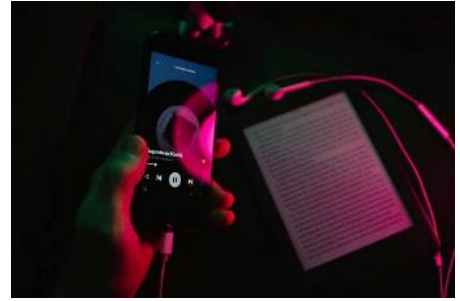


Skip, Save, Shuffle

The warehouse in your headphones.



Streaming services have taken over most of the ways that we consume content today. With the most popular music provider being Spotify, streaming services in general make up around 84% of revenue in the United States. [1] Digital streaming platforms have become increasingly popular due to their on-demand content and recommendation systems, but if people are getting their music recommendations from a company's for-profit algorithm, how does the current nature of the music industry influence listeners' music choice and discovery methods? Algorithms are now a significant influence on what ends up in your ears. Focusing on Spotify for its large customer base, 30% of music users listen to come from playlists. Furthermore, 90% of the playlists featured on the platform are curated by employees of the company itself. [1] That means around a third of the music a Spotify user saves are marketed to them by the service that many of them already pay to use. Music marketing has always been part of the industry game, but it used to come from genuine sources. Spotify's mission has always been to "position their technology as a voice of authority in such a way that would align them with other positions in society that have traditionally held the role of recommending music: a friend, radio DJ or music critic." [2] Connection is one of the many values that music has as a communicative art-form, and it seems that every online service wants to use that to their advantage.

Even if you don't use music streaming services such as Spotify, social media algorithms also influence what we listen to. Songs that are popular on platforms like TikTok often see increased streams on Spotify/Apple Music [3] So, whenever you get a song stuck in your head or participate in a video trend, the algorithm once again has influenced what you listen to. Independent artists are pushed to have a social media presence for reasons like monetization and exposure. That means when algorithms fail to push artists songs to listeners, or they're one of the 69% that report not being able to live off of their content, social media becomes yet another time-consuming labor artists need to succeed in their field. [4]

The algorithms, however, don't just influence your music choices. Musicians now report tailoring their sound to take advantage of, or overcome, these flawed discovery systems. [4] In order to distribute a song to more than a few people, authenticity is often sacrificed. Marketing is, of course, a two-way road that requires consumers to view and something for merchants to sell. What once was a leisurely activity that was enriching for both parties now is seen as a product to apply for a practical purpose. Everyone seems to have playlists for everything: the car, sleeping, studying, working out... Listeners don't form connections with the artist as much anymore, which causes many issues when considering the value of the work they consume. It's commonly reported that college aged listeners don't even consider piracy, "ripping" of sound files via online websites, to be harmful to anyone involved. [5] The shift in attitude about listening to music has widened the gap between artists and listeners. The quality listeners receive is formatted in a marketable way for the sake of artists making money. In other words, "the work you really want to pour into that may require more time and creativity, isn't the work that's also paying you." [6]

In a world where artistry is seen as a product to sell, it should be no surprise that music is often changed to be more marketable. Still, I think that it is important to see how connection and communication have become a corporate battle with originality and profit. Music is personal and doesn't just come from the internet. Before the internet, people went to concerts and bought physical copies, got new songs from their friends or the radio! The next time you see an advertisement for a big artist's next album or single, you could also check what the other people in your life are listening to.

[1] Pachali, Datta, "What Drives Demand for Playlists on Spotify?" (*Inform Pubs Online*, September 2024)

[5] Barata, Coelho, "Music streaming services: understanding the drivers of customer purchase and intention to recommend" (*NLM/PLC*, August 2021)

[2] Thomas Hodgson, "Spotify and the Democratization of Music" (*Cambridge University Press*, April 2021)

[6] Zomorodi, Strickler, Shah, "The Price of Creativity" (*NPR Ted Radio Hour*, November 2025)

[3] 'Ian' "The Impact of TikTok on Music Production: Trends Influenced by the Platform" (*Press Farm*, October 2025)

[4] Isabella Gomez Sarmiento, "Research Study Title in Quotes" (*NPR*, September 2025)

