

Dodging the Middleman: Insights on Disintermediation in the Independent Music Sector

Francisco Bernardo

Research Centre for Science and Technology of the Arts (C.I.T.A.R.)

Portuguese Catholic University, R. Diogo Botelho, 1327, 4169-005 Porto, Portugal

Email: fbernardo@porto.ucp.pt

Abstract:

The paper presents the findings of an exploratory study¹ on how the disintermediation phenomenon is occurring in the music industry and how it is affecting the business models and professional practices of independent and DIY (Do-It-Yourself) music artists.

Disintermediation is a phenomenon in which the roles of traditional intermediaries become at stake, typically in the aftermath of a technological paradigm shift. Such has happened with the music industry with the advent of the digital revolution. The access to global communication networks and digital tools has caused disruptive changes to the production model, to the access conditions of producers to markets, and to the power relations between traditional economic agents. The DIY approach and the direct-to-fan business models are challenging the status quo of these agents, supported mainly by the emergence of social technologies. However, there seems to be a great deal of rhetoric in the discourse around the possibilities that music artists have in thriving in their activities, and successfully reaching the market on their own.

The empirical findings emerge from a multiple-case study in which seven independent music artists and professionals have been selected and analysed, based on the strategic approach they take in business and in the evolutive path they are pursuing. The paper provides an analysis and discussion on how independent artists seem to be adjusting their professional practices, concerning funding, distribution, promotion and management, as well as on the relation they maintain with current technologies in order to fulfil their projects needs, supported by theoretical concepts around disintermediation.

Keywords: Disintermediation, DIY, Independent Music Artists

¹ This paper is an abridged version of the author's master thesis (Bernardo, 2013), written between September 2012 and September 2013 at Portuguese Catholic University, Porto.

1 Introduction

With the advent of the digital revolution and the Internet, business models and success factors of the traditional players within the music industry's landscape have suffered a significant change. In this reality afforded by easy access to networked global communications, and with the maturation of Web technologies, disintermediation effects are succeeding (Chircu & Kauffman, 1999). Major record labels, which created and developed a lucrative business model and have been the main driver of the industry in the last decades, have been severely hit (Young & Collins, 2010). They are now retracting in investment, by cutting costs and laying off staff and artists – they are signing fewer and fewer artists, mostly investing in the ones who first prove themselves in the independent circuit (Dahl, 2009).

In their practices, independent artists are making extensive use of home studios and tools and platforms available online. These platforms are continuously emerging with open and decentralized new business models that take advantage of social networks and community resources (Benkler, 2006). They can potentially provide the independent and 'Do-It-Yourself' (DIY) music producer with access to essential resources for key components of their business: financing, collaboration, management, marketing, distribution, and direct communication with fans. By encompassing these functions and other affordances that typically integrate the value chains of traditional industry agents (record labels, distributors, record promoters, radio stations, etc.), these new platforms may constitute a viable alternative to support an autonomous and independent approach from the artist to his creative and business management activities, as well as a more direct and successful relation between him and the consumer of his music.

This paper aims to contribute with insights to the reality around independent music artists. It examines the available literature on independent music cultural movement and on economic theories around disintermediation, in order to set up a theoretical framework for analysis of the empirical findings. The methodology for the empirical study is here summarized. Finally, empirical findings drawn from the study are presented and discussed, focusing on uncovering the business practices and strategies, the motivations behind them, within the given framework.

1.1 The Independent Music Sector

Within the music industry context, the term 'independent' or 'indie' is applied to agents that have no ties to a major record corporation. It derives from the industrial organization behind it, the independent record company (Hesmondhalgh, 1999). The indie movement emerged from the evolution of punk and anarchist ideals of democratization, decentralization and free access to the music market. According to Hibbett (2005), "indie rock demonstrates the principles and politics of a 'superior' art" in which "obscurity becomes a positive feature, while exclusion is embraced as the necessary consequence of the majority's lack of 'taste'" (ibid, p. 34). Indie stands as both trendy and exclusive, acquiring meaning from the opposition to mainstream, in a perpetual construction that seeks and encompasses novelty. Indie correlates to artistic integrity, aesthetic quality and to the cutting edge.

Hesmondhalgh (1999) analysed two cases of emblematic independent labels, One Little Indian² and Creation³, on the causes and consequences that lead independent record companies to practices of professionalization and partnerships with major corporations. The author characterized the conditions of working in the music industry, a high-pressure business with several strains:

- the permanent conflict between surviving bankruptcy, and overriding ideals and selling out;
- the thin line between leisure and work, between public and private life which are often so diluted;
- the relations with co-workers, many times friends, that suffer with the strains derived from the different roles required to be performed.

Further, given the political background of the independent scene, professionalization was seen as a dilution of principles, in what it meant establishing a compromise with commercial success and pecuniary rewards, in detriment of purism and idealism. According to Hracz (2012), in the pre-digital revolution, "traditional independent production was really an ad hoc system with inherent limitations" (ibid, 2012, p. 454); money and specialized professionals were required even for basic productions and distribution was limited to the streets and after-shows. These circumstances led independent artists into professionalization in order to cope with the industry's needs, while driving many others, musicians and staff, out of the industry (Hesmondhalgh, 1999).

With the technological transition, the industry has been consequently restructured, and the independent music production has evolved from niche market position to the mainstream model. Independent musicians began to have

² One Little Indian. (n.d.) Retrieved August 8, 2013 from <http://www.indian.co.uk>

³ Creation. (n.d.) Retrieved August 8, 2013 from <http://www.creation-records.com>

full autonomy and creative control over their music, but are now required to perform a wider variety of activities. The set of activities contemplated in this model ranges between technical, business, performance and musicianship aspects of the business, which demand organization, careful planning and management of time and energy (Hracs, 2012).

Independent artists seem to be leveraging on contemporary networks for its structural arrangement, technological, creative and connective affordances they provide. Wendel (2008) provides several illustrative examples of music artists and practices that highlight potentials in establishing autonomy and independence from the mainstream industry, leveraging on both offline and online networks. The author examines the structure and affordances of the networks around UK-based record label Rough Trade⁴ and MySpace⁵, focusing on the way similarities and differences have affected independent artists practices. Valladares (2011) explored the landscape that web-based and social media tools have provided for independent music producers. Production, promotion, and distribution have been identified as areas where the Internet is having a significant impact. Independent music producers seem to be using a diversified and flexible approach to online social networking platforms and web-based tools, and to the communication strategy employed in their use.

1.2 Disintermediation

In economics, an intermediary offers intermediation services between two trading parties, a supplier and a customer, or between other intermediaries. The intermediary acts as a conduit for goods or services offered by the supplier, providing added value to the transaction, either by transformation (e.g. manufacturing) or transfer in time (e.g. speculation) or space (e.g. trade) Bailey and Bakos (1997). Disintermediation, also known as "cutting out the middleman", occurs when intermediaries are removed from the supply chain (Chircu & Kauffman, 1999). This phenomenon is typically assigned to several factors such as the supplier's internalization of activities traditionally performed by intermediaries (Sarkar et al., 2006) and the degree of market transparency which leads to the buyer's increased knowledge of supply pricing (Picot & Bortenlanger, 2006).

Benjamin and Wigand (1995) argue that within an ubiquitous communication network, such as the Internet, the ability to support direct exchanges efficiently would be beneficial for both producer and consumer: the manufacturers would be able to retain more surplus value or profits that are generated, while the

⁴ (1978 – 1991)

⁵ (2003 – present)

consumers would benefit from both a larger choice and lower prices. According to Whinston, Stahl and Choi (1997) the emergence of technologies for electronic commerce on the Internet allows new ways of interaction between the players in a market. In fact, the use of an information technology (IT) infrastructure shortens the supply chain, cutting costs, optimizing operations, and allowing the consequent higher captures of value and profit redistribution along the value system.

In the beginnings of the dot com boom, electronic commerce was seen as a tool of disintermediation, given that the Internet would allow consumers to purchase products directly from producers. What actually happened, however, was that new intermediaries appeared in the digital landscape (Sarkar et al., 2006). This phenomenon is called reintermediation, which takes place with the reintroduction of an intermediary between supplier and consumer, whenever disintermediation has occurred first (Chircu & Kauffman, 1999). Carr (1999) defines reintermediation as the reformulation, realignment and pruning of intermediaries but without total elimination. In the context of electronic commerce, reintermediation occurs due to problems associated with the e-commerce activity, and to the technical knowledge and extensive resources that are inherently required. Sarkar et al. (2006) state that the roles of intermediaries can be multifaceted and cover a set of functions that are not easily assumed by producers, arguing that intermediation will remain a structural feature of electronic marketplaces. On the other hand, by aggregating transactions and creating economies of scale and scope, intermediaries can increase the efficiency of the exchange process.

Chircu and Kauffman (1999) address the three phenomena in the changes occurring in the market interaction in terms of a cycle of intermediation, disintermediation and reintermediation (IDR) stages. This cycle may occur repeatedly, with the introduction of new technological innovations. The authors provide a series of cases of the IDR cycle, using the structure for the music industry retail market as one illustrative example, with traditional intermediaries (e.g., Tower Records, wholesalers) and electronic-commerce-only (EC-Only) intermediaries (CDNow.com, Musicboulevard.com).

Handke (2010) addresses disintermediation as one of two phenomena (along with amateurisation) that, among other hypothetical causes such as the deliberate use of the Internet as a promotion tool, suggest an increase of market competitiveness of 'indies'. In his empirical study of the German music sector, Handke focused on determining the market context and significance of self-issuers⁶, among amateurs and more conventional record companies. According to empirical results from Handke's study, and comparing to other types of independents, self-issuers appear to be smaller, both in number of individuals in

⁶ A self-issuer "predominantly commercialises sound recordings by composers or performers who also work in another function in the firm or who own the firm at least in part" (Handke, 2010, p.345)

their staff and in terms of turnover. Self-issuers are also less dependent on the primary market for sound-recordings than conventional record companies, since creators benefit directly from complementary markets such as that for live performances. Despite that half of the market is accounted to more conventional “indie” record companies, the market share of self-issuers may have risen over recent years. According to Handke, there seems to be a “trend that more creators set up record companies rather than record companies picking creators to cooperate with”, with an observable sustained upward trend in the period of 1994 and 2004. Overall, Handke uses this to contribute with a possible explanation to the apparent boom among small, independent record companies in the middle of a recession in the record industry.

2 Methodology

In order to explore how the disintermediation phenomenon is affecting business models and practices of independent artists, an empirical study has been conducted. The research approach taken was case study, more suitable for a study with a descriptive and exploratory nature (Yin, 2003), and more specifically, a multiple-case study, which facilitates the exploration of a phenomenon within its context using a variety of data sources (Baxter & Jack, 2008). In this case, it lead to a better understanding of the motivations, the influence of the context and its impact on the business decisions of the independent music artist. This approach also converged with the approaches of similar studies on independent music artists and music industry (Wendel, 2008, Valladares, 2011, Ahrens et al., 2012).

The independent artists that comprise the sample were selected based on the diversity of organizational structure, business models and approaches. The spectrum of subjects ranges from the minimal structure (one-person band) and full DIY approach, to the independent band that managed to successfully deploy its global distribution infrastructure with a professional team. In the middle, stands a set of independent Portuguese artists that are employing innovative approaches to business.

Part of the study is based on the analysis of primary data obtained from five interviews conducted in 2013 to five Portuguese musicians and music professionals that work in the independent music sector and that accumulate different roles such as managers, agents, and executives at indie labels. These artists, listed on table 1, are mainly identified as independent and participate in a variety of music genres, including electronic music, alternative rock and pop.

Interviews took place in places of convenience to the interviewees, which agreed to speak openly and in personal name. The interviews lasted an average of 93 minutes and were audio/video recorded with the consent of the participants. Hired contractors which were instructed to transcribe the

interviews following a denaturalistic approach (Oliver, Serovich & Mason, 2005). The primary data has been made available for the academic community for further studies (Bernardo, 2013).

This study also uses several sources and types of secondary data, such as industry reports, specialized press articles, blog entries, and conference videos. Secondary data has been used to build up the cases of Metric and Zoe Keating. The main source of information about Metric has been a video-recorded interview that the band and their manager gave to the 2011 Rethink Conference (Rethink Music 2011). For the case of Zoe Keating several dispersed items were consulted mainly from specialized blogs, and from one Google spread sheet that Keating has publicly shared herself.

Case	Projects/Professional Services		
Bruno Miguel	:Papercutz ⁱ		
Joaquim Durães	Lovers&Lollypops ⁱⁱ	Milhões de Festa ⁱⁱⁱ	
Luís Fernandes	The Astroboy ^{iv}	Peixe:Avião ^v	PAD records ^{vi}
Luís Raimundo	The Poppers ^{vii}	Keep The Razor Sharp ^{viii}	
Nuno Saraiva	SCL Agency ^{ix}	La Maquina ^x	AMAEI ^{xi}
Emily Haines, James Shaw and Matt Drouin			Metric ^{xii}
Zoë Keating	Zoë Keating ^{xiii}		

Table 1. Selected cases

Another important source of secondary data considered for this study is the Artist Revenue Streams (ARS) project and the reports generated from its database. This research initiative, which is led by the Future of Music Coalition (FMC), aims to assess the earning capacity of individual musicians concerning diversity of revenue streams and change over time (Future of Music Coalition, n.d.). The ARS project consists of a multi-method, cross-genre examination of US-based musicians which used three data collection methods: in person interviews with about 80 different musicians and composers, case studies based on the detailed financial data from 10 different individual musicians, and on-line survey data from 5,371 US-based musicians and composers.

3 Findings: Perspectives on independent music artists' business models

3.1 Financing

Advances and recoupment, are the most usual mechanisms of financing amidst musicians and record labels. Yet, it appears that independent artists have been considering and using several other funding alternatives for their projects.

A common ground to the interviewed artists has been going through an initial self-financing stage, in which they manage to release their first works on their own. This is typically a DIY stage, in which the success of those works and all the efforts to potentiate it provide the opportunity to gather funding for a next step. Some acts, given their specific configuration, stay in this model; the ones who have the opportunity to step-up, eventually do it, either through independent labels or private investors backing. In this second stage, artists seem to use the traditional model of funding, assigned in the form of an advance by an indie label, with the subsequent recoupment of royalties from sales.

Despite that the number of financing possibilities has been seemingly increasing, the fact is that many of them have specific benefits and disadvantages, and most of them, significant constraints to the beginning artist. Discarding direct donations and public funding as atypical, such is the case of sponsorship, private investment agreement, and even crowdfunding for different reasons. For crowdfunding to work at its best, an extended fan base is required, which is unlikely for a minor artist. Other alternatives depend on past achievements and involve risk taking.

Labels are the private investors that have deeper business knowledge and thus, the least averse to invest in worthy cases. This general assumption can be extendable from the smallest indie labels to majors, attending always to the scale of agreements and power positioning that is involved. Labels keep the capital and funding muscle, and that is an important part of their competitive advantage; their positioning as an established intermediary keeps strong.

Even so, some illustrative signs of readjustment provided by some interviewees, such as the renegotiation of contracts, the adoption of other models in which artists keeping control of copyright and licensing the album only, P&D deals, the all-inclusive 360° deals, and the lessening of investment in certain traditional business functions. According to its definition, these adjustments may be seen as reintermediation, in which the traditional intermediary is refining or changing its model due to changes in its economical context. On the other hand, it has been observed that the use of self-financing at a more advanced level seems to be a trend among independent artists. This entails financial discipline and audacity for the independent artist and his management structure, but it does happen at different career levels, and with artists with

distinct projection levels. These cases configure instances of full disintermediation, as labels may be fully circumvented as intermediaries.

3.2 Distribution

The early days of a music project, which coincide with a DIY stage, show specific settings in what regards distribution. In the physical domain, initial releases have limited editions with limited physical distribution in concerts sales, or on consignment in a limited set of retail outlets. In an advanced scenario, the artist or his label actually get an agreement with a distributor, and physical distribution is settled. In a furthermore advanced scenario, there are several territories to cover, and more agreements to make. These are the fundamentals for physical distribution that, apart from issues regarding the decline of record sales, are the most desirable for any artist. Disintermediation would occur here if an artist or his management structure were to establish direct agreements with the distributor, by circumventing labels as middlemen. Yet, under these assumptions, physical distributors remain undisputed middlemen. The issues arise with considerations associated to the digital domain. The emergence of the digital online retail outlets, streaming services and mobile retailers, gave way to new intermediaries such as digital aggregators.

Thus, if one goes all the way to consider the extinction of physical sales, or a complete shift to exclusively digital releases, disintermediation of the traditional distributors becomes a possibility, as distribution would depend exclusively of aggregators. Nonetheless, digital aggregators have been, until now, a necessary condition for artists to reach the major online retailers.

As observed before, there are instances of artists already circumventing digital aggregators and reaching these markets on their own. Together with the use of direct-to-fan services like Bandcamp, or MySpace, or SoundCloud and more recently with iTunes, they configure instances of full disintermediation. This brings the artists the premise that the value chain can be configured to exclude traditionally necessary pieces that do not deliver value, and thus optimize their revenue streams.

In all the cases, distribution clearly stands as one area in which disintermediation and re-intermediation has been taking a more evident and clear effect. First of all, digital aggregators are a strong example of new intermediation, according to its definition, by taking control of digital distribution channels. Secondly, the disintermediation initiated by artists must be taken significantly in account. There are several instances that show the awareness and effort that artists take, while striving to optimize revenues streams, to cut off the middleman both in the physical and digital domain. They also range from the micro scale level to the macro level, from very localized efforts of tuning revenues through disintermediation, through to the major

strategic decisions that imply assembling a global distribution network. In the former case, we have the instance of Zoe Keating; she took advantage of a change in iTunes' affordances, which turned a market that was only reachable through the intermediation of aggregators, to a directly reachable market through the use of label accounts. On the other end of the spectrum stands Metric and Drouin, who fundamentally believe in the need to cut off the middlemen, as way to reduce costs and make more money in the long run and implemented a global distribution operation based on that premise. In the middle, stand all the artists that take advantage of platforms like Bandcamp to perform the distribution on their own, without intermediaries and with increased revenues.

3.3 Marketing and promotion

In general, finding point to the clear separation of concerns between traditional and new media. There is a general agreement between cases that both media are important, for different reasons, having different intrinsic challenges and different people to be assigned as their managers. Typically, the online media promotion is assigned to artists, and managed on their own, in order to take advantage of and to grow the artist-fan connection. It is also the most immediate promotional medium used in the early days any act.

With the gradual development of the act, the need for traditional media increases and well as for professional support in these areas. At this point all the acts refer to the use of professional specialized help in the form of contracted freelancers, or services provided by the labels. The most off-the-beat positioning is from Metric and Zoe Keating. Drouin seems to dismiss the importance of radio against a database of direct fan contacts, in particular for independent and non-mainstream acts. Metric was already a high status act in the context he mentions, though. For Zoe Keating no information has been found that confirms or refutes her positioning, except for the general information that points to a DIY and exclusive use of online promotion.

As for promotion, the initial stage for a music artist, contemplates several efforts using the DIY approach. Typically, musicians would have to put most of their efforts on the live performance circuit and with that find new fans for their music. These efforts would consist of localized actions that would bring them a limited reach.

Today, audience building and fan communication have become both easier and affordable, as artist have been given access to a huge set of tools and services to build audiences and promote their work. Furthermore, the tools build on networks and social components that allow them a global reach. Thus, artists have been leveraging on these tools and platforms to engage with fans and collaborators, by enhancing direct relationships and developing dedicated networks. It has been observed that artists have a very flexible and organic

approach to these tools in order to successfully connect with their fans and followers.

However, despite of the digital and online domain being recognized as very efficient for promotion purposes, artists still feel the need to embrace traditional media to emerge from the crowd and effectively promote their music. And this is another league, in which the DIY approach acknowledgedly appears to fall short. In remaining DIY they may be undermining their projects and themselves concerning creative availability and evolution. Here, the specific business knowledge and contact networks provide an explicit competitive advantage, which most artists may not have on their own. Thus, they must either acquire it externally, either from specialized independent professionals or record labels.

Looking through the disintermediation lens, it is somewhat evident that music artists may prescind from promotional services and reach an interesting activity level on their own. The online platforms, as new intermediaries, have provided a great margin of action and empowerment to the artists. Moreover, on an advanced level, an artist might consider a specialized marketing and promotional team operating in his own structure.

However, the labels traditionally possess core competencies in this field and have no hurdle in taking advantage of them. Therefore, concerning promotion, reintermediation is the most obvious, given that traditional intermediaries maintain a strong positioning in the market and appear to be adjusting their competencies. Nonetheless, concerning the artist-label power relationship, there is a different stand for both parties. Promotional power is a core competency of labels that would most willingly be used by artists, but today there is much more margin for negotiation.

3.4 Technology, team and management

The general attitude of the interviewees towards technology reveals that it is considered very important for them to manage the overall business functions. Some of these technologies, like email, Google Drive, Facebook, YouTube and Bandcamp, have become indispensable for the interviewees. Findings indicate a highly concentrated use around these technologies. This is confirmed, in general, by an evident attitude of resistance or lack of interest to try new platforms, or to acquire more advanced or specialized ones, when the essential functions are already granted. This seems to indicate that business-supporting technology is approached as means to an end, and on a need-only basis.

The interviewees' testimonials are convergent with the main conclusions of ARS report on the impact of emerging technology on the careers of musicians and composers. In general, ARS participants demonstrated good levels of awareness and comfort in making effective use of technology. "50 to 70 per cent of respondents were 'very comfortable' or 'somewhat comfortable' using

technologies for common musician-related activities” (Thomson, 2012). The report concludes that emerging technology has had a measurable impact on the careers of musicians and composers, empowering them and leveling the playing field. Concerning the impact of studio technologies, ARS survey participants generally answered that “they have made them more efficient, and able to produce top quality work in their own studios” (*ibid*). Regarding promotional and sales supporting technologies, a significant amount of survey respondents agreed to become more self-sufficient, as technology allows them to communicate directly with fans, to collaborate with other musicians, and to self-manage their careers.

One ARS report focuses on the impact of the team and partnerships on the artist’s revenues. ARS Director Kristin Thomson referred to this data in her article to the Music Business Journal. Thomson (2012) draws a parallel between the DIY artist that leverages on current technologies to perform every task, and the musician that has a team of specialized professionals and partnerships. The goal is to assess the impact in the musician’s income and expose some of the tradeoffs involved in both situations. For that, Thomson went through the main roles that a musician may have, support this analysis on the different US copyright-based revenue categories and business practices: composer/songwriter, recording artist and performer.

For the composer/songwriter first role, the report examines the publishing income and the impact of having a publisher on the team. It shows that income derived by compositions accounted for 6% of our survey respondents. However, respondents who “had a paid/contracted relationship with a publisher, or an attorney, or a record label were deriving twice to three times as much income from compositions”.

Concerning the recording artist role, income from sound recordings made up about 6% of overall respondents’ income. But for those with a record label or web-master, that percentage is doubled. The report addresses the team members that had the greatest impact on income earned from performances. Booking agent leads the ranking, with a significant margin in income from live performances over those who do not have one.

One could infer from the analysis of the interviewees’ discourse, that when an artist achieves a certain initial growth, the DIY path appears to become more distant and uninteresting, or perhaps even risky. Jack Conté, from Pomplamoose^{xiv}, issued a very comprehensive statement regarding this issue:

“We did a really good job taking it from zero to 50% and then I think we got paralyzed, and we needed to be better leaders and to have a cabinet of smart people around us to help us take it from 50 to 100, and instead I think we just kind of stopped at 50. Now we’re a decent, well-known band. You know, we play 600-person venues and that’s awesome but I think we could have gone much higher had we been better business people. But at the same time, we

also wanted to be artists. We didn't want to be in it for the money. We didn't want to try and grow the brand. We wanted to make songs, you know? I spend my days in the recording studio. I'm very, very careful about how much time I spend doing business and how much time I spend doing music, and I want to be making music all of my time and so I'm willing to sacrifice certain business ventures because I'd rather be playing songs.” (Conté, cited by Sptiz and Bylin, 2012)

Considering this testimony, should an artist reach at determined stage of success, it appears he will have two choices; either signing up with a label, or by following a strict independent path, contract a manager that helps him building his own structure and professional team.

One trend that appears to proliferate in the music industry is the shift to the management model, in which the managing party takes a minor percentage of every revenue stream generated by the artist. Labels are also appropriating this model through the 360^o contracts. In this model, managers will be part of the record label. The alternatives are either recurring to the services of freelance management, or to the most recent approach, à-la-carte management services. In any of these alternatives the artist does not have to consider working with a label, but in case he does, the manager will be working in close conjunction with it.

4 Conclusion

The empirical study contributed with a perspective over the business reality and context of a meaningful sample of independent music artists. Findings indicate that artists seem to be increasingly business aware and self-sufficient. The most common pathway for independents appears to be taking an initial DIY approach, later followed by a flexible and mixed business approach that depends on team structure, business knowledge and financial availability. They appear to be configuring the use of intermediaries and professional services in their business models, in order to optimize revenues and workload.

Independent musicians have been leveraging on currently available online platforms and web tools. Their efficacy makes them invaluable as they increase productivity and facilitate the execution of major business functions. Further, these tools leverage direct access to market and are fundamental in enhancing the engagement between artist and fan. Although new media seems to stand as an alternative to traditional media and intermediaries, it has a specific and limited reach, and does not seem to replace the need of professional services. Furthermore, technology is not the center; music artists rather focus on creativity.

This study indicates that the effects of disintermediation, resulting from a technological paradigm shift, are mostly observable in the way independent artists are becoming self-sufficient. Business functions, such as management, funding, distribution and promotion, seem to have different levels of incidence. This appears to emerge from the inherent difficulties of the self-issuing artists, and from the power that record labels still maintain over financing and promotion. In the evolutionary path of an independent artist, the need for a professional structure is evident and typically grows along the way. This structure maybe provided either by a record label, by assembling a professional team or resorting to independent services.

The consequences of disintermediation may also relate to signs of readjustment by the record labels, observed in the renegotiation and adoption of distinct contract models, and in the lessening of investment in certain traditional business functions. Furthermore, the bargaining power of artists has increased, granting them more control over their career direction, over the development of their brand, and most importantly, over their creativity.

Acknowledgements:

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Tables with captions

- i :papercutz
- ii Lovers & Lollypops
- iii Milhões de festa
- iv The Astroboy
- v Peixe:Avião
- vi PAD Records
- vii The Poppers
- viii Keep The Razor Sharp
- ix SCL Agency
- x La Maquina
- xi AMAEI
- xii Metric
- xiii Zoë Keating
- xiv Pomplamoose