Music-making after the pandemic: algorithmic imaginaries and increased cultural optimization

Paper presented at

CULTURE, MEDIA AND CREATIVE INDUSTRIES CONFERENCE
"Rethinking Culture, Media and Creative Industries in the Era of Covid"
KING'S COLLEGE LONDON (2021)

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Abstract

The Covid-19 pandemic appears to have accelerated the processes of dislocation of the spaces of cultural creation and reception towards digital environments. In the case of music, this seems particularly relevant: streaming services, such as Spotify, have experienced exceptional growth, while the live music sector is suffering a severe financial crisis. Moreover, the culture of 'social distancing' triggered by the pandemic is likely to further marginalize the centrality of physical proximity within the processes of cultural exchange, while favouring the platformization of cultural production. Within this scenario, the role played by digital platforms and by algorithmic imaginaries, i.e. worlds of the experience users make of the algorithmic media, in shaping cultural production and consumption, is increasingly crucial. While the debate over the consequences of the aforementioned processes on music consumption is quite vibrant, much remains to be understood about how cultural producers may be affected.

The main goal of this contribution is to address the following issues in the light of existing literature: i) The role of algorithms as cultural gatekeepers and how they may affect the creative disposition of music producers, as well as their strategies to relate with the broader environment of cultural production and consumption. ii) The optimization of culture, i.e., how cultural producers may attempt to create platform-optimized products adapting their creative efforts to platforms' affordances, thus fostering processes of product homogenization. Finally, suggestions will be offered for future investigations regarding how all the actors in the music industry relate to streaming platforms.

Keywords: cultural production, platformization, music, algorithmic imaginary, optimization