

THE ROLE OF INDEPENDENT ARTISTS IN THE MUSIC INDUSTRY

AN EXPLORATORY STUDY ON THE DRIVERS FOR
INDEPENDENT ARTISTS

ALLAN LOCK FREDLUND

DANIEL NAKHJAVANPOUR

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Abstract:

The music industry has evolved continuously, from vinyl records to CDs, to digital streaming platforms. This digital shift simplified distribution, enabling artists to share their music independently without relying on a physical distribution infrastructure. The rise of short-form content platforms like TikTok has further empowered independent artists, offering new ways of exposure. This thesis explores the pain points and opportunities faced by independent artists, and their role in the industry. Further, it develops a model to help determine whether an artist should sign a record deal. Using a qualitative, exploratory approach rooted in constructionism and inductive reasoning, data was collected through interviews with industry professionals. Key findings highlight that independent artistry has grown into a viable career path rather than an in-between role before signing with a label. The study identifies three core factors influencing the decision to remain independent or pursue a record deal. It also presents theoretical models outlining drivers for both paths. By exploring different preference scenarios, a vast amount of practical artist examples with different outcomes can be observed.

Keywords:

Music marketing, Music industry, Independent artists, Record labels, Social media,

Authors:

Allan Lock Fredlund (25845)

Daniel Nakhjavanpour (25784)

Tutor:

Lixin Lu, PhD Student, Department of Marketing and Strategy

Examiner:

Per Andersson, Professor, Department of Marketing and Strategy

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Business and Economics Program,

Stockholm School of Economics

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1. Introduction

1.1. Concepts

Major record label

Major record label refers to the largest three record labels and they have significant influence in the music industry.

Independent record label

Independent record label refers to record labels that are not signed to or acquired by major labels.

Independent artist

Independent artist refers to artists that are not signed to a record label.

Distributor

Distributor refers to companies that offer digital distribution of music to streaming platforms. Distributor also refers to companies that offer physical distribution of music.

Streaming platform

Streaming platform refers to digital streaming platforms where music is available to stream on demand.

Master

Master refers to the original sound recording of a song.

Utility

Utility refers to the benefit/satisfaction/fulfillment a consumer gets from a service or good.

ISBN

ISBN is an abbreviation for international standard book number and relates to the unique identifier of all printed books.

Editorial playlist

Editorial playlist refers to playlists curated by editors from streaming platforms. These playlists often have a significant amount of followers and traction.

DIY

DIY is an abbreviation of Do It Yourself.

1.2. Background

Before streaming services came along, the music industry operated on physical copies of music such as vinyl records, CDs, and cassette tapes, with CDs becoming the dominant form of music distribution due to being more durable and offering better sound quality (Guo, 2023). The physical era of music entailed record stores becoming a hub for purchasing music, and due to limited physical space, music was carefully curated. With the emergence of digital music formats such as MP3, music could be compressed without losing sound quality, meaning hundreds of songs could be stored digitally. This created a means to copy and share digital files, which meant that independent artists and labels could distribute their music, which traditionally would have required large amounts of physical production and distribution infrastructure (Guo, 2023). The industry was further re-shaped when streaming services came along as purchasing music was no longer the norm, and people had access to a multitude of music on demand through a subscription model. This also enabled listeners to discover new music through various genres without the same commitment that it would have required during the physical era (Guo, 2023). In more recent years, the music industry has been further affected by digitalization as short-form content has emerged with an emphasis on TikTok (Khosravian, 2021). TikTok served as a way for independent and lesser-known artists to turn their songs into hits due to the inclusive TikTok algorithm pushing content from the bottom up. This shift was heavily noticed when comparing the most streamed tracks from 2019 to 2020, where 2019 are all signed artists and 2020 had four independent artists in the top 14 most streamed songs, which was due to going viral online (Khosravian, 2021). Moreover, with the share of independent artists growing yearly from 1.7% of total music industry revenue in 2015 to 4.1% of the revenue in 2019 (Frenneaux, 2023), this study will aim to explore the factors behind this growth and what it means for independent artists and the industry.

1.3. Purpose and Research Gap

Research questions:

R1: What is the role of independent artists in today's music industry?

R2: What are the factors that affect whether an independent artist signs to a record label or stays independent?

It is likely that the change in the music industry has had considerable effect on the social structure of the industry. Independent artists seem to be a particularly significant industry actor to study for the seemingly unproportional change they have faced. Independent artists have historically been marginalized but it is possible this is changing following industry wide development. Simply investigating their market share growing by roughly 2.4x between 2015 and 2019 (Frenneaux, 2023), the numbers indicate growth both in terms of revenue and populace. However, qualitative analysis is required to ascertain this conclusion. Therefore, the purpose of the study is to investigate how the role of independent artists has changed and why this development has occurred. An unexplored approach to these questions is to analyze the drivers for signing and identify reasons to sign or not sign while considering the current market conditions and their effect on the drivers. This creates the basis for the second research question. Moreover, this approach is relevant because it recognizes how closely intertwined the role of independent artists and the role of record labels are and utilizes empirical data to differentiate the two. Thus, by extension generating knowledge on how and why the role of independent artists has changed.

1.4. Scope and Delimitations

The first delimitation regards the geographical scope of the study. There are likely differences between how the music industry operates in different continents, particularly on a social level. Therefore, the scope is delimited to a few similar countries since otherwise a significantly larger sample would be required to saturate categories. The geographical areas decided to be included in the scope were Scandinavia and the U.S. This decision was based on the accessibility of data and the likelihood that both the operational and societal level of the music industry of the countries are relatively similar.

Another delimitation concerns the type of independent artist studied. To properly understand the drivers for independent artists, it is essential that the independent artists are knowledgeable and take their music career seriously. Therefore, we classify independent artists as artists not signed to a record label and who consistently release

music, do collaborations, network and use all the tools at their disposal to succeed. These are artists making music as a career, as opposed to a hobby.

A final delimitation regards the sample in which all interviewees are required to have multiple years of experience in the music industry on a professional level. The study is concerned with the industry professionals' view on independent artists, not the public's view on independent artists. Further, the information needed to construct all models is in the hands of industry professionals. A different sample would not have as in-depth information on the market conditions and drivers for artists.

In summary the scope is to investigate the role of independent artists and drivers for staying independent or signing to a record label through the lens of music industry professionals, in Scandinavia and the U.S.

2. Literature Review

The literature search was approached with the mindset of finding theory within pre-established boundaries in order to abductively improve upon previous conceptualizations. The main boundary was that studies must be directly linked to independent artistry. Within this boundary no theoretical contributions or conceptualizations were found, forcing the authors to either adapt the boundary or employ an inductive approach. The latter was chosen. The following texts have been chosen to portray the existing knowledge within the field of independent artists and the factors contributing to their rise, along with recent changes in the market that may be relevant. The empirical findings of these studies were used to determine the authors' research approach and complement the authors' findings for theory generation. The relevant literature found was then split into three categories that capture the central topics discussed relating to the research questions.

2.1. Independent Artists

Frenneaux (2023) mentions that due to digital platforms providing greater access to production and distribution tools, DIY and independent artistry has grown significantly. It is further mentioned that income from independent artists has grown from 1.7% in 2015 to 4.1% of the total music revenue by 2019. However, major labels still control the majority of the music industry. Frenneaux (2023) also touches upon independent artists having to develop DIY competencies in multiple roles such as managing their own career, and doing their own marketing, which puts them under significant pressure due to juggling multiple roles.

Ketonen (2018) also explores similar factors. She finds that digitalization has made it possible for independent artists to succeed on online streaming platforms such as Spotify with the help of social media such as Instagram being a heavy driver for marketing. Ketonen (2018) also emphasizes that some challenges independent artists face are financial constraints in terms of funding for marketing, access to radio play, and networking. She further explores what motivators artists have for independence, which

she concluded was creative control over their music and image as well as flexibility in making decisions without pressure from record labels.

2.2. Record Labels

Angelova and Johnning (2021) emphasize the role of major labels in terms of what they can offer. Some of what they mention is financial resources in terms of larger budgets for marketing, connections for radio and playlisting, access to influencers and brands, and PR campaigns. Further, they also emphasize the marketing expertise that labels hold. The authors conclude that independent artists have access to self-promoting tools such as social media, while record labels can amplify the reach through their connections.

Brännkärr (2023) brings up the traditional role of record labels and compares it to how they have adapted more recently. She states that major labels that historically controlled physical distribution have shifted focus to digital distribution while recognizing the importance of social media as a way for artists to interact directly with their fans and build a personal brand to promote their music. The major labels have further shifted from solely focusing on traditional PR and advertising to a heavy focus on digital marketing campaigns to create trends and viral moments on social media. Brännkärr (2023) also emphasizes that artist development has changed in the digital age as it is now more focused on helping artists create an online persona that resonates with their audiences, essentially coaching them on how to create viral content and navigate the social media platforms such as TikTok and Instagram.

2.3. Signed Artists Versus Independent Artists

Frenneaux (2023) further brings up platform capitalism, which is divided into multiple parts. The parts he emphasizes here are that even though streaming platforms create equal opportunity due to their accessibility, it is to some extent an illusion as it does not translate into fair opportunities for all artists since the algorithms and playlists tend to favor artists with established fanbases. He further mentions that economic inequality arises between artists that are independent and artists that are signed with majors since

independent artists do not have the large budgets for marketing that major labels offer. Considering that streaming platforms do not pay a significant amount per stream, this makes it difficult for smaller or independent artists to make a sustainable income which further creates a gap between independent and major label artists (Frenneaux, 2023). Lehtola (2024) explores songwriters' perspective on differences in pros and cons between signed and independent artists. She highlights artistic authenticity in independent artists, and challenges of finances, time management and skillsets.

2.4. Literature Summary

The total revenue attributed to independent artists in the music industry is growing, and the consensus seems to be that independent artistry is becoming more frequent. Further, the studies indicate that social media has been an important factor for independent artists to market their music, and a common pain point has been the marketing budget. There has also been surface-level research made on record labels adapting to focus more on social media and digitalization in modern ages. This leaves room to explore in depth the pain points and enablers of independent artistry through interviews and establish a framework around it while looking at shifts in the market conditions of the industry. There is an opportunity to explore gatekeeping more in depth and the differences it can create between signed artists and independent artists. Moreover, this can be explored in relation to whether an artist chooses to be independent or sign a record deal.

3. Method

In short, the study follows a qualitative, exploratory approach with constructionism and inductive reasoning at its core. The section describes this decision beginning with the research approach and ending with method critique. Further, data collection, data analysis and quality of research are evaluated.

3.1. Research Approach and Theoretical Framework

In terms of a theoretical perspective on the subject of independent artists within the music industry, the area is comparably unexplored. This can partly be attributed to the novelty of independent artists as a more significant player in the industry. The long-term effects of this are unclear and the role of independent artists within the music industry is uncertain and ever changing. This uncertainty combined with the lack of pre-existing studies motivates an exploratory approach for its helpfulness in laying the groundwork of theoretical implications. *“Exploratory research in social science can be defined in different ways, but its core, I believe, consists of an attempt to discover something new and interesting, by working your way through a research topic.”* (Swedberg, 2020: 17). Furthermore, the lack of pre-existing studies leads to new theoretical implications and concepts principally being constructed from the data collection in which a qualitative study is suitable for its compatibility with inductive approaches (Bell et al., 2022). Moreover, a qualitative study allows for a closer interaction with the studied interviewees and allows them to steer the conversation into important perspectives the researcher might have overlooked which is a highly valued feature in the context of the study.

3.1.1. Constructionism

The research area of independent artists is highly affected by social setting and interaction between actors and the musical environment. Therefore, to give weight to the social properties and adequately develop theory in a social setting, the authors deemed a constructionist ontology appropriate. The position is one of social phenomena being co-created rather than ‘out there’ (Bell et al., 2022). The epistemological position of constructionism aligns well with the interpretivist position but shifts the focus from

the individual level to the collective social level. Additionally, the researcher's role in the construction of knowledge and their influence on it is further emphasized. These properties are highly relevant to the context of the study. The constructionist approach acknowledges that the categories and theoretical implications from the analysis are shaped by the researcher's interaction with the field (Charmaz, 2000).

The constructionist position encourages the researcher to familiarize themselves with the research area through previous literature before data collection (Charmaz, 2000). This approach alleviates the issue where researchers must try to suspend their preconceptions rather than recognize the low feasibility of theory-neutral observation (Bell et al., 2022). Therefore, the authors investigated the research area, previous literature and associated theory prior to data collection.

3.1.2. Inductive Approach

Lack of theoretical conceptualization in previous literature necessitated the need for an inductive approach. The study aims to expand the theoretical understanding of independent artistry and since there is no previously established theory on the subject, the authors are compelled to inductively generate the original theoretical contribution from empirical observations. *“The primary purpose of the inductive approach is to allow research findings to emerge from the frequent, dominant, or significant themes inherent in raw data, without the restraints imposed by structured methodologies.”* (Thomas, 2006: 238).

Further, the inductive approach is well compatible with the epistemological level of constructionism as it recognizes the researcher's role in knowledge creation, making it suitable to the study. The inductive approach leans on coding processes for theory generation, though they are not as defined in comparison to more structured methodologies, such as grounded theory. Coding relates to an analytical process of labelling component parts based on the data collected, and component parts are chosen for their potential theoretical implication. Coding is a continuing process that should begin shortly after the first data is collected (Bell et al., 2022).

The sampling process the authors decided to utilize for the inductive approach was theoretical sampling. Theoretical sampling was endorsed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and Strauss and Corbin (1998). The intention behind theoretical sampling is theory generation, in which what data is needed to develop the emerging theory decides the next sample. The researcher finds this information by analyzing and coding previously collected data. Since the aim of this study is theory generation, this makes theoretical sampling a suitable choice. A concept closely correlated with theoretical sampling is theoretical saturation. Theoretical saturation is the notion that data collection should cease when new data does not develop the emerging theory nor produce new theoretical categories. In terms of theoretical sampling, theoretical saturation is employed as a criterion for when the researcher should move on from a particular theoretical category, and when all theoretical categories are saturated, the data collected is sufficient (Bell et al., 2022).

3.2. Data Collection

3.2.1. Interviews

The data collection consisted of interviews. To be able to answer the research questions it was important that the interviewees each had multiple years of experience in the music industry. The interviewee decisions were driven by theoretical sampling whereby after each or a few interviews the data was analyzed and utilized to determine who to interview next. After the first interview it was clear that in order to answer the research questions and develop the emerging theory, multiple actors in the industry were required. Thus, the interviews moved between different actors until the theoretical categories were deemed sufficiently saturated in relation to the time constraint. When to deem a category sufficiently saturated was based on a combination of three factors described by Strauss and Corbin (1998). These factors are that new or relevant data do not appear to emerge concerning a category, the category demonstrates variation and is well developed, and relationships between categories are validated. In total 8 interviews were conducted with actors ranging from record labels and managers to artists. The somewhat contrasting perspectives of these actors ensured variation and multifaceted

insights necessary for establishing collective social implications. On average the interviews lasted approximately 30 minutes.

3.2.2. Interview Process

The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format in which the sessions followed an interview guide with open-ended questions. This approach ensures the sessions are on topic, while simultaneously allowing for the authors to ask additional questions to delve deeper into interesting interviewee responses. The interview guide was continuously adjusted during the entire data collection process as the theory emerged. This was done by constructing new questions to capture theoretical categories that previous interviewees had hinted at as well as by adjusting the guide to fit the actor being interviewed. The logic behind this approach was to ensure that the focus of the data collection is development of the emerging theory.

The interview guide consisted of an introductory section to open up the conversation. A section about the role of independent artists and record labels. As well as sections on distribution, social media and networking. The emphasis on networking in the interview guide was strengthened after the first interview as its significance to the emerging theory was established.

Since many of the interviewees were based abroad, it was necessary to allow for interviews to be done digitally. Of the eight interviews six were performed through digital means and the other two were face-to-face. The software that was used for the video interviews was Google Meet. The language used in the interviews were either English or Swedish depending on what language the interviewee was most comfortable with. All interviews were recorded and transcribed.

3.3. Data Analysis

3.3.1. Inductive Coding

Thomas (2006) highlights five wide steps in the coding process of the general inductive approach. These are (1.) *preparation of raw data files*, (2.) *close reading of text*, (3.)

creation of categories, (4.) overlapping coding and uncoded text, (5.) continuing revision and refinement of category system.

(1.) *Preparation of raw data files* relates to the process of preparing the data for analysis. This can include formatting and transcribing among others.

(2.) *Close reading of text* relates to the researcher familiarizing themselves with the contents of the raw data to begin to form an understanding.

(3.) *Creation of categories* relates to the process of breaking down the data into digestible groups and themes. There is no specific method allocated for this purpose and the researcher may decide an appropriate procedure for this aim themselves.

(4.) *Overlapping coding and uncoded text* relates to that in contrast to generally accepted rules of quantitative coding, for the inductive approach of qualitative coding it is allowed to code the same section of text into multiple categories and that significant sections of the text may stay uncategorized if they are not relevant.

(5.) *Continuing revision and refinement of category system* relates to constantly refining and comparing the categories until a few core categories can be established. Thomas (2006) suggests that more than 8 summary categories signal that the coding process is incomplete. This point also relates to the process of identifying contradictions and identifying quotes to capture themes.

3.3.2. Coding Process

To summarize the authors' approach to Thomas's (2006) five steps, the first four steps were done in rounds as more data was collected. This was to ensure coherence in the iterative process between coding and data collection which provides validity for the theoretical sampling. All video-files were transcribed and formatted in preparation for analysis, closely read and then initially coded to provide information on where more data should be gathered. After all data had been gathered the transcripts were re-read, and step five began in which more categories were identified and then assimilated until

only three summary categories remained in the final model. All coding was done manually.

The interviews mainly consisted of open-ended questions leaving room for the interviewees to develop their own reasoning, thoughts, and connections spontaneously based on their own experiences. The aim of this was for the different backgrounds and experiences of the interviewees to shine through in their responses to paint a more nuanced picture in the data collected, covering multiple aspects from multiple actors. This also led to some categories arising which were less common among the interviewees, however it is important to note that less common does not necessarily mean that it is less important as it can be categories that are more difficult to identify. The empirical data collected through the interviews was coded into multiple cohesive recurring concepts that emerged during the interviews, and these concepts were further categorized into groups. The concepts were thereafter defined and explained along with examples from the interviews.

3.4. Reflexivity

In accordance with the constructionist framework significance is attributed to preconceptions and biases of the researchers. The position views the emerging theory as co-constructed between researcher and participants and arises from the researcher's interaction with the observations (Charmaz, 2000). Therefore, it is important to outline potential preconceptions. From examining previous literature and from previous experience the authors began the data collection with the presumption of distributors and social media having a significant impact on the development of the role of independents. This preconception may potentially have overstated its significance to the social impact in the proposed theoretical models. Regarding background, one author had multiple years of experience as an independent artist which affects how the author interacts with the observations. This could potentially mean that the author may absorb positive observations of independent artists better than negative observations. The other author had no prior experience in the music industry hence interactions with the observations happened from an outsider perspective.

3.5. Quality of Research

There is no consensus of the optimal way of evaluating the quality of research of qualitative studies. The approach utilized here was advocated by LeCompte and Goetz (1982) and consists of four aspects: external reliability, internal reliability, external validity and internal validity. This approach utilizes the well-known terms of reliability and validity usually found in quantitative research but adapts them for qualitative studies (Bell et al., 2022).

3.5.1. Reliability

External reliability refers to the replicability of the study. True replicability is generally difficult for qualitative studies to achieve since the exact circumstances and social settings cannot be replicated (Bell et al., 2022). For instance, the social standing and relationship between researcher and interviewee is original and ever changing, yet it still has a profound effect on what the interviewee discloses and how. To strengthen the degree to which the study can be replicated the authors have done their best in describing the entire process through a transparent methodology. The inductive approach also presents difficulties in terms of reciprocity for its interpretative and context-dependent nature. To lessen the effect of this, the authors have described the coding process and how all decisions relating to the sampling process were taken. Additionally, a section on reflexivity was added to reflect on potential biases that may have affected the sensemaking of data.

Internal reliability refers to the consensus between observers. If multiple observers make sense of an observation in the same way independently, it strengthens the reliability of the understanding (Bell et al., 2022). The study was conducted by two observers who coded the transcripts individually. The codes were then compared and assimilated after which it could be concluded that the sense-making of both authors were similar. However, it is worth noting that both authors share similar backgrounds, for instance in terms of age, education and living situation. Except that one had experience in the music industry while the other observer could provide an outsider perspective.

3.5.2. Validity

External validity refers to the generalizability of the study. Similarly to external reliability, external validity can be difficult to achieve at a higher degree for qualitative studies (Bell et al., 2022). The study was based on a specific case and used a relatively small sample size, which lessens the degree to which the study can be generalized. The delimitations discussed in section 1.4. Scope and Delimitations, further challenges generalizability across other industries and social settings. The theoretical models produced by the study can hint at implications in other settings, but to ascertain these implications further studies are needed (this is discussed in section 6.4. Limitations and Future Research).

Internal validity refers to the congruence between theoretical ideas and observations (Bell et al., 2022). The inductive approach is particularly strong in this regard as the theory is generated by the data. Through thorough coding processes among others, the concepts are well matched to the observations.

3.6. Ethical Considerations

Prior to the interviews the interviewees were informed on the aim of the study, how the data is managed and guaranteed anonymity, and gave consent. All interviewees also consented to being recorded. Care has been taken that no external parties have had access or been shown/told the contents of transcripts and video-files. At the conclusion of the study all interviewee data was deleted.

3.7. Method Critique

The constructionist framework encourages researchers to investigate previous research before data collection. This approach alleviates the issue where researchers must try to suspend their preconceptions rather than recognize the low feasibility of theory-neutral observation. It has also been debated whether being aware of previous theories is beneficial, as it allows the researcher to build on previous conceptualizations (Bell et al., 2022). However, the incorporation of prior theory into the process introduces a risk of imposing those theories on the observations.

The most prevalent critique of social constructionism is that it is often understood as anti-realist for its perceived relativistic position (Andrews, 2012). Andrews (2012) further brings up Hammersley's (1992) argument that the usefulness of findings generated by a relativistic position can be questioned since it allows for a multitude of claims to each be legitimate. However, in counter to this, Sismondo (1993) argued that the criticism is misguided for it does not reflect how the constructionist framework is mostly used in empirical studies. Sismondo (1993) instead puts constructionism on a spectrum. On one end of the spectrum there are more extreme constructionist approaches for which the realist critique would apply as this position denies physical reality. On the other end of the spectrum are more contextual, mild constructionist approaches in which physical reality is recognized, and this mild constructionism is the most prevalent in research. This is also how constructionism is used in this study.

The method utilized in this study leans on coding processes in order to produce categories, models and theoretical implications. However, coding processes in qualitative studies are criticized for the possibility of losing context as you are picking out small chunks from wide data (Bell et al., 2022). Another critique relates to the fragmentation of data acknowledged by Coffey and Atkinson (1996) and Marshall (1981). Fragmentation of data relates to the narrative flow being lost (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996), as well as the loss of wholeness of individual interviewees (Marshall, 1981).

4. Results

This part describes the data and presents the results which in turn acts as the basis for the theory proposition. The data presentation is divided into three summary categories, these are: drivers for signing, drivers for staying independent and market conditions.

4.1. Data Description

A total of 8 professionals in the music industry were interviewed. These 8 interviews had an average length of approximately 30 minutes. The interviewee sample encompassed a range of actors in the music industry. 2 of the interviewees were independent record label CEOs, 4 of the interviewees were artists, and the other 2 interviewees were an artist marketing consultant and an artist manager. Due to the anonymity requirement of the study, no identities of labels, managements, artist teams, or such may be disclosed. The study is constructionist in nature meaning the authors acknowledge their voice in the following data presentation. Thus, the data should be interpreted critically by for instance considering preconceptions stated in section 3.4. Reflexivity.

4.2. Data Presentation

4.2.1. Drivers for signing

Capital Restraints

Capital Restraints refers to labels, especially majors, having big budgets while independent artists have restricted capital and lack funding for activities such as marketing. 7 interviewees (87,5%) mentioned that capital restraints are a relevant factor.

“I think funding hinders more artists from going independent”

“No independent label could ever match the budgets that [established major artists] get thrown at them. There's no shot.”

Social media is crowded

This point refers to songs and artists fading out in the crowd due to social media being crowded and thousands of songs being released on streaming platforms daily by independent artists who have more or less the same tools. 3 interviewees (37,5%) brought up this point during the interviews and expressed it being an issue.

"Despite there being more freedom for the artists, I notice that many artists almost get lost in the crowd. You have so many incredibly talented people who don't get the chance to be heard because there's so much material out there."

"When it comes to promoting on social media, it's a very crowded room. It is a very, very crowded room. 100,000 songs come out on Spotify every single day. So you have to distinguish yourself from 99,999 artists, which is insane to me."

Playlisting for labels

Playlists refers to editorial playlists on streaming platforms such as Spotify being largely controlled by record labels with the top spots or entire playlists being occupied solely by signed artists. 7 interviewees (87,5%) emphasized this being a considerable factor of gatekeeping.

"If you look at all the major editorial playlists, your rap caviar, your fresh finds[...] The biggest editorial playlists, which is Spotify decides who goes on them. Major labels own like 80, 90% of these slots. They own a very good percentage of these slots, and they will forever own a good percentage of these slots [...]"

"But if you're signed, you see all these not so big artists, let's say, and they're like playlisted in 10 different Spotify playlists. And you just know it's because of the labels and they have contacts [...]"

Booking Agents

This point refers to difficulties for artists to secure a booking agent without sufficient contacts emphasizing that contracts with booking agents are often acquired upon

signing with a record label due to their close relationships, although it is still possible for independent artists to have booking agents. 5 interviewees (62,5%) emphasized gatekeeping within acquiring a booking agent.

“[...] if you sign a record label contract, then it's very common that you will get in contact with people that will get you a contract with a booking firm who will create opportunities for live shows.”

Time Restraints

This point refers to pressure and time restraints independent artists face due to having to do everything themselves within the process of making the music as well as after, such as marketing. 7 interviewees (87,5%) found this point to be a relevant factor when discussing independent artists.

“You have to act like a business. You have to think like a business. You have to build a contact network. You have to work with social media. [...] There are not many artists who can juggle so many things at once.”

Label Contacts

Label Contacts regards labels having extensive networks and contacts for every part of the music making process which they can use to set up collaborations and benefit their artists as well as contacts within other beneficial places such as radio that can be leveraged, whereas independent artists may face difficulties finding and connecting with these people themselves. 7 interviewees (87,5%) emphasized the significant role Label Networks/Contacts plays.

"It's a collaboration between different parties. It's artists and producers coming together in large studio spaces located around Stockholm. It's about being able to work together. I think the record labels are very good at creating such opportunities."

“[...] if you know [name] and [name] at BBC [...] you get on BBC Radio One rotation. If you don't know them, you have to go through the same process everybody else is doing

where you may waste money on a radio plugger who doesn't end up getting you anything either way.”

Focus on music

This point regards labels being beneficial for artists who only want to focus on making music as signed artists are able to focus more on the music side while having a team around them handling everything outside of the music. 4 interviewees (50%) brought up this point as a relevant factor when discussing the benefits of signing with a record label.

“[whether you want to sign with a label] It depends on if you want more help, let's say, like people are handling stuff for you and you can focus only on the music.”

Exclusive Events

This point concerns artists who are signed being invited to exclusive events which can serve as opportunities to network with other actors within the industry such as release parties and awards ceremonies that are reserved for signed artists. 2 interviewees (25%) brought up this point when discussing networking.

“[discussing networking] If you sign to a record label, then you can show up on their release-parties.”

Artist Development

Artist development concerns record labels having expertise in artist development and engaging in it actively by creating opportunities for their artists to work with different actors such as producers and songwriters while helping them develop their sound and careers. 3 interviewees (37,5%) brought up this factor when discussing record labels' role in the industry today and the benefits of signing to a record label.

“I think that labels really come into play and can take artists to the next level when artists have momentum and they feel like they've reached a ceiling.”

“[the role of record labels] it may not be about marketing and the like, but rather about artist development, and that also has a large effect.”

4.2.2. Drivers for staying independent

Short Form Content Marketing

Short form content marketing regards short form videos posted on social media such as Instagram Reels and TikTok for marketing purposes. 8 interviewees (100%) remarked short form marketing as significant for the success of independent artists as it enables artists to reach large audiences at a low cost.

“I think the main reason artists are shifting away from signing to major labels or sometimes signing any deal in general is because they can market themselves through social media. [...] when it comes to social media, that's all I'm thinking about. Content marketing, short form content, 30 second clips, slide posts, maybe different things in that regard where you can catch someone's attention span.”

“I didn't do TikTok at all maybe three years ago. And my numbers, my monthly listeners and everything, it was like four times higher than before I started.”

Creative Control and Artistic Integrity

Creative control and artistic integrity regard the artist's ability to have full control over their workflow, processes and image. This relates to being able to release whatever music you want, when you want to and however you want to, among else. 4 interviewees (50%) brought this up as an important aspect of why you may wish to be independent.

“If you want to be in control yourself, it's kind of like being your own boss. As soon as you are part of a big label, you have people deciding for you what to do and all that stuff.”

“[an independent artist group] I don’t feel like they are particularly entrepreneurial. I rather feel like they don’t want to be sellers at all. [why the group hasn’t signed] It’s probably more about artistic integrity.”

Entrepreneurial Characteristics

Entrepreneurial characteristics in this sense regards characteristics such as self-driven, independent, ambitious, hardworking and business mindset. 4 interviewees (50%) mentioned such characteristics as necessary to either succeed as an independent artist or to stay independent.

“I would say independent artists, they have very, very similar, if not the exact same characteristics as entrepreneurs. You know, they’re very hardworking. They’re very self-driven. [...] They want to remain independent. They want to be self-sustained. They don’t want to rely on somebody pulling strings, getting them on a playlist, running ads for them to be successful. They want to do it themselves. [...]the biggest characteristic I’ve seen in successful, key word successful, independent artists is they’re self-driven. They want it more than anyone else.”

“I think that’s always the question that you have to ask as an independent artist. It’s just how hard are you willing to work and how far can you take things?”

Social Media Networking

Social media networking regards how useful social media is for finding and connecting with people that can elevate your music career as an independent artist. 7 interviewees (87.5%) expressed social media as the easiest way to network and very helpful for independent artists.

“One thing is to reach people in general, but reaching people who’s going to like you is really hard. And just imagine back in the days, how much money that would necessarily cost and how much just stress and money and effort and time and everything. But with social media, [...] It’s literally like walking around on the street with ‘artist’ written on your forehead.”

“All the [my] networking happens on social media. Maybe, okay, let's say 99%. [...] People find you, people hit you up, you find people, you hit them up and you start a collab.”

Being Independent is Cool

Being independent is cool relates to the emotional feelings attributed to independent artistry of trendy, hip or cool. 2 interviewees (25%) expressed that being an independent artist at the moment is cool. This is something some signed artists use in their marketing campaign by pretending to be independent.

“But if you ask most artists why they want to be independent [...] They're just going to answer based on what the word of mouth is. And the word of mouth is that it's cool to be independent. Fuck the labels. But nobody's really precisely saying why, in that sense.”

Attitude Shift Toward Major Labels

This point concerns an attitude shift in the industry among artists where historically signing to a major label was considered prestigious and a dream for many, whereas it is now considered less of a big deal due to artists choosing independency. 2 interviewees (25%) expressed that the end goal for artists is no longer necessarily to get signed by a major label.

“Five years ago the dream was to sign. It was like this: everybody wanted to sign. If you got a meeting with Sony or Universal, that was big. Today it isn't big. Today artists choose either to do it themselves or they go with a management team. Or they find other ways. [...] It's not as prestigious to sign today compared to before.”

Major Labels Take Large Cuts

Major labels take large cuts regards the traditional major label deals consisting of them taking large revenue percentages as well as ownership of masters. 4 interviewees (50%) expressed that the large cuts that major labels take is a reason to consider staying independent.

“The industry standard is that a major record label takes 80% of the pie. And it could be that you feel that, actually I, I don’t want that. Also, a large portion of major-label contracts regard selling your masters. And it’s not certain that you want that.”

“The major labels that are taking music in perpetuity, taking egregious splits of 80, 90% [...] They’re taking 80% post-recoupment, and they have those records forever. To me, it’s almost like a no-brainer. You know, as a businessman, would you give your company up for 80% for a one-time payment?”

Playlisting for independents

This point relates to the fact that even though major labels largely influence editorial playlists and are prioritized, there are still ways for independent artists to get put on many playlists. Such possibilities for instance arise from data driven playlisting where algorithms can push songs that are doing well. Another way is through distribution companies who have relationships with streaming platforms and can pitch songs for playlisting. Spotify also offers the option for artists to pitch to them directly through their artist platform. 5 interviewees (62.5%) expressed that it is more difficult for independent artists than for signed artists to be playlisted but not at all impossible.

“[Spotify] it’s more open and it’s more data driven as well, because algorithms can help you reach playlists and stuff, and everything that you previously couldn’t.”

“And these distribution companies also pitch you to certain playlists. I mean, obviously, I look at that as filling out a free lottery ticket.”

Accessibility of making music

Accessibility of making music concerns the process of making music being very accessible and cheap in the present compared to the past. In the past expensive studios were a requirement and the only option which required artists to sign a record deal, whereas now it is possible to do it at home with a laptop and microphone. 3 interviewees (37,5%) brought up this point when discussing independent artists.

“It's easier than ever to produce music. You don't have to go rent a studio and all this stuff. You can do everything on your laptop.”

Distribution

Distribution concerns digital distributors enabling independent artists by providing a cheap way for them to distribute their music to streaming platforms without the need to sign any deals. 6 interviewees (75%) emphasized the importance of digital distributors for independent artists.

“I think distributors are kind of there with social media as a very key factor. I think they're almost equally as important. [...] Nowadays, you can virtually get a song on every major platform, your Spotify, your Apple Music, your YouTube, at the click of a button.”

4.2.3. Market Conditions

Power/Leverage shift when making deals

Power/Leverage shift when making deals considers independent artists gaining more negotiating power when signing deals. The reasoning behind this is that labels are more data and analytics based now rather than signing based on feeling. Further, artists are no longer dependent on having record deals which gives artists the ability to be selective, especially since there are more labels to choose from today which means that artists can negotiate with multiple labels at the same time. Moreover, artists have the ability to leverage social media to build a presence which gives them negotiating power if they want to sign a record deal. 7 interviewees (87,5%) emphasized that independent artists today have more leverage than before when negotiating deals with record labels.

“Today you might not have the same need to sign so now you can be a lot more selective.”

Labels shifting their deal structure

This point regards major labels making a historic shift from previously doing mostly long-term deals to be open to smaller contracts. It is a shift from having to give up partial ownership of your music with strict conditions to more licensing and distribution deals. This represents a more favorable environment for artists as the labels only borrow music for a certain time period and the artist retains ownership. 2 interviewees (25%) brought this up.

“Because this is maybe the first time in history where labels are really opening up to like distribution deals, license deals in such a bigger fashion than just artist deals that they did use back in the days.”

Songs rather than artists

This point concerns there being a trend where people listen to songs rather than artists, with an example being mood music playlists that are curated to fit a certain mood or task such as breakfast music. Further, it is stated that this trend has made it easier for independent artists to break through with individual songs without a label. Moreover, it also leads to signed artists having less loyal fan bases as people stream their songs passively through these playlists. 2 interviewees (25%) brought up these factors.

“There are concepts like mood-music. If you look at mood-playlists on Spotify, which is an entirely new concept. You have people that listen to music for a particular circumstance. They might be studying, they may be cooking. Or that they are trying to create a particular feeling. It's very song-based and a lot less artist-based.”

Shift to domestic focus

This point concerns any labels and distributors that are not independent since major labels and all distributors under their acquisition are moving to a domestic focus wherein each country focuses on music within their own country. Thus, artists who make music in English for example and sign to a distributor or label in Sweden that is not independent may not be pushed outside of that country restricting their reach. 3 interviewees (37.5%) mentioned that this may serve as a reason for artists to stay

independent rather than signing to such distributors or labels depending on their strategy.

“[the major labels] They bought up all these distribution companies [...] and they're still framing it as global distribution. But the major labels has already secured that they're mostly focusing on their national, like national, country. And if the entities they own are under the same system, they cannot break globally.”

4.3. Data Deviations

One of the main drivers brought up for being independent by the interviewees was creative control and artistic integrity. This was contradicted by one interviewee who stated that as an independent artist you must get comfortable doing things that make you uncomfortable, marketing yourself and constantly adapting and letting go of your strict vision.

5. Theoretical Propositions

Through the concepts that emerged in results, we present 4 models. Three of the models reflect the three different groups presented in results, and these models are used to categorize the different concepts into cohesive wholes that are key points for the final model. The final model weighs the different categories that emerged in the prior models as reasons for whether an artist should sign a record deal or not. Thereafter, these models are also used for further implications.

5.1. Drivers For Signing Model

This model summarizes the concepts about drivers for signing, outlined in the data presentation. In the model these concepts are categorized into higher order constructs.



The concepts *Capital Restraints*, *Time Restraints* and *Social Media is Crowded* are all different factors that represent difficulties for independent artists and challenges that they must get around in order to be successful in the industry. These challenges are all factors that labels are able to address to some degree. These concepts are therefore categorized into a single final construct *Challenges For Independents*.

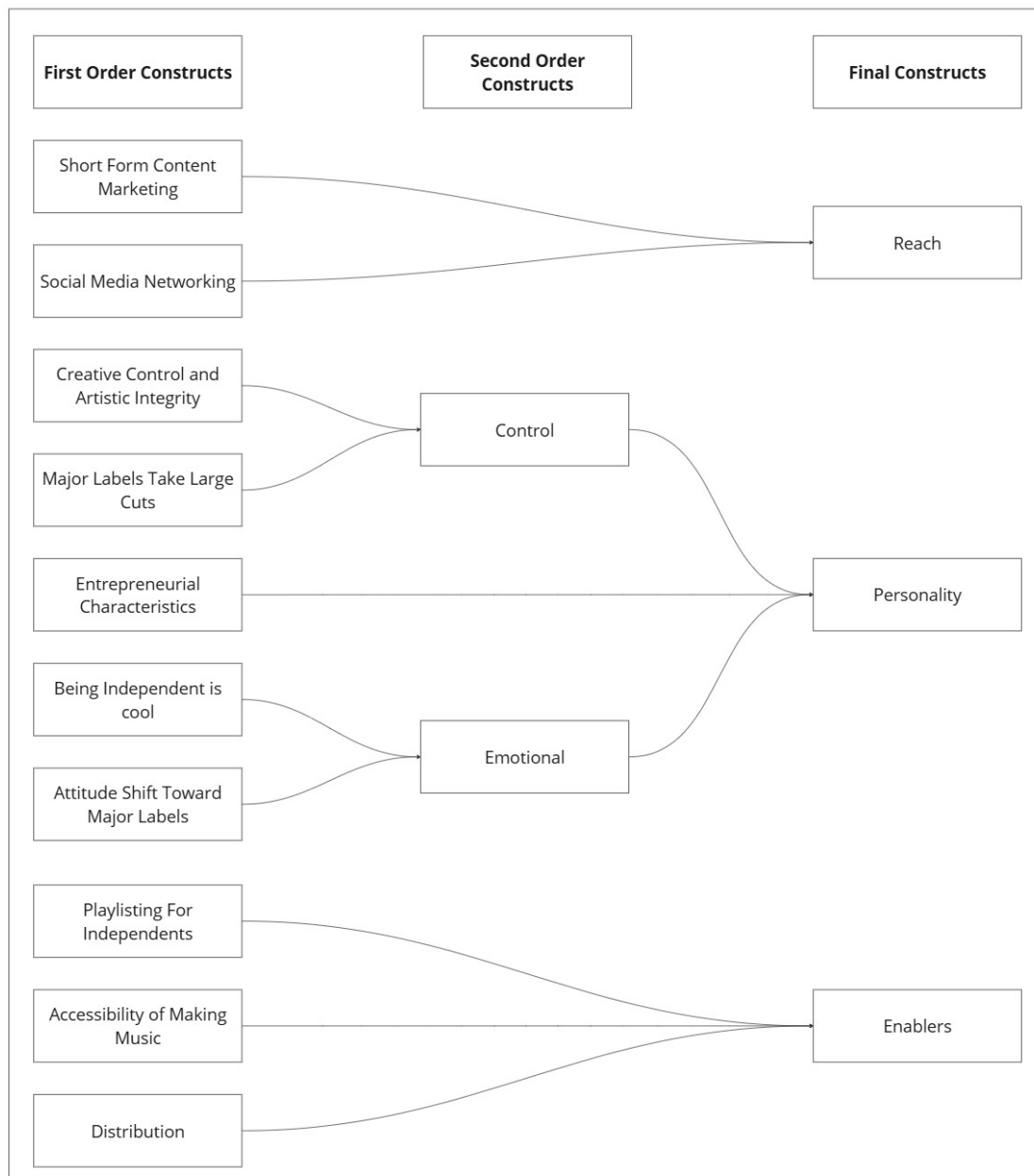
The concepts *Booking Agents* and *Playlisting for Labels* both relate to important activities for musicians that to some degree are more open for signed artists. Signed artists have it easier to get opportunities for live shows as well as will be attributed slots for popular playlists that can increase streams. These concepts are categorized into the second order construct *Gatekeeping*.

The concepts *Label Contacts*, *Focus on Music*, *Exclusive Events* and *Artist Development* represent perks that artists will gain access to if they are signed. These perks are made available by the significant contact network that labels have and are therefore categorized into the second order construct *Network*.

The second order constructs *Gatekeeping* and *Network* both relate to significant benefits artists will unlock by signing with a label. These are therefore categorized into the final order construct *Benefits For Signing*.

5.2. Drivers For Staying Independent Model

This model summarizes the concepts about drivers for staying independent, outlined in the data presentation. In the model, these concepts are categorized into higher order constructs.



The concepts *Short Form Content Marketing* and *Social Media Networking* both regard different aspects of reaching people for various reasons, thus they are categorized into the final order construct *Reach*.

The concepts *Creative Control and Artistic Integrity* and *Major Labels Take Large Cuts* both regard aspects of control the artists have or give up if they choose to stay independent or sign. These two factors are therefore categorized into the second order construct *Control*.

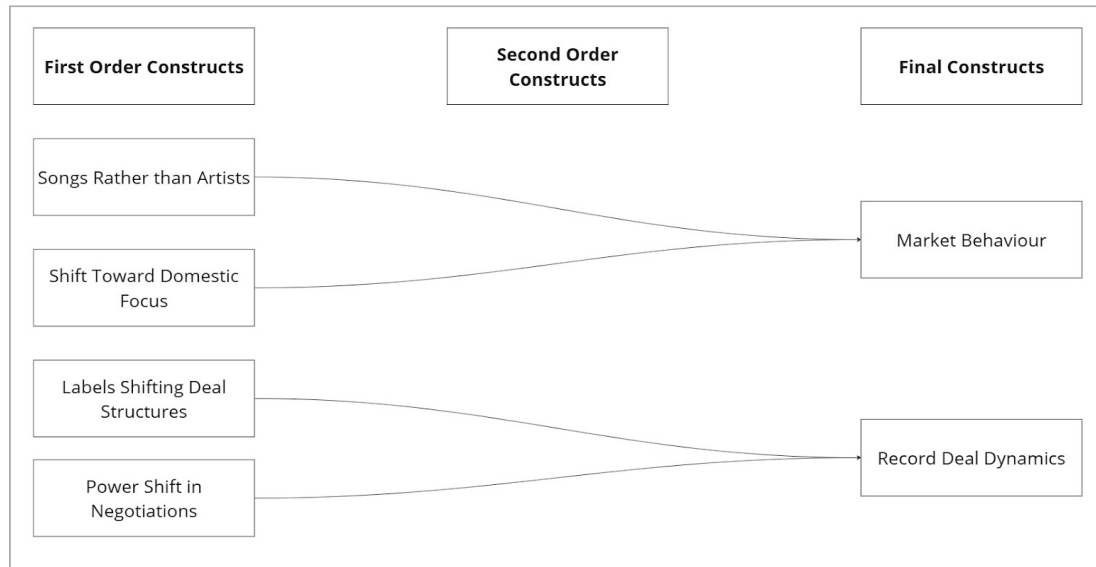
The concepts *Being Independent is cool* and *Attitude Shift Toward Major Labels* regards emotional aspects as it captures the emotional state of actors within the industry towards independent artistry and Major Labels. Therefore, these are categorized into the second order construct *Emotional*.

The concepts *Playlisting For Independents*, *Accessibility of Making Music*, and *Distribution* all contribute to enabling independent artistry in significant ways that properly weren't available previously, thus they are categorized into the final-order construct *Enablers*.

The second-order constructs *Control* and *Emotional* along with the first order construct *Entrepreneurial Characteristics* are all based on the artists' personal preferences and personality, thus they are categorized into the final-order construct *Personality*.

5.3. Market Conditions Model

This model summarizes the concepts about market conditions, outlined in the data presentation. In the model these concepts are categorized into higher order constructs.

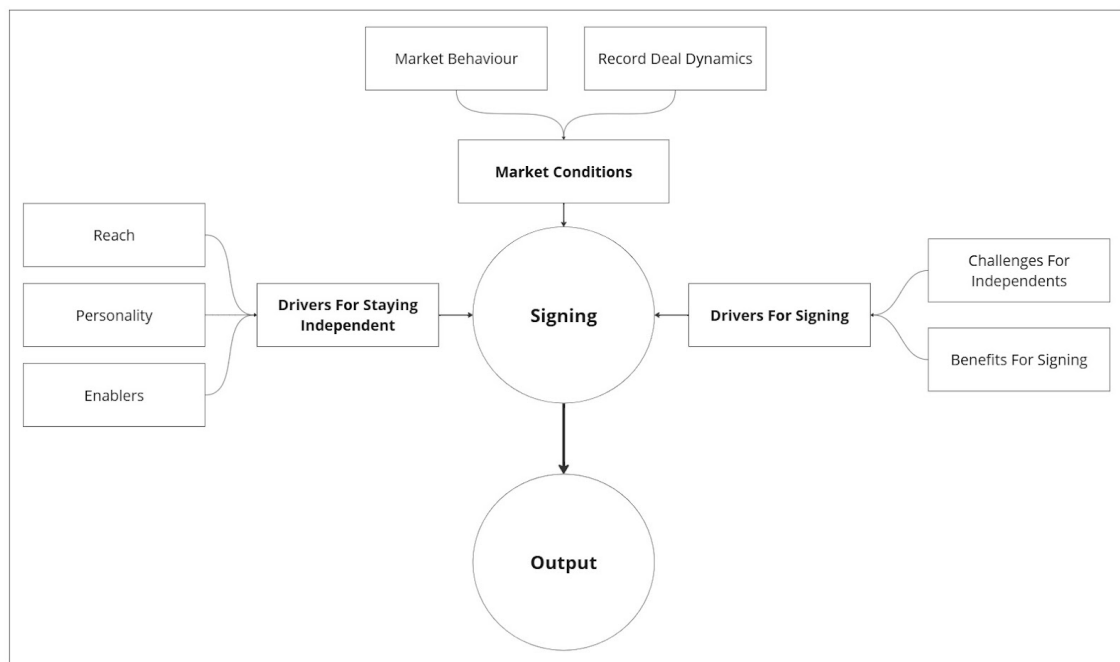


The concepts *Songs Rather than Artists* and *Shift Toward Domestic Focus* both relate to novel shifts in how the market operates. Previously mood music did not play as significant a role as today and streaming platforms, distributors and labels had more of a global focus than today. These concepts are categorized into the final order construct *Market Behaviour*.

The concepts *Labels Shifting Deal Structures* and *Power Shift in Negotiations* both relate to how the dynamics in record deals have shifted in recent times. These concepts are categorized into the final order construct *Record Deal Dynamics*.

5.4. Combined Model

The combined model utilizes the final order constructs produced in the previous models to generate a comprehensive understanding for the factors that goes into artists choosing whether they sign or decide to stay independent. The implications of this model also describes how the role of independent artists have changed in the industry and reasons for this shift. The model assumes that artists seek to maximize utility.



The model suggests three particularly important factors that affect the role of signing and by extension why artists are independent. These are, *Drivers For Signing*, *Drivers For Staying Independent* and *Market Conditions*.

The factor *Drivers For Signing* is the model by the same name and is built up by the final order constructs *Challenges For Independents* and *Benefits For Signing*, which are constructed from the model's lower order constructs.

The factor *Drivers For Staying independent* is the model by the same name and is built up by the final order constructs *Reach*, *Personality* and *Enablers*, which are constructed from the model's lower order constructs.

The factor *Market Conditions* is the model by the same name and is built up by the final order constructs *Market Behaviour* and *Record Deal Dynamics*, which are constructed from the model's lower order constructs.

Signing relates to the process of an artist signing a record deal with a record label.

Output relates to whether an artist signs a record deal or not. The *Output* is dependent on the individual weight the artist attributes to the drivers for signing in contrast to staying independent, in relation to cost of the deal.

The cost of the deal is based on the deal structure, meaning if the label takes ownership of masters, if it is a licensing deal, recoupment clauses, and how big of a revenue split they take. The cost of the deal is affected by market conditions, for example through *Record Deal Dynamics* which highlights the market trend of *Labels Shifting Deal Structures* and *Power Shift In Negotiations* to the advantage of independents.

The model suggests that the artists choose which path to go, signing or independency, based on whichever route brings them the most benefit. However, the benefits are not the same for every artist but based on the individual preferences of that artist.

Specifically, the preferences to the concepts outlined in the driver models which build up the categories *Drivers For Staying Independent* and *Drivers For Signing*. For instance, one artist may value creative control highly, while another artist may value label networks higher. The benefits of independence are often mutually exclusive to the benefits of signing, which leads to artists having differing degrees of desire to sign.

Whether the artist then follows their inclination depends on the cost of the deal. A higher cost of the deal would require a stronger desire to sign in order for the artist to actually sign.

6. Discussion

6.1. Implications

6.1.1. Role of Independent Artists

The role of independent artists has historically been an in-between role for artists to build a following and attract the attention of major labels until they are offered a deal. However, more artists are choosing not to sign, indicating that independent artistry is developing into its own viable career path. This implication is based on data gathered in the study, as well as theoretical implications from the models. The driver models suggest that there are advantages and disadvantages to both signing and staying independent. The combined model takes this one step further by suggesting that whether you decide to stay independent or sign is dependent on the personal weight each artist attributes to the often mutually exclusive benefits associated with each role. The combined model also attributes significance to the changing market conditions that in many ways has been favorable for independent artists. This further implies that the role of independent artistry is viable and ‘stands on its own two feet’. Moreover, the developed view, where independent artists are taken more seriously and accepted as a player in the industry among industry actors, indicates that the role of independent artistry has been constructed into a new mature role.

6.1.2. Major Labels Have to Adapt

Since a trend has emerged of artists choosing the independent route over signing, it indicates that the drivers for signing currently weigh less in a majority of cases than the drivers for staying independent when considering the cost of the deal. The significance of this trend can be understood when considering that major labels are starting to open up for shorter deals and less strict deals such as licensing without taking ownership of masters. Therefore, it indicates that major labels need to further implement deal terms that are more appealing to artists. Alternatively, the combined model also suggests that increasing the drivers for signing in order to outweigh the drivers for staying independent would have a similar effect. Yet another alternative would be for majors to

adapt the market conditions into their favor, though the feasibility of this approach can be questioned.

6.1.3. Cases

The combined model implies that there are circumstances where signing is beneficial for artists and circumstances where staying independent is beneficial. By utilizing the driver models both can be identified. The preference for different factors in the driver models can be combined in multitudes of ways, however, many combinations are purely theoretical and lack practical basis through unrealistic preferences. Therefore, we provide a few examples of likely scenarios based on realistic preferences.

For instance, individuals who put significant importance on creative control and keeping their artistic integrity as well as enjoy doing everything themselves and do not mind not being able to put all their effort into making music. As long as such an individual has been able to overcome capital and time restraints and is capable at social media marketing, the models suggest staying independent is likely the most suitable approach. There may also be cases where an artist would like to be able to focus only on music, but creative control and artistic integrity is such an important factor to them that it outweighs the rest. An example where it would instead be suitable to sign would be if the artist feels as if the network of labels, and the increased access to live shows and editorial playlists, outweighs loss of control and the costs.

6.2. Conclusion

The purpose of the study has been to address the priorly stated research questions. Summarized answers to those questions follow below:

RI: What is the role of independent artists in today's music industry?

Independent artists have historically been an in-between role with the purpose of building a following until you get noticed and offered a contract by, especially, major record labels. The findings in our study indicate that this is not the case anymore and independent artistry can be discussed to have been constructed into its own viable career

path. The main reasons for this are that during recent times novel benefits and opportunities have been introduced into the industry and the view on independent artists has changed. Such opportunities have for instance become possible due to digital distributors and short form social media content and increased accessibility to music creation. Thus, there exists different advantages and disadvantages for independent artistry and signing to a record label, and these drivers can often be mutually exclusive. Therefore, the produced theoretical models suggest that there are circumstances where independent artistry is the best route rather than signing to a label, making independent artistry its own viable role.

R2: What are the factors that affect whether an independent artist signs to a record label or stays independent?

The produced theoretical models suggest that there are three main factors deciding whether an independent artist should sign or stay independent. These are, the drivers for signing, the drivers for staying independent, and the market conditions in the form of the cost of the deal. If you assume that artists seek to maximize utility, then, whether the artist signs is dependent on the individual preference the artist attributes to the drivers for signing in contrast staying independent, in relation to cost of the deal. In other words, if an artist values the benefits of independent artistry more than the benefits for signing and the cost of the deal is high, then staying independent is the best choice. The cost of the deal is affected by market conditions such as market behavior and the record deal dynamics. The theoretical models suggest a range of drivers both for independency and signing, and by exploring different preference scenarios a vast amount of practical artist examples and their outcome can be observed.

6.3. Contributions

Previous literature on the subject matter both regarding the role of independent artists and drivers are mostly empirical in nature, indicating a need for widening of the understanding through theoretical means. The produced theoretical models generated in the study can be concluded to overlap to some extent with previous studies outlined in the literature review. For instance, the introduction of social media and how increased

ease of marketing enables independent artists to succeed. And conversely, how large marketing budgets plays a significant role as a driver for signing with a record label. Nevertheless, the previous literature left room for a comprehensive understanding of the modern music industry by linking factors previously discussed independently as one whole. By connecting the drivers for staying independent, the drivers for signing and market conditions into a single whole, understanding on a theoretical plane could be established. The study thus contributed to increased theoretical understanding of the roles in the music industry and the interactions between them, as well as indicate areas of where more development is likely. Additionally, the study contributed with an applicable model that can explore many different artist preference scenarios and their outcome. Lastly, the study contributed with a widened understanding of the drivers for independence and signing, especially when considering the addition of how market conditions and cost of the deal affect the weight of these drivers.

6.4. Limitations and Future Research

The study highlights the current state of the industry and partially hints at changes that are starting to show and might show. However, since the future outlook of the industry is not the main focus of the study such implications are not investigated extensively. This leaves room for future studies. Perspectives that could be interesting to analyze in this sense are for instance, how major record labels will continue to adapt and the end role of such adaptation, investigating future market conditions and their effect, investigating if drivers for signing could be more accessible for independent artists in the future or if current drivers for staying independent will get restricted. Gatekeeping is another interesting factor to investigate from a future outlook perspective in the sense of whether gatekeeping will diminish or increase and what effect this will have on the industry.

The inductive approach, specific case usage and relatively small sample size makes it challenging to generalize the findings of the study across industries. The phenomena of the rise of independency and DIY is likely not confined to the music industry but taking place across creative industries to greater or lesser degrees. Therefore, it would be valuable to investigate the phenomena in other creative industries and find cross-

industry patterns. One such industry would be literature where it indicates that self-publishing independent authors are on the rise in a similar fashion. According to a report by the United States official ISBN agent, the number of self-publishing ISBNs issued in the US has been on a steady growth pattern 2013-2018. During this time period self-publishing ISBNs have increased from around 460 thousand to over 1.6 million (R.R. Bowker, 2019). It is plausible that similar factors highlighted in this study such as increased accessibility, increased ease of marketing through social media, and increased ease of distribution would support self-publishing authors.

Another limitation relates to coding in that the depth of specific aspects can be diminished and less easily identifiable aspects may go unnoticed since interviewees may not think about it in the moment.

An additional limitation regards the geographical scope of the study in which interviewees were either based in Scandinavia or USA. It is plausible that other countries would culturally affect the responses, more categories may be discovered through a more culturally diverse sample and deviations from established categories could be identified. This creates challenges in generalizing the findings of the study to other countries than those studied.

Lastly, the record labels interviewed were independent labels. It would be interesting to investigate the perspective of major record labels on the research area and it is plausible that such information could result in interesting findings.

7. Appendix

7.1. Interview Guide

Topic	Main Questions
Introduction	• Introduce yourself, how long have you been in the industry, tell us about your label/artist process/work etc. • Would you say that more artists are independent today than say 5 years ago?
Independent artists	• What do you think the main factors are that artists choose to be independent vs signed if you think of artists of the same size? • Is there anything that you can think of that hinders more artists from going independent? • From your experience, what characteristics do independent artists share, what values do they emphasize? - What differences do you see in this compared to signed artists?
Social media	• What role do you think social media plays in artists being independent today? • Due to the emergence of social media short-form content, and artists being able to build their own fanbases, and release their own music, how do you feel that record labels have / will have to adapt?

Distribution	• What role do you think distributors play in artists being independent today?
Networking	• How large of a role would you say social media has for you when it comes to networking? • Are there any other tools or ways you use other than social media to network?
Record labels	• Do you think the role of a record label has and/or will change in the future? • What do you think that artists get out of working with record labels that they otherwise would not?
Other	• Would you say there is a lot of gatekeeping going on in the industry today? - If so, in what aspects / areas do you see that in? • How would you say the leverage of independent artists looks like today when conducting deals? - Do you see changes in that compared to before? • Are there any other topics you think are relevant when discussing independents?

(Note that not all questions were asked every interviewee and that the formulation of the questions was adapted for the different actors.)

7.2. Generative AI-Disclosure

- **What AI tools have been used and how.**

ChatGPT, used for translating quotes from Swedish to English.

- **In what ways have these tools contributed to increasing the quality of the thesis?**

It contributed to quotes being as accurate as possible to their original nature when translated to another language.

- **What potential risks were found using AI and what measures were taken to reduce these risks?**

A relevant risk of AI is that it can make mistakes by adding unrelated information, thus we manually checked anything translated by AI to ensure that nothing unrelated was added and that everything was accurately translated.

- **What are the insights gained from using AI tools in the thesis writing process?**

AI translates faster and generally more accurately than humans. This is especially true when it comes to phrases without a direct translation in the other language, in which you have to capture the essence of the phrase in other words. ChatGPT can often find similar sayings in the other language with as close to the core meaning as possible.

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