 and 2.3, the digitalisation of music has drastically changed the music industry along with our music consumption and listening habits. This has also had an

effect on musicians who have had to learn to adapt to this new digital world. For independent musicians, traditionally getting started in the music industry was a costly and time-consuming process. As Wang notes:

*“making a living and breaking-even has proven to be a challenge. Costs of being a musician include equipment, studio time, rehearsal space, travel expenses for shows and touring, and recording costs, not to mention the time put into the actual creative process of writing music.”*

(Wang, 2016, p.2)

Although a number of these costs still prevail, social media and new technologies have lowered the barriers of entry into the music industry (Florina & Andreea, 2012). This in turn has led to *“a renewed wave of musical independence”*, paving the way for a new era of technologically privileged, independent musicians (Hesmondhalgh & Meier, 2015, p.7). Social media has opened the door to applications that allow for a much easier and quicker route to market for the creation and exchange of user-generated content, effectively displacing traditional methods (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Dewan & Ramaprasad, 2014). Independent musicians now have a number of options and platforms in which they can showcase their talent (Choi, 2017). They have a means to publicise their music, attract new fans and sell their music all in one place, the internet, and they can utilise various channels to do so (Haynes & Marshall, 2018). Social Media enables users to connect with other users through blogs, forums and platforms, such as Instagram, Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, among others (Mangold & Faulds, 2009).

*“YouTube is now one of the most important social platforms in the world, heavily used by music artists, allowing users to share and to rate videos that they upload on the site, stimulating the coagulation of social communities and online communication through links. Facebook allows people to share their day-to-day activities, likes and happenings with friends. Twitter functions as a broad audience texting service”*

(Florina & Andreea, 2012, p.128)

There are huge number of blogs and websites, such as *“7 Social Media Platforms Every Musician Should Use in 2020”* on MusicianPort.com, dedicated to best practice when it comes to utilising social media. However it is unclear as to which platform is best, as each offers a

different benefit. From a review of the literature, it was deemed that research in this area was lacking with respect to independent musician use of platforms.

#### ***2.44 Gone Global***

The new digital world has enabled independent musicians to breach global boundaries. As Flew and Iosifidis (2020) note social media networks operate on a global scale which means that communication and interactivity is now also global. Any content produced through these platforms is effectively accessible from anywhere in the world. Before the internet, a musician's reach was limited to mediums such as the radio and tv, which would have their restrictions in number of listeners and cost to market (Haynes & Marshall, 2018). Now with the help of the internet and platforms such as Soundcloud and YouTube, there are more globalised options available to independent musicians. This has empowered independent musicians by providing them with new platforms to interact with audiences directly without any geographical restrictions (Suhr, 2011). Breen coined this interaction as a “*direct access relationship*” where the connection between musician and fan has entered “*another realm*” into “*pure communication*” in which the relationship was “*no longer controlled by marketing campaigns*” (Breen, 2004, p.80). Such a pure relationship, on a global scale, would have been difficult pre-internet. However, although social media has provided independent musicians with means to build up a fan base, many have argued whether this aids in the musician's success. In a study conducted by Sargent (2009), it was found that although musicians found success in using social media when reaching local-level fans, they struggled when trying to reach broader audiences. Baym also makes note of how there are “*blurred boundaries between fans and friends*” which can influence the way in which an audience is perceived by a musician, casting doubt over the benefit of online followers (Baym, 2012, p.286).

#### ***2.45 Digital Benefits: Unbundling***

Digital technologies have drastically reduced costs of copying and disseminating information. This has created new opportunities for independent musicians to leverage digital technologies to showcase their music. Unbundling is one way in which musicians have utilised the freedom that digital technology and MP3s have given them. Unbundling is the process of segmenting an album into individual digital tracks, enabling customers to choose single tracks rather than paying for a full album (Elberse, 2010). Unbundling aids in consumer convenience as users can disregard songs they are not interested in and can add tracks to their preferred device (Oh

& Park, 2012). This enhancement in convenience means that recorded music can be more easily spread among a wider audience, thus, reaching a new cohort of customers that may not have purchased the album otherwise (Dominik & van Heerde, 2017). Unbundling has advanced recently onto social networking sites such as Bandcamp and SoundCloud, allowing artists to upload songs which gives fans the option of purchasing or simply streaming the track online without paying. Andersen & Frenz (2010) highlighted how this offers up an opportunity of a *hear-before-buying-effect*, which gives more freedom to music listeners but also enables artists to showcase their work in a freemium space which could ultimately lead to physical purchases, future ticket sales and ultimately financial gain.

The *try-before-you-buy-concept* and the practice of unbundling has become a more common occurrence. Choi makes note of how the artist Lorde had difficulty getting radio airtime until “*she put five songs on SoundCloud in 2012*”, after uploading the tracks to the website, “*the songs instantly went viral*” which led to the sale of millions of copies of her debut album (Choi, 2017, p.478). Radiohead also made their album *In Rainbows* available to download from their website and allowed consumers select the price they wanted to pay, starting at nothing (Morrow, 2009). Bourreau, Dogan and Hong (2015) highlighted that the album was released with a *pick-your-own-price* offer during an 8-week timeframe. Although it was feared that this may have an adverse effect on the album, as Morrow notes this “*did not so much devalue the music as a ‘product’, rather it further facilitated the role that radio has played in music marketing processes in the past*” (Morrow, 2009, p.167). After the 8-week period had past, both the digital and physical copies of the album were sold at normal album prices (Bourreau et al., 2015). Although sales figures were disputed, Morrow states that this process showcased that rather than being concerned about file-sharing, Radiohead were able to “*successfully employ a strategy that enables them to monetize file-sharing*” and highlight that “*file-sharing, an extraordinarily popular activity, is the cheapest form of music marketing there ever was*” (Morrow, 2009, p.174).

## **2.5 Summary**

The existing literature highlights that a great change has occurred within the music industry due to the digitalisation of music. In some respects this impact has, unfortunately, been negative with P2P networks paving the way for music piracy. However, as the literature suggests, it has also opened the door to new opportunities for independent musicians who can

make use of digital marketing and social media platforms to aid in their success. These platforms and associated technologies have broken down global boundaries and, in many respects, have reduced the costs for musicians. However, the literature also pointed to a degree of naivety in the belief that these new technologies guarantee success. The possibility of poor returns from streaming platforms in combination with the need to do more in this new reputation economy have challenged the perceived all-encompassing benefits of these mediums. However, as research has shown, life as we know it is becoming more digitally reliant, thus, the channels in which independent musicians operate in are following in the same vein. Following a thorough review, gaps in the literature were identified with regards to why independent musicians use these mediums and if they feel they need to utilise them. Which has established grounds for further research in this area.



## **Chapter 3: Methodology**

### **3.1 Research Objective**

The main objective of this dissertation is to ascertain if there is an overreliance on the use of digital marketing and social media by independent musicians. Haynes and Marshall (2018) undertook a study examining musicians who were signed to small labels in England, however, no such study has been conducted in Ireland to date. There has also been no such study conducted that investigated this area into independent musicians who are unsigned, as per Gao et al. (2009) definition, in Ireland.

### **3.2 Research Philosophy**

Research philosophy represents a set of assumptions and beliefs concerning the nature of the research being undertaken, which forms the basis of the research (Melnikovas, 2018; Bryman, 2012). The research philosophy is crucial, as the assumptions made here underpin the overall research strategy and influence the methods chosen (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009). The overarching aim of this dissertation is to investigate the use of digital marketing and social media by independent musicians to see if there is an overreliance on these mediums. However, as was highlighted through the literature, research into this area has been examined from a much more functional perspective. For example, in the case of social media, the research focuses on the platforms purposes and what they offer, rather than how users view them. Therefore, as an individual's perception can be quite complex and varied, it was important to adapt the right philosophy. With this in mind, this research has been carried out using a qualitative and interpretive framework.

#### ***3.21 Qualitative Approach***

It was important to understand how independent musicians in Ireland were using these mediums. In this vein, a qualitative approach was deemed more suitable than a quantitative one. Quantitative studies involve the collection of numerical data and the use of formal methods, such as structured questioning practices with predetermined responses (Bryman & Bell, 2015; Hair, Wolfenbarger, Ortinau & Bush, 2010). In contrast, qualitative research methods are not as reliant on numerical data. According to De Vaus “*qualitative methods are often regarded as providing rich data about real life people and situations and being more able to make sense of behaviour and to understand behaviour within its wider context*” (De Vaus, 2002, p.5). Thus, one of the key differences between these approaches is that qualitative

research is of the mindset that there is great value to be derived from rich descriptions, whereas quantitative research is less interested in this level of detail (Wilson, 2010; Näslund, 2002).

In order to gain a deeper understanding into how independent musicians were using online tools and for what purposes, the author utilised both content analysis and in-depth interviews methods. Interviews rely heavily on a combination of communication, interpretation and observation (Hair et al., 2010). The purpose of the interviews was to open up the lines of direct communication and to gain a more comprehensive understanding. Through a line of questioning the author sought to procure further insights into the world of social media for independent musicians in Ireland. In addition to this, given that a core focus of the research was investigating social media usage, the author identified a need to make use of a qualitative research method that focused on and examined data as a narrative. With this in mind, content analysis was conducted, focussing on both written and visual content posted on social media platforms by independent musicians to understand their habits and procedures in these online spaces (Wilson, 2010).

### **3.22 Interpretivism**

As the aim of this research was to acquire an understanding of independent musicians perceptions of an overreliance on digital marketing and social media platforms. Further to understanding how independent musicians used these platforms, it was crucial to gain insight into their opinions of and how the use of these mediums affected them. With that in mind, a more feeling-driven approach needed to be employed to derive meaning from the participants in the study. Unlike, ontology which is the study of being, an epistemological approach tends to be more focused on attitudes and feelings (Blaikie, 2010; Saunders et al., 2009). One of the core philosophies that epistemology adheres to is interpretivism. Interpretive research aims to “*yield insight and understandings of behaviour*” by explaining “*actions from the participant’s perspective*” (Scotland, 2012, p.12). An interpretivist approach “*supports the view that the researcher must enter the social world of what is being examined*”, therefore, in order to gain a better understanding of the feelings and motives behind independent musicians using online marketing tools, it was deemed the most suitable philosophical approach (Wilson, 2010, p. 33). Interpretive researchers assume that access to reality can only be achieved through social constructions such as language, consciousness, shared meanings and instrument (Myers, 2008). The use of content analysis and in-depth interviews enabled the researcher to enter into the

participants reality. Furthermore, the researcher relied on both the collaboration and participation of the interviewees in order to gather further insights to aid in analysing and presenting the key findings (Wilson, 2010).

### **3.3 Research Design**

#### ***3.31 In-depth Interviews***

The researcher chose to make use of in-depth interviews in order to gain further insight into the use of the digital marketing and social media tools by independent musicians as they are a very effective method of gathering reliable and valuable data (Saunders et al., 2009). Previous studies on independent musicians, such as Haynes and Marshall (2018) and Baym (2012), have also made use of this research technique. A crucial factor for the author choosing to use interviews as a data collection method is their ability to elicit more detailed information about a particular topic. This was achieved through the use of open-ended questioning which the researcher hoped would shed more light on independent musicians own opinions of using these tools. As Hair et al. highlight *“the general rule is that the more a subject talks about a topic, the more likely he or she is to reveal underlying attitudes, motives, emotions, and behaviors”* (Hair et al., 2010, p.81). There was also a hope that these interviews would challenge the studies hypothesis that *“there is an overreliance on the use of digital marketing and social media by independent musicians”* and unearth more information as to why they are needed. The author recognised that conducting interviews could aid in addressing this theory as they offered a number of key advantages that other methods did not, such as:

- i. They create an environment where the researcher can engage in both verbal and non-verbal communication
- ii. Respondents feedback can be recorded which aids in providing more accurate reporting
- iii. Greater flexibility in the delivery of the questions being asked
- iv. Conducting an interview can be quite straight forward
- v. Often completed in a timely fashion

Wilson (2010, p.168)

### *3.31.1 Interview Design*

Saunders et al. (2009) made note of how there are varying types of interviews and that each can be characterised by their level of formality and structure. Interviews can be categorised into three types; structured, semi-structured and unstructured. As the research question suggests, there was a need to dig deeper into the subject and to understand the views of the participants in more detail. Therefore, the interview questioning style of semi-structured was considered the most appropriate due to their open, yet formal approach. Semi-structured interviews are conversational in nature which provided the participants with the freedom to respond in an idiosyncratic manner (Walle, 2015). By adapting this approach, the interviews were conducted in a more informal way which the researcher believed created more natural opportunities to uncover further insights into the thoughts of independent musicians (Hair et al., 2010). This causal approach allowed for more flexibility and for the conversation to flow effortlessly which enabled the researcher to learn as much as possible from the participants. The open-ended questioning style also helped avoid uncomfortable and knowledge-limiting situations of basic Yes/No responses from the participants.

The use of a semi-structured approach also gave greater versatility to alter the order of questioning during interviews depending on the flow of the conversation or if there was a need to dig deeper to explore certain areas of discussion further (Saunders et al., 2009). The participants were asked a number of open-ended questions, as per Appendix, which arose through themes that were devised from the literature review. These questions were generated as the researcher wanted to understand the reasons why independent musicians used these platforms, what value they believed they were obtaining from their use and if they felt they would be at a loss without them. There was an expectation from the researcher that through these questions that the main research objectives and questions would be addressed. The researcher anticipated that the participants would possibly agree with the hypothesis of there being an overreliance and that these types of questions would allow for elaboration on answers provided by the participants. However, it must be noted, although these questions were prepared in advance in order to ignite the conversation, they were viewed more so from the perspective of a road-map of questions to help guide the interview (Adams, Raeside and Khan, 2014). The order of questioning was very much dependent on the flow of the conversation and the answers provided by the participants. Therefore, the use of a semi-structured style allowed for the research to unearth further insights to aid in addressing the research objective.

In total, five interviews were conducted with each lasting around thirty to forty minutes. Contact was made with participants, who met the criteria for inclusion as per section 3.32.1, via social media messaging through Facebook and WhatsApp. However, two of the participants in particular, were contacted via colleagues. The interviews took place in a face-to-face setting, however, due to the current COVID-19 situation, interviews were conducted over video call using Zoom. Although the researcher would have preferred to meet in person, the video interviewing enabled greater flexibility in terms of reaching participants from various locations and eradicated the need to travel which aided in the scheduling process. This was seen as being quite advantageous due to the limited time in which the research was to be completed, which will be discussed in section 3.5. The Zoom software also offers a recording function which enabled the researcher to record the interviews. These recordings were then transcribed immediately after each interview had taken place through Otter AI software to identify common themes that arose through the participants responses. These reoccurring themes were then developed on and presented as findings, which will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 4.

### ***3.32 Sampling***

There were a number of factors to be consider when assessing the appropriate sampling size and sampling technique to use for this research. Among these factors were elements such as access to samples, quality of samples and the time constraints the research was under. Firstly, it was important that the researcher addressed the sampling process by choosing a sampling technique. Saunders et al. (2009) notes that there are two main types of sampling techniques; probability and non-probability sampling.

- *Probability Sampling*: With probability sampling, the chance, or probability, of each case being selected from the population is known and is usually equal for all cases.
- *Non-Probability Sampling*: In contrast to probability sampling, with non-probability the probability of each case being selected from the total population is not known. With this technique it is therefore not possible to make statistical inferences in relation to the wider population (Wilson, 2010).

With this in mind, the author made use of non-probability sampling due to difficulty in establishing the total population of independent musicians in Ireland who utilise online tools

for promotion. Also, the aim of this project was to understand real life phenomenon rather than statistical meaning, therefore employing a sampling technique that allowed for this research was crucial. Studying social phenomenon is a key trait of non-probability sampling which was a key reason as to why the researcher chose to utilise this type of sampling. (Taherdoost, 2016; Yin, 2003). There are, however, a number of types of non-probability techniques that can be used, these can be seen in figure 3 below:

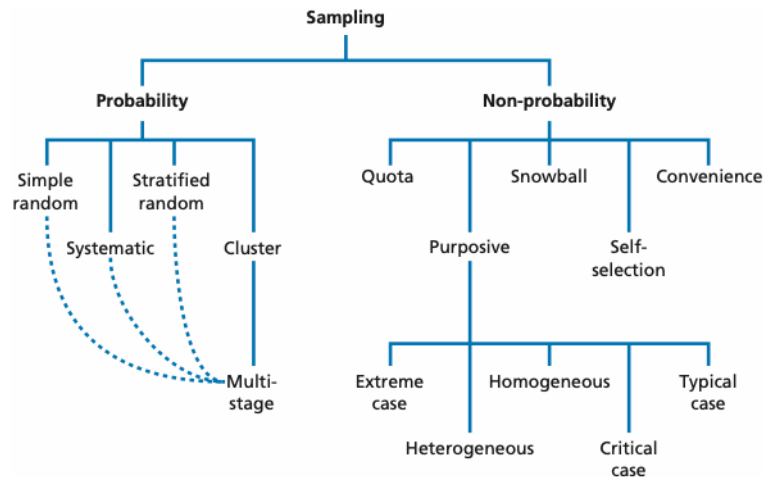


Figure 3: *Sampling Techniques* taken from Saunders et al. (2009)

With the above in mind, the author utilised a purposive sampling technique for this research project. With purposive sampling, a researcher includes participants in the sample because they deem that they warrant inclusion and believe that the information required from the research would not be obtained unless these participants were deliberately chosen (Maxwell, 1996; Wilson, 2010). Using this approach, enabled the researcher to select participants they believed would give the best chance of achieving the research objectives and answering the research questions (Saunders et al., 2009). With this in mind, the researcher established an inclusion criterion to be met for this research project.

### 3.32.1 *Research site & Inclusion Criteria*

As previously stated, the focus of this study was on independent musicians in Ireland, therefore, Ireland was chosen as the research site for this dissertation. The reason Ireland was chosen as the country of focus was due to the researcher being based in Ireland, the researchers familiarity with this research area and also, as discussed previously, no study to date has focused on independent musicians in Ireland who utilise online tools. In addition to this, as the author is also a musician from Ireland, there was an assumption that the participants would be more

receptive and thus would divulge further information to someone who was familiar with the Irish music scene.

In terms of the sample size, the study focused on smaller, specific samples rather than the wider population. Given the nature and objectives of the research being undertaken in combination with the time restrictions involved, due to a specified submission date, the author believed a smaller sample size was appropriate. However, although the sample size was small, the target sampling group was deliberately chosen in order to get a better understanding into the social phenomenon being studied and also as to give the best chance of obtaining valuable information to aid in answering the research questions. For this research project, the criteria the author chose for the target population included musicians who fell into the following categories:

1. Unattached from a music label and who are unsigned
2. Social Media user for promotional activities relating to their music
3. Band member or solo artist
4. Based in Ireland

The author did not choose genre as a measure as there was a belief that this may have affected the response rate and limited participants numbers, to be discussed in section 6.1, when the project was to be completed in a short space of time. Further to this, the researcher also felt that musicians from varying genres would have different experiences with online tools and this diversity would benefit the research from a much broader perspective. The genres that the participants played were desert rock, grunge, hip-hop/rap and singer-songwriter.

### ***3.33 Content Analysis***

As discussed previously, a focus of the research was examining social media usage by independent musicians in Ireland. With that in mind, it was deemed important to investigate the social media profiles of both the interview participants along with other online profiles of independent musicians in order to get a sense of their online practices. Therefore, content analysis was undertaken.

The goal of content analysis is to derive meaning from text-based data and to turn that into valuable information to be used in research. As Hsieh and Shannon note it is “*a research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns*” (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p.1278). In doing so, a researcher can identify important themes within the text relating to their area of research (Fisk, Cherney, Hornsey & Smith, 2012). There are three types of content analysis:

- i. **Conventional Content Analysis:** This is used when the aim of the research is to describe a phenomenon when the existing literature on the phenomenon is limited.
- ii. **Directed Content Analysis:** When prior research about a phenomenon is incomplete or would benefit from further description.
- iii. **Summative Content Analysis:** This involves identifying and quantifying certain words or content in text in order to understand the contextual use of the words or content.

(Hsieh & Shannon, 2005)

The author implemented a process of conventional content analysis to aid in data collection. Similar to the style of a semi-structured interview, conventional content analysis avoids preconceived categories allowing for the researcher to immerse themselves into the research and for the categories to flow naturally from the data (Kondracki & Wellman, 2002). As discussed, there was a sharp focus on online practices for this research project. Therefore conventional content analysis was applied to researching online communities, social media profiles and social media groups to aid in theme development for the research. The analysis of online communities and groups, namely “Dublin Musicians” and “Musicians in Ireland”, enabled the researcher to get a broad and real-life view of how independent musicians were making use of online platforms. Examining various profiles, including the interview participants, also shed some light on how musicians presented and promoted their image and music online, which also yielded some very valuable insights for the research project.



### **3.4 Data Analysis**

As has been highlighted in section 3.21, this dissertation made use of qualitative data collection methods. With that in mind, the author analysed the information gathered in a qualitative manner also. Qualitative analysis is any kind of analysis that produces findings not arrived at by statistical methods (Glaser, 1992). In conducting qualitative data analysis, there were a number of steps to be considered. The author adapted Wilson's (2010) approach to qualitative analysis which involved the following processes:

#### *Transcribing*

As noted in section 3.31.1, the researcher recorded each interview and transcribed each through the Otter Ai software immediately after the interview took place. Although this software provides a full transcript, it was important to listen back to the recordings multiple times and make notes in order to gain a better understanding of the participants experiences and views (Holloway, 1997). This task was an important process as the transcribed data from Otter Ai is often not completely accurate, so it was crucial that the interviews were transcribed into a correct and manageable format to conduct analysis.

#### *Coding & Themes*

After the interviews were transcribed correctly and notes had been taken, it was important that the researcher engaged in a coding process. Through the coding of the data and findings, the researcher was able to rearrange this information into categories to aid in the development of theoretical concepts (Strauss, 1987). Themes were then formed from the coding process and were presented as findings in Chapter 4. As mentioned in section 3.33, the author also conducted content analysis. From this research, similarly, themes were identified within the research to aid in theory elaboration and answering the research questions.

#### *Interpreting Findings:*

Finally, the researcher identified connections between transcripts to aid in developing more meaningful understandings of the results. These interpretations, also, aided in development of theoretical ideas that will be discussed further in Chapter 5.

### 3.5 Time Horizon

Time horizon refers to the time period in which the research is to be conducted. There are two main types of time horizon; cross-sectional and longitudinal (Saunders et al., 2009).

- *Cross-sectional*: This is when the research being carried out is done so at a particular time or a *snapshot* in time (Saunders & Tosey, 2013). Research undertaken in this fashion is generally confined to a timeframe due to time constraints (Saunders et al., 2009).
- *Longitudinal*: As the name would suggest, longitudinal research is carried out over a longer period of time. It is likened more to a *diary* perspective rather than a *snapshot* like cross-sectional timeframes (Saunders, et al., 2009).

Given the nature of this research project was a dissertation, the research was conducted over a cross-sectional time horizon. As the project was due for submission within the academic year, a longitudinal study was not feasible.

### 3.6 Ethical Considerations

Many studies, Bryman & Bell (2015), Saunders et al. (2009), Wilson (2010), have discussed the importance of ethical considerations when conducting research. The author abided by and followed the ethical guidelines as set out by the National College of Ireland (NCI) when conducting the research. A number of key areas were considered when undertaking this research:

- *Informed Consent*: Each participant was presented with a consent form, using a form provided by NCI. These forms stated the nature and the purpose of the research.
- *Voluntary*: Participation in this research study was voluntary and this was made known to each participant.
- *Anonymity*: The author did not reveal any participants names in the study. The interviewees are noted as either “*interviewee*” or “*participant*” in this report.
- *Confidentiality*: Any confidential information provided by participants was treated with the strictest confidence.

## Chapter 4: Findings & Analysis

### 4.1 Introduction

The focus of this chapter is on the findings derived from the primary research that was undertaken. In total, five semi-structured interviews were conducted, with data also collected through content analysis by researching various online groups on Facebook that were created specifically for Irish independent musicians. The author has included raw data in the form of direct quotes from the interviews along with screenshots of online data to present the findings. A thematic approach was used when analysing and presenting the primary research findings. In line with the main research question, as per section 1.2, the author identified a number of sub-questions to assist in addressing the overarching goal of this research, is there an overreliance on these tools. Their objective was to address independent musicians motivations for using these tools, to understand what represented value for them and to determine if they felt they would be at a disadvantage if they opted not to engage with these tools. The author used these sub-questions to aid in identifying themes from the findings. The author has identified these in the table below, in line with the objective of each question they are associated with:

| <b>Objectives</b> | <b>Motivations</b> | <b>Value</b> | <b>Disadvantages</b> |
|-------------------|--------------------|--------------|----------------------|
| <b>Theme</b>      | Promotion          | Reach        | Cost                 |
| <b>Theme</b>      | Power              | Recognition  | Digital Changes      |
| <b>Theme</b>      | Engagement         |              |                      |

Table 1: Interview Themes

## 4.2 Motivational Themes

The first objective was to understand the motivation behind independent musicians use of digital marketing and social media. Through coding the transcribed interviews, three main themes were identified; promotion, power and engagement.

### 4.21 Promotion

Promotion was a common theme with each of the interview participants. As discussed in Chapter 2, the aim of promotion is to make consumers aware, persuade them to consume and then to encourage repeat purchases (Thackeray et al., 2007; Kotler & Keller, 2007). With the internet becoming more of a staple in our everyday lives, independent musicians are having to adapt to these digital times in order to gain a reputation and promote themselves. There has been a *marked changed* in the music industry (Hesmondhalgh & Meier, 2018), which has made things more difficult for independent musicians. As interviewee 1 notes:

*“It's not like it was, say in the 90's and even the early 2000s, when everybody wanted to go out and see the local acts. They wouldn't even necessarily have to see our posts or anything like that. They just say right “there's a show happening in Fibber McGee's” say tonight, or, whatever. “We're gonna go and see what bands are out”. Unfortunately, that doesn't really happen anymore.”*

There was a unified agreement that promotion was one of the key factors behind using social media for their music. There was a feeling that older methods are becoming more redundant as the world becomes more digitally-reliant.

**Interviewee 1:** *“You know posters and such, people don't pay too much attention to, I don't think, anymore.”*

In essence, independent musicians, nowadays, are facing a number of challenges when it comes to promotion. The new digital age has meant that traditional methods are in the decline. The literature also suggested, that as a result of digital technology there is now a new promotional culture, in which independent musicians need to engage in promotional activities online to aid in raising awareness about their music (Klein et al., 2017; Hearn, 2010). In order to facilitate this need, independent musicians are making use of digital marketing and social media.

**Interviewee 3:** *“The way I see it is, if you have a single you need the support systems with a single man. You need like the publications to share it. You need your friends to share it. Like, if you have a single that needs to hit the websites, the blogs, you know, I think you need like something to give that a push”.*

Independent musicians need a medium to promote themselves more effectively and social media provides that option. The interviewees also felt that it was one of the only ways in which you could promote yourself as an independent musician today.

**Interviewee 1:** *“Everything now is promoted through social media. I think it’s the only real place you can promote yourself....you know, you can promote your band, you can promote certain concerts there as well.”*

**Interviewee 3:** *“You can promote yourself a lot more effectively (on social media).”*

**Interviewee 5:** *“It’s only social media dude, yeah. It’s the only way I would do (promote oneself). Like it’s the only thing that I feel, for what I’m doing, is the only way to kind of promote myself, would be via social media.”*

Following on from this, another interesting finding around the theme of promotion was when it came to booking gigs. One of the participants suggested that aside from performing promotional activities on social media platforms, having a social media presence was a promotional tool in itself for securing gigging slots.

**Interviewee 2:** *“When you’re getting gigs, promoters check for videos, promoters check for your advertising strategies, because they’re also thinking about how many people can we get in venues kind of thing. They want to check; Are you any good? Will you have people show up?”*

#### **4.23 Power**

Another interesting theme that the findings revealed was the idea of power. Hracs (2012) hinted at the idea of power when discussing how those who are attached to music labels tend to give

up a lot of their power in return for a recording contract. However, as one of the participants suggested, this power has shifted, in a way, to the independent musicians due to social media.

**Interviewee 3:** *“But now, I think that the power is more in the artists hands. And I think a big reason why that is, why we're seeing a lot more independent artists now than ever, is due to social media man.”*

With this newfound power, brings more freedom to the musicians. Enabling them to move at their own pace and on their own terms. However, it does also mean that they have no one to rely on.

**Interviewee 1:** *“You gotta get your music out there man. We don't have a manager, we don't have a promoter, we don't have anything. It's just literally the four of us.”*

Wang (2016) discussed how independent musicians utilise a more bottom-up approach when making music in which they opt against mainstream record labels in order to produce and distribute music on their own terms. Through operating in this unaccompanied-state, independent musicians act in an entrepreneurial way, taking on multiple roles such as manager and promoter to accomplish “*non-creative tasks*” along with assuming the responsibilities of songwriter also (Oliver, 2009; McLean et al., 2010; Hracs, 2012; Hracs & Leslie, 2014; Haynes & Marshall, 2017). Therefore in essence the burden of achieving success lies solely on the independent musician, as Interviewee 1 suggested when stating “*It's just literally the four of us.*”

However, there is an argument to be made that even though the onus is on the independent musicians to assume multiple roles and responsibilities, it can actually be more advantageous. Musicians who are contracted to record labels have very little say in marketing and promotional activities, and in many cases are overruled creatively also (Hracs, 2012). Social media platforms have empowered independent musicians to promote their own music, own their own terms and have afforded them with a number of channels and options to utilise. Independent musicians also have information indicating what platform is most suitable to use for their audience and the freedom to choose whichever platform they see fit, as interviewee 4 highlights:

*“With Instagram you hit much younger audience and that's kind of what I'm aiming at, maybe. Well not necessarily a younger audience but I kind of want to hit everyone you know what I mean? You want to hit the youth, the elders and I think that Facebook isn't as popular with the younger dudes, then it used to be. Like it's all more Instagram and, I dunno, f\*\*cking TikTok and all that stuff.”*

As Hesmondhalgh (2019) noted these platforms, along with Soundcloud and Spotify, have a more *producer-oriented* focus. They are set-up to benefit the producer of the music rather than to appease the music industry narrative of a consumer-orientated market. These platforms in essence have shifted the control to the artists allowing them to become more self-reliant. Something that may not have been possible pre-internet, as Haynes & Marshall (2018) highlighted.

#### **4.24 Engagement**

Each of the participants believed that social media opened up a door to a new level of engagement that would not be possible with any other medium. Social media has changed the communication landscape drastically. As Patino et al. (2012) noted online communication has now become a one-to-many platform. The literature highlights how social media has created new interactive spaces where independent musicians can communicate with others (Kietzmann et al., 2011; Flew & Iosifidis, 2020).

**Interviewee 3:** *“You can communicate ideas, you know, you can get your ideas across.... you can connect directly. But I think as a broad scale thing, it's good because you can communicate your ideas across very well, I think.”*

Independent musicians can now interact with fans, potential new fans and other musicians all through social media channels. Engaging with fans and promoters was a key factor for each of the musicians interviewed.

**Interviewee 3:** *“When you're talking about, like, being connected, I think you can get connected 'cause someone can send you a personal message.... Because if you're at a DJ set or something, you know, (someone screaming) “I LOVE YOUR MUSIC”, you can't really have a good conversation with someone in that environment. You know what I mean? So like, if*

*someone hits you with a direct message, you can talk to them, you can connect with them man, you honestly can. Like I definitely feel that.”*

This engagement opens up new opportunities for the artists that would not have been possible without a medium such as social media. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) made note of how digital marketing and social media have created new opportunities to interact with end-users more effectively and efficiently than traditional mediums allow. The findings illustrated this by showing how closely linked musicians and fans are today through online platforms.

**Interviewee 1:** *“Yeah, hundred percent. I mean, like, you know, whenever we get, it could be say a message or somebody comments on the videos and stuff, you know, we will quite regularly, you know, respond to them.... So yeah, we we'd have a good reaction or a good interaction, rather, with our fans.”*

The findings also pointed to how engagement through social media benefitted independent musicians by helping in getting booked for gigs. The idea being that the more you engage the more likely you are to find work. It also acted as a reassuring factor for the musicians who viewed this engagement as a measure of their work.

**Interviewee 2:** *“The return on that (social media) would be I think a piece of engagement, for sure. Getting a feel as well for if people are into it. Because if people are into it, were more likely to get a gig. And it's good to have other people on the outside being like “Oh, that sounds great!” Which is kind of more reassuring.”*

Furthermore, the lack of global boundaries means that independent musicians can connect and engage with fans and promoters all over the world.

**Interviewee 1:** *“You can talk to people from anywhere. You might even get yourself a show through it as well. Like, you know, someone could say, “Oh, I've got this place in America or this place in England” and then all of a sudden, you got a gig there in the summer like you what I mean? So I think the communication and, you know, the interaction of social media can be a really, really good thing.”*



### 4.3 Value Themes

The second research question aimed to gain an insight into how independent musicians measured value in their use of online tools. This question was prompted by McCaughey et al. (2014) theory that calculating a ROI was quite difficult through digital marketing and social media platforms. The concept of value was a very interesting topic of discussion during the interviewing process and it unearthed two key themes; reach and recognition.

#### 4.31 Reach

What became clear from the primary reach, was that the participants perceived value in a very different way. They did not look at it from the standpoint of financial gain rather they viewed value from the perspective of what digital marketing and social media could do for their careers. Each of the participants were very clear that value wasn't represented from a financial perspective; it was something different all together. Although making a living out of music was a goal, the participants were much less interested in monetary gain from their use of online tools.

**Interviewee 4:** *“For me, it's just growing an audience, getting my name out. There's no monetary value in it for me at all.”*

This effectively challenged McCaughey et al. (2014) theory on calculating a ROI. Arguably, from a business or commercial perspective this assumption may in fact be true, for independent musicians, however, this proved to not be the case. Where they saw value was through the reach digital marketing and social media enabled. Interviewee 4 discussed this in more detail when talking about how they could use digital marketing techniques to reach an audience:

*“I could check out the demographics, I can check out the age group, what people are interested in. And yeah, just from having a bit of knowledge about it was just super useful.”*

When it came to value, each of the participants noted that reach was a key indicator of what they gained through the use of digital marketing and social media.

**Interviewee 1:** *“I think a big thing for social media is you can reach people.”*

**Interviewee 3:** *“I find with social media, there's more of a reach, right. Now as I was saying that can be that global reach, or that can be the local reach.”*

Many of the participants spoke highly about the reach within the music community online also. Each of the participants saw the value in being able to reach out to other musicians through Facebook groups such as “Dublin Musicians” and “Musicians in Ireland”. There was a community element to it, in which musicians wanted to reach more like-minded people in order to get their music into the hands of new fans but also to get some feedback on their work. As Interviewee 3 notes:

*“So, like they’ll throw it (a song) in and say, “this came out” and people get likes and comments. But I have seen independent artists that, like, I haven't heard of go on to that page and they’re like “I put out a single. What you think?” and you actually do genuinely see people give feedback, you know. It's typically positive.”*

After reviewing a number of online groups, this was a common occurrence, musicians reaching out to other musicians to share their music. This can be seen from the screenshots below, which were taken from the *Dublin Musicians* Facebook page:



Figure 4: Screenshot (1) from Dublin Musicians Facebook Page

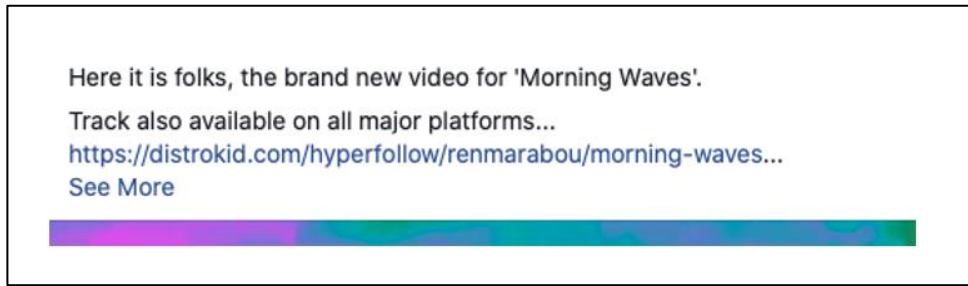


Figure 5: Screenshot (2) from Dublin Musicians Facebook Page

Another benefit that the participants highlighted, with regards to reach, was the fact that there were so many platforms to utilise in order to reach an audience. They now have a number of channels, options and platforms to promote their music through digital marketing and all, effectively, in the one place, online (Choi, 2017; Haynes & Marshall, 2018). Mangold and Faulds (2019) listed the various platforms and ways in which users can interact via social media. The primary research aligned with the literature to suggest that now more than ever, independent musicians have the means to reach audiences and promote their music more effectively. These platforms also enable cross platform promotion which allows independent musicians to reach much wider audiences. As Hesmondhalgh (2019) highlighted, websites like Soundcloud and Spotify have created spaces in which musicians can upload their music and then share that music across different platforms. Which emphasises the shift towards more digital means of music production and distribution, as studies such as Vaccaro & Cohn, (2004), Molteni & Ordanini (2003) and Arditì (2019), made note of.

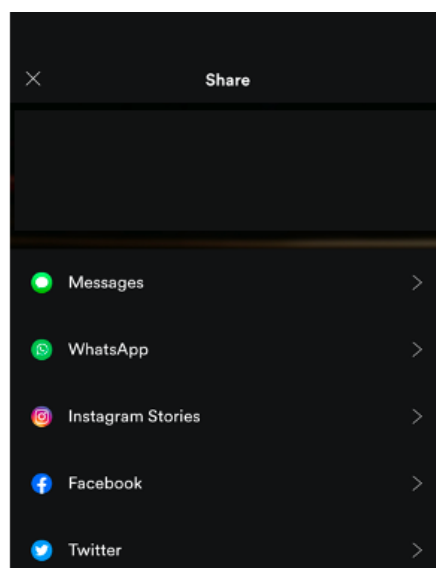


Figure 6: Screenshot (1) from Spotify Sharing Page

The findings made note of the likes of Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and YouTube, to name a few, that they utilised for reaching audiences. However, interestingly, although Florina and Andreaa (2012) posited that YouTube was the most heavily used social platform for musicians, the primary research indicated that this was not the case. In fact Facebook was the more preferred platform.

**Interviewee 1:** *“Facebook would probably be our main go-to I’d say, yeah.”*

**Interviewee 4:** *“Yeah, I have it (latest track) on YouTube. It's done nothing on YouTube because it's just, I don't know, unless you have some sort of platform PR stuff behind it and people know about it. Like it's done ok, a few hundred hits, but nothing compared to Facebook.”*

Finally, the global reach that online platforms present independent musicians with was seen as an unrivalled benefit in comparison to traditional tools amongst the participants. Many studies, such as Flew and Iosifidis (2020), Suhr (2011), Haynes and Marshall (2018), illustrated how the new digital world has broken down global boundaries. Independent musicians are no longer restricted to local bars, clubs and fanbases, they can go global through online platforms. This was seen as a key form of value to the participants and echoed throughout the findings.

**Interviewee 1:** *“It's great for us, you know, you talk to people all over the world. So, again, I think that's another beautiful thing about social media.”*

#### **4.32 Recognition**

Klein et al. (2017) and Hearn (2010) suggested that independent musicians today are now a part of a digital reputation economy where their status as a musician is based on being known online and by attributing follows or likes. From the findings, it was clear that the participants believed in this concept and that recognition was another key representation of value for the participants interviewed. There was a shared opinion that there was a need to establish an online presence in order to gain a reputation. Increasing likes, shares and views is the new way to get recognised. And it is this recognition where the participants saw value.

**Interviewee 1:** *“Just to kind of get the views up as well. So people will hopefully share and get the follows up as well, you know. So, I’m a big believer in social media. It’s just the way times are now and, you know, I think you gotta adapt to the times I suppose.”*

**Interviewee 2:** *“Well, the main reason why we set it up (social media profile) really was to get a bit of a following for gigs ‘cause we’ve seen just from experience that it’s the way (to do it).”*

However, it was evident that the participants had different opinions on what type of recognition they felt held value for them. For instance interviewee 1, saw the value in being recognised as a band across online platforms that were not limited by global boundaries:

*“I mean look, getting, say messages like “I’ve just heard you”. Like we’ve got messages from people from America saying “Just checked you guys out. You’re awesome” and stuff, you know... And I mean, why wouldn’t you feel proud? Like, you know with music that we’re writing, you know, it’s actually affecting people like, you know, in America and everywhere, which is awesome.”*

On the other hand, the value in recognition was viewed from the point of view of getting more paid gigs. Some of the participants believed that digital marketing and having a social media presence enabled them to gain a reputation that would in turn lead to more promoters recognising them and setting them up with shows to play.

**Interviewee 2:** *“I think the recognition piece goes a little bit with expected sharing and kind of expected visibility for gigs, and vice versa.”*

This was followed up with the idea that online recognition acted as a form of advertising that could help an independent musician become more well-known.

**Interviewee 2:** *“We haven’t really planned if we’re going to get a sign (online tagline) or something like that, to just, like “follow us here”, if that will boost it more in an organic way to then get more gigs, or if that will create more recognition locally, and then lead to something being like advertising.”*

One argument that was put forward by Baym (2012) was with regards to the benefit of online followers. As was discussed in Chapter 2, Baym (2012) ascertained there was a blurred boundary between independent musicians and online fans effectively doubting the benefit of online followers. However, the primary research indicated that growing an online fanbase and gaining recognition through likes and follows was deemed a very valuable asset. As Hanna et al. (2011) highlighted consumers are no longer just the end-user of products and services, they are fully ingrained in the production process through new means of connectivity and interaction. All of the participants indicated that online fan recognition was very valuable to them. This recognition was valued by the interviewees as it acted as a catalyst in providing direction and enabling musicians to get an understanding of how they are perceived. Interviewee 2 spoke about this by showcasing how recognition online acted as a barometer to how well they were performing:

*“Okay, we're heading in the right direction (by having followers). If we were having no followers and people were like “Oh my God, that s\*\*t” then we'd probably also not get gigs.”*

#### **4.4 Disadvantage Themes**

As was outlined in section 1.3, the main objective of this dissertation was to see if independent musicians were overly dependent on digital marketing and social media. With that in mind, it was crucial to understand if the musicians interviewed felt they would be at a disadvantage if they did not engage in online activities or use social media platforms. During interviews the following themes emerged in relation to this research question; cost and digital changes.

##### **4.41 Cost**

As the secondary research suggests, the cost of being a musician can be quite high, especially if you are an independent musician. Independent musicians generally are lacking in any kind of financial backing (Hesmondhalgh and Meier, 2015). Therefore, as Wang (2016) highlights, there is a challenge to even breakeven let alone make a living from being an independent musician. Each of the participants expressed the financial difficulties that being an independent musician can present, with interviewee 3 being particularly blunt about their situation:

*“In terms of the total costs, I mean, a big thing you have to think about as well man is, as an independent artist it's f\*\*king tough to eat man you know? Realistically!”*

The cost of using online tools was raised by the majority of the participants. The findings suggested, independent musicians are having to make use of online tools as it can be very costly to be an independent musician otherwise. With the help of digital marketing tools, especially social media, the participants believed they had a cost-effective way of pursuing their craft.

**Interviewee 4:** *“As an independent artist having very little money, it was one of the, I guess, just one of the ways that I could target an audience without spending a huge amount of money.”*

Online tools have helped to reduce some of these costs and have enabled independent musicians to operate in a more inexpensive way, yet at the same time still reaching audiences and making a name for themselves. The barriers of entry to the music industry have been lowered and costs have been reduced due to new technologies (Florina & Andreea, 2012).

**Interviewee 3:** *“Unless you're on a record label. So there's not a lot (of money) unless you hit like big time. You're not really going to be making too much money back. So I think, realistically, that's another brilliant thing with social media and let's say the likes of YouTube, Spotify you know? Putting yourself out there and just not paying too much.”*

Similarly, interviewee 3 highlighted how online tools and social media helped drive down the costs of recording and releasing music.

*“That's the thing, it costs a lot of money to go to a professional studio and record. Then you need artwork, and like, if you don't have social media, it's like you're paying, you could pay a f\*\*king stack out, man.”*

Another interesting discovery was the participants thoughts around spending money through digital marketing and social media platforms. Gu et al. (2018) made note of the increase in the use of freemium-based platforms, the majority of which the participants were using. Lovett and Staelin (2016) also discussed how digital media could be viewed as either owned, earned or paid-for. The participants indicated that they were aware of paid-for options such as boosting posts, but admitted they viewed them as more of an optional opportunity rather than a necessity.

**Interviewee 1:** *“It's a good option I think as well to have. Of course it can promote your page as well. So yeah, I don't think it's a bad thing.”*

**Interviewee 2:** *“I think if you boost it in the right way, it will get picked up. But we haven't put any money behind it yet.”*

This non-mandatory view on utilising paid-for mediums was fairly consistent amongst the participants apart from one, interviewee 4, who had a different opinion on the subject.

**Interviewee 4:** *“I think the first video got about 1005 (views) and the second got about 130. But that was all because you know, from paid advertising. And then even with Instagram, I put something on that didn't do much and the same with Twitter. But again, I didn't put any money into them. So yeah, that's why it didn't really perform as well.”*

Haynes and Marshall (2018) discussed how on a practical level it was difficult to reach more followers without investing money into social media. However, for the majority of the participants interviewed their assumption was they could still gain followers and recognition through the inexpensive and free options that are out there.

**Interviewee 1:** *“Yeah, we have we have used the paid stuff before. Yeah. Actually one of our last posts we did for our latest single we used it and you can actually see the difference how much it reaches people, like, you know? I think it reached like, 4000 people in like, two days or something like that. It was crazy. You know, we wouldn't do it all the time. We kind of like to usually let things roll naturally really, like, you know, it's a good option, as well, to have.”*

#### **4.42 Digital Changes**

The final theme to emerge from the interviews, was arguably the most poignant. Each of the participants emphasised how technology has changed the music landscape forever with traditional mediums seemingly in the decline. As was discussed in chapter 2, digitalization has changed many aspects of life by producing new ways of performing tasks and effectively erasing older methods (Halttunen, 2016). The digitalization of music, in particular, has drastically changed a number of elements of the music industry, from production to consumption (Vaccaro & Cohn, 2004; Molteni & Ordanini, 2003; Arditi, 2019). There has



been a social change in which music piracy has become an acceptable practice (Taylor et al., 2002; Kinnally et al., 2008) and where social media has become a staple in everyday life (Yuksel et al., 2016). These changes have been felt by independent musicians and this was evident amongst the participants.

**Interviewee 1:** *“It's so funny that way man. I just think life just evolves and stuff, and people just kind of go with it, you know? Because I think if there's a change in something, it can mean a complete change, then if something goes.”*

There was a feeling amongst the participants, that without online tools, it would be extremely difficult for them to establish some notoriety and to progress as independent musicians.

**Interviewee 1:** *“I think it's all through social media now, when people find out about these shows, you know? .... That's how people are finding out now, you know, and obviously back in the day, it was posters, you know, which is crazy to think about.”*

**Interviewee 4:** *“Yeah, you can kind of take the old grass roots and go out and perform at, you know, opening mic nights and stuff. But I couldn't even see a path at the moment, how I could have even gotten the traction I got, you know, without social media. It's been an absolute key player.”*

**Interviewee 3:** *“I think if I didn't have social media man, I'd be f\*\*king busking on Grafton Street you know? If I didn't have social media just be sitting in the shed with a few blokes playing beats, you know? What could I release it (music) to?”*

The secondary literature discussed how the MP3 and P2P networks were so successful due to an ideology of sharing. Similarly, the internet and digital mediums, such as social media, have created new avenues in which to share content and user-generated content with great ease (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). This, like the CD unintentionally managed to (Daniel, 2019), has created a digital culture in which older, traditional mediums have become less effective. There has been a cannibalisation of older marketing methods also (Rowley, 2008). Which has affected independent musicians today. As older methods become more obsolete, independent musicians have been left with very few options. The participants acknowledged this

assumption and used it to emphasise how important digital marketing and social media are to their careers.

**Interviewee 3:** *“Without the likes of SoundCloud, Spotify, etc. Who am I going to go to?... See social media is really important for stuff like this man... Now with Spotify, with social media, you're able to see more, you're able to hear more.”*

**Interviewee 1:** *“Yeah, I definitely think if there was no social media, I do think that people would, it could be the start of something maybe you know? A new kind of, what would you say? I suppose, a new era really like, you know? But I can't, I can't see social media going out the window for a long time.”*

To conclude, the primary research indicated that participants felt very strongly that without social media they would be left in quite a disadvantaged state and struggle to achieve any kind of success. In a way this does indicate a dependence. However, this is less so an overreliance on these tools and more so need to utilise them as traditional methods are not as effective as they used to be.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion**

The goal of this dissertation was to investigate if there was an overreliance on digital marketing and social media tools by independent musicians in Ireland. Through a combination of the primary research findings together with the existing literature, the researcher was able to address the main research questions. As the body of literature suggested, the world of music is changing and is becoming more digital. This has led to a decline in a number of traditional methods of marketing and given rise to a new era of digital marketing. For independent musicians, as the findings suggested, this has led to a need in resources such as social media tools to help promote their music. Furthermore, the existing literature highlighted that independent musicians are now operating in a new promotional culture, where recognition and reputation can act as catalysts to success. In order to thrive in this new market, independent musicians need to engage with fans, enhance their image online and promote their music. And to do this, they require the digital means to do so.

This chapter aims to take a deeper look into the findings in line with the existing literature and theoretical concepts examined in chapter 2. The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the results in a broader context focusing how the digitalisation of music and social media use influences independent musicians in Ireland.

### **5.1 The Power to Promote**

It was clear from the primary research, that one of the key motivations behind making use of these tools was for promotional purposes. The participants were unified in their view that a vehicle was needed to promote their music and that social media provided the means to do so. There was also an agreement amongst the interviewees that not only was it needed but it was the only option available to them. As highlighted in the findings interviewee 1 stated that social media was “*the only real place*” independent musicians could promote themselves. When looking at the literature, there was a heavy emphasis on how social media has become a staple in everyday life and has effectively altered the way in which we communicate and interact with one another (Patino et al., 2012; Yuksel et al., 2016). Today, interactions occur across social platforms, where sharing content and information is a primary activity (Mangold & Faulds, 2009; Kietzmann et al., 2011; Flew & Iosifidis, 2020). Which has led to traditional methods of both communication and marketing becoming less useful as consumers are now using social platforms as a source of discovery and information (Rowley, 2008; Dewan & Ramaprasad,

2014). This in essence aligns with the respondents opinion on the subject, as they believed with the decline in traditional methods, they were left with only one option. Therefore, from an Irish independent musicians perspective, in this vein, there is a clear route to market; online promotion through social platforms.

Although, there may have been a slight degree of annoyance displayed by the participants due to this seemingly limiting factor. These platforms have in fact provided them with a newfound freedom to share their music that would not have been possible through other means. They are now leaning on the philosophies of P2P networks by freely sharing their music amongst peers and fans across multiple platforms with ease (Asvanund et al., 2004). Which in a strange way paints quite a poignant picture with regards to fears surround file-sharing and music piracy. The power that was once perceived to be lost to the P2P networks, has now in fact empowered today's independent musicians. There is also the added benefit that social media creates opportunities for independent musicians to communicate directly with their fans. Music fans are now more digitally-enhanced, more engaging and interactive than ever before. They are communicating through social platforms, discovering new music online and sharing both content and music with their peers. Social media allows for closer and more relevant lines of connectivity amongst users, and as previous studies suggest, aids in the efficiency of direct contacts (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). This is an important factor to be considered as the way in which we communicate has changed forever, and there is now more a reliance on these lines of communication. This was evident in the findings as interviewee 1 highlighted:

*“It's kind of funny if you look at it that way. If there wasn't social media, God knows what they (independent musicians) would do, like, you know?”*

## **5.2 Recognising Value**

The concept of value was an interesting topic that arose from the research. Drawing on the conclusions from the existing literature and the findings, value was represented both from a monetary perspective and a notoriety standpoint. Firstly, taking a look at value in a financial sense. Existing studies examined the value that utilising digital marketing and social media tools provided in returning an investment (McCaughey et al., 2014). The existing literature casted some doubt over the ability of these to provide a return and also cited difficulties in knowing the most appropriate tool to make use of (Li et al., 2014). Arguably, business

vocabulary such as ROI could be deemed as an inappropriate use of terminology when considering the subjects involved in this research. As independent musicians generally struggle financially and may not concern themselves with too many business concepts (Wang, 2016). In saying this, it was quite interesting to discover that a number of the participants, namely interviewee 4, recognised the commercial and financial aspects involved with pursuing a career as an independent musician. Although these factors were acknowledged, it became very evident that to the participants, these online tools provided more than value in terms of financial gain. Perhaps, this may have been overlooked in some respects, as ultimately like any professional or aspiring professional there is a need to make ends meet, however, unequivocally, the evidence from the research suggested that there was more value in notoriety gained.

With the digitalisation of music and the growth in online platforms, independent musicians now have a number of channels to publicise and showcase their music (Choi, 2017; Haynes & Marshall, 2018). This effectively enables them to reach more people with their music and in theory creates more opportunities to get recognised. The body of literature suggested that independent musicians are operating in a digital reputation economy in which value is based on notoriety (Klein et al., 2017; Hearn, 2010). The findings aligned with this theory, as the participants were clear in their assumption that the number of followers, likes, shares and views a band or signer had was an indication of their reputation as a musician and a sign of their success. Although it could be just to argue these figures, and their value, as previous studies such as Baym (2012) have done. There is sense in the participants' viewpoint that this recognition is indeed a prized asset. When considering the statements made by interviewee 2 with regards to a bands online reputation acting as a catalyst in securing future work, it becomes clearer as to why the participants believed more so in this aspect of social media than financial return. This online recognition acts in a similar way to word of mouth or electronic word of mouth, as it is now more commonly known, when dealing with online processes (Niu & Fan, 2018). Therefore, for Irish independent musicians, online profiles provide promoters with synopsis of their musicianship. Without the help of a record label and management team to promote them, social media affords independent musicians with a calling-card of sorts to help book future gigs, which is, debatably, as valuable, if not more valuable, than money for these musicians.

### 5.3 A Digital Cost

One of the core underlying concepts of this research project, was the effects of the digitalisation of music. What was evident from the findings and the literature discussed, was that as result of the advancements in digital technologies the world of music has dramatically changed. This has had both negative and positive effects on the music industry and for independent musicians. Firstly, as the literature highlighted, new digital technologies and social media platforms have eroded some of the barriers to entry into the music industry for independent musicians (Florina & Andreea, 2012). With cost, being one of those boundaries. It was evident from the findings that the participants all felt that social media platforms offered up an extremely affordable option for promoting their music. The use of freemium platforms that offered optional paid-for options was seen as the ideal scenario for musicians who had “*very little money*” (Interviewee 4). However, with this new easier route to market being available, it means that more and more independent musicians are setting up social platforms, as Daniels (2019) noted in a report. To a certain extent this was acknowledged but at the same time was overlooked by the participants. In a way, it could be argued that it was accepted as part of the process now that these tools are more widely used. And that perhaps, this is viewed as the incurred costs of using these platforms.

**Interviewee 3:** “*Like it being completely cheaper, it's easier. Which means a lot more people do it. So it does mean there is a lot more s\*\*t music, man, you know?*”

Finally, the body of literature also highlighted how the digitalisation of music has altered the idea of tangible output in terms of music distribution and has challenged the social norms of consumers who have become socialized in a cyber-culture (Taylor, et al., 2002; Kinnally et al., 2008; Fuentes et al., 2019). It was evident from the findings also, that the participants deemed streaming services such as SoundCloud and Spotify as the go-to platforms to release their music on. Recently, however, there has been a resurgence in older physical formats. In fact in 2019, vinyl records outsold CDs for the first time in 40 years (Tallis, 2019). With the establishment of events such as *Record Store Day* tapping into consumers nostalgic side, there are some signs of a mainstream, sustainable return for physical formats. However, as the existing literature highlighted, file-sharing is still a persistent problem and now with social media there's an even greater emphasis on sharing content. From an independent musicians perspective it could argued that this bears no real relevance as the costs involved in producing physical copies can be quite high. Along with that, the process of sharing music online is as

simple as a few mouse clicks. And when you combine that with the majority of listeners nowadays being subscribers to streaming platforms, it is understandable why independent musicians in Ireland make use of these services.

## **Chapter 6: Conclusion**

The aim of this research was to investigate independent musicians use of digital marketing and social media with the goal of determining if there was an overreliance on these mediums. To achieve this objective, the author made use of a combination of research questions, qualitative data collection and data analysis techniques, and secondary research. In order to gain a deeper understanding into the world of independent musicians and their use of online mediums, the researcher focused on three areas when conducting the primary research; motivations, value and disadvantages. Through these, the study found that there was not an overreliance on digital marketing and social media, in fact, it was deemed that it was a necessity for independent musicians to make use of these platforms to operate in the new digitally-enhanced music world.

The study identified a number of key areas to strengthen this conclusion. Firstly, the costs involved in being an independent musician have been greatly reduced with the help of digital technologies. The barriers of entry have been lowered with online recording software becoming more affordable and social media platforms empowering independent musicians in Ireland with a means of distribution and promotion at minimal cost. Secondly, the new promotional culture has led to a need in having an online presence. Irish independent musicians need to stay active online and ensure they engage with fans online in order to boost their profile and enhance their online reputation. Being vigorous in this manner can lead to growing a fan base but can also attract promoters. In that sense, being able to efficiently market online can lead to offline success also. Finally, and crucially, the effects of digitalisation have greatly influenced the need for online promotional tools. As the music world becomes more and more digitally involved, the use in online mediums is warranted.

### **6.1 Limitations**

As was discussed in section 3.5, the research undertaken was for a Master's dissertation. Due to this a number of limitations were identified. Firstly, the study was limited in time as there was a fixed submission date of August 19<sup>th</sup> for this research project. Secondly, as with many dissertations, that utilize qualitative analysis and data collection methods, the study was conducted with a smaller sample size. The author was also faced with a number of cancelled and declined interviews which also limited the sample size. Finally, this study was undertaken in unforeseen circumstances as it was carried out during the height of the COVID-19 outbreak in Ireland. Although the author was able to adapt by conducting in-depth interviews over Zoom, it did have an effect on the interviewing process. The interviewees for the most part had no



operational issues. However, they did experience some audio delays and video lags. The video interviewing also affected the researchers interpretation of the participants body language. As Wilson (2010) noted face-to-face interviews enable researchers to engage in both verbal and non-verbal communication. The researcher was able to gauge some of the participants body language; however, the interviewees were often holding a up a device or were too conscious of the camera too be totally conformable and to act naturally.

## **6.2 Recommendations for Future Research**

To date there has been a limited amount of research undertaken focusing on independent musicians and marketing. There is also a lack of research on Irish independent musicians, in particular, and their use of online platforms. The findings indicated that independent musicians in Ireland were quite dependent on online tools. With the aim of the research being an investigation into their usage, and now with the conclusion that they in fact reliant upon it, there is scope for further research in this area. The author has identified two area of focus that would merit further research; genre of music and platforms used. As this research was undertaken as a cross-sectional study, genre of music was not a specified criterion for sampling, thus, the music genres amongst the participants was quite varied. The author posits that if afforded more time to conduct a longitudinal study that examining the role music genre plays in the use of digital marketing and social media use of independent musicians would be a key area of interest. It could be argued that more modern styles of music are more suited to social media platforms than older genres. Thus, researching this difference, over a longer period of time, could yield some interesting results. Finally, as was discussed and identified in section 4.31, the participants used a number of platforms, however, Facebook reigned supreme amongst the interviewees. With that in mind, determining which platform is most beneficial to independent musicians could also be another area of future focus. The researcher would be very interested to explore the opinions of independent musicians who may be loyal to one platform over all other options and why they are. Similarly, a longitudinal study into this area of focus would be more suitable.

## **6.3 Recommendations for Independent Musicians**

The researcher suggests that independent musicians become more active with social media. As the research revealed, self-branding and self-promotion are key components for becoming successful into today's digital world. Showcasing your reputation along with your talent in online spaces is a crucial element in growing fanbases but also for booking gigs. As was

revealed through the primary research, promoters today use social media profiles in order to assess a musician's credentials. Judging how good an artist or band is, is now very often done so through these platforms, so therefore having an online presence is crucial. Finally, due to the cross-platform sharing capabilities of the majority of online tools, independent musicians now have the capacity to reach much wider audiences than ever before at the touch of a button. This is a huge advantage, that was not available in the pre-internet era, that effectively affords independent musicians every opportunity of their music being heard. On that note, the researchers' final recommendation is to heed the advice of interviewee 1:

*“F\*\*k it man, you know, just throw it everywhere. Literally, throw it everywhere! Just see what people think. Either somebody sees it, or somebody doesn't, it doesn't matter, like, you know? You've got nothing to lose anyway, like, you know? So, yeah, I promote that yeah. I definitely promote people trying to get it out there because it's gonna hit the right person eventually you know?”*

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## Appendix

Sample interview questions:

### **Objective: Motivations**

1. What motivated you to start using social media?
2. Why do you use social media to promote your music?
3. What social media platforms are you using and why?

### **Objective: Value**

1. What do you believe is the main value proposition from using social media?
2. Do you feel that there's more communication and connectivity between you and your fans now with online tools?
3. Do you use any kind of paid advertising online or do you use free options only?

### **Objective: Disadvantages**

1. Do you think you would be at a disadvantage if you didn't have the likes of social media?
2. Do you think it'd be much harder to craft out a reputation and break through onto the music scene without an online presence?
3. Do you feel that if you didn't have social media, it would be much harder to discover an artist like you?