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MASTER'S THESIS

THE MUSIC INDUSTRY DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC:

THE EFFECTS ON MUSIC INDUSTRY
PROFESSIONALS' WORK AND THEIR
USE OF THE DIGITAL SPHERE

**MSc. SocSc. Management of
Creative Business Processes**

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Abstract

As the COVID-19 pandemic rages worldwide, the world economy and most industries are suffering the consequences of the restrictions implemented by governments. These restrictions have made it nearly impossible for artists to perform live. Thus, the cultural industries and especially the music industry have had to endure significant losses during this period of time. Throughout the year, a multitude of reports from government facilities and trade unions have been published. While they are predominantly quantitative studies focusing on the economic effects and providing valuable insights on the macro-scale of the music industry, they fail to include the human element and understand how music industry professionals have experienced this period. Therefore, this qualitative research contributes to the discussion by answering how the pandemic has affected music industry professionals' work processes and how they have expanded their use of the digital sphere to generate revenues. To carry out this research, six interviews have been conducted with European professionals based in Finland, Switzerland, and the UK. To gain a broad overview, all the interviewees follow different careers connected to the music industry.

The research finds that all surveyed music professionals have felt an impact on their work ever since the pandemic started. Companies that had to rely on government support during this time were focusing their time on exchanging with politicians. Moreover, professionals whose work is directly connected to the live sector have experienced an increase in workload at the beginning of the pandemic because concerts, festivals, and tours had to be cancelled or postponed. Reorganizing planned events takes time and energy; however, it creates no additional revenue. Companies not operating in the live sector have been able to further work on contracts that were agreed upon before the pandemic. Additionally, strategically changing the company's client base even led to economic growth throughout the year. Finally, the digital sphere has not been utilized to the extent that we had predicted. Although technology has experienced a significant push forward, it should be noted that legislation around live streaming and its taxation takes longer to be implemented. This is a hindrance, especially when revenues should be made in the digital sphere during this time of social distancing.

Further research should be conducted during and after the pandemic. It is necessary to give a holistic view of the situation the music industry is undergoing. Only when the effects of the pandemic can be understood fully, precautions for future crises can be worked out, and a conversation about the future of the industry can be held.

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1. Introduction

"At the moment, I am not that happy, as you might guess. But I still think of it [music] as my passion. I have worked for over seven years to get to this point where I am right now. So, there is no way of me wanting to just throw that away. Although, there's been times when there hasn't been any light at the end of the tunnel." (Tähtinen, 20th of March, Appendix VI)

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected the world economy significantly, but among the most affected industries is music. The social distancing restrictions set by governments across the world have made it nearly impossible to perform live music, which has led to significant losses of revenue for the whole industry. The initial quote represents the struggles that music professionals and artists have been going through ever since the live music industry had to be shut down.

In the European Union (EU), the music industry has sustained significant damages, and the revenues are expected to have declined by 76% in 2020, compared to the year before (Ernst & Young (EY), 2021). The cancellation of live shows has had widespread effects. Not only are the artists suffering, but the whole live industry, including but not limited to venues, managers, and booking agents. With the industry employing 1.2 million people in Europe in 2019, the restrictions stemming from COVID-19 will likely be followed by wide-ranging and long-lasting effects in the music industry (EY, 2021). As the pandemic started only a year ago and is still ongoing, there is no extensive academic research that would cover the effects of the whole pandemic on the music industry. Naturally, as the pandemic will most likely stay with us for a longer period of time, its impact on the industry cannot entirely be determined yet. However, much quantitative research about the pandemic's effects in 2020 has been carried out by government agencies, consultancies, and trade unions in Europe. The European Parliament's Committee of Culture and Education (CULT) published a study titled "Cultural and creative sectors in post-COVID-19 Europe" (2020), which covers the effects of the pandemic in considerable detail. EY (2021) published a similar report, "Rebuilding Europe", on the impacts of the pandemic. Yet another notable report is the "Independent Artists – Pathfinding through the pandemic" (Mulligan & Jopling, 2021), published by MIDiA Research. These studies manage to portray the economic effects of the pandemic on the industry.

This research aims to supplement the previously mentioned quantitative studies with a qualitative approach. The goal is to get insights into how music industry professionals in Europe have experienced this difficult period and how they perceive the effects COVID-19 has had on their work. We

follow a qualitative approach to provide an in-depth look into the interviewee's insights about working in the music industry mid-pandemic. Six professionals were interviewed for this study. They were chosen to represent a wide spectrum within the industry – many of the interviewees live in different countries and work in various sectors of the industry. By highlighting the experiences of these individuals and supplementing them with reports of the state of the industry, we aim to get a comprehensive view of the economic effects of the pandemic and its effects on the music professionals' working lives. The following chapter will give some background information about the music industry's current state and how professionals have reacted to change. Later on, the more specific research problem and questions will also be presented.

1.1 Background

In order to understand the extent of this problem, one needs to understand the unique characteristics of the music industry.

First, as the term *music industry* suggests a somewhat homogenous field, it is crucial to define the term for the use of this study more precisely. According to Williamson and Cloonan (2007), the term music industry can lead to misinterpretation and confusion as "*it suggests simplicity where there is complexity and homogeneity where there is diversity*" (p. 305). In most academic literature, the term is used as a synonym for the recording industry, while other music-related sectors are excluded. This does little to help people to understand the interrelationships between the various contemporary actors in the field. With the ever-growing importance of the live music industry, only focusing on the recording aspect would not paint a holistic picture of the field. In fact, the music industry consists of numerous fields. (Williamson & Cloonan, 2007) In the broadest definition of the music industry, sectors such as music instrument building, music journalism, or the educational sector around music can be included (Passman, 2019).

In this thesis, when we are talking about the music industry, we include the recording and live sectors within the term. Throughout the study, it will be pointed out if numbers or statements should only be referred to either of these sectors. It should be further noted that this qualitative research focuses on the popular music industry. All interviewees are working within popular music, leaving other sectors, such as orchestral or classical music, unexplored. However, the numbers presented throughout this study also include the different genres as global and European reports do not exclude them.

Like other creative and cultural industries, the music industry has many characteristics that make it vulnerable to crises. It is characterized by high uncertainty of economic success (Caves, 2000), project-based work (Grodach & Seman, 2013), and a large number of freelancers and small enterprises (Grodach & Seman, 2013; EY, 2021). In addition to these factors, many governments in Europe do not have comparable social welfare programs for freelancers as they do for wage earners (UNESCO, 2020). This means that freelancers are more likely to be at risk of insolvency during a time of crisis. Even though the music industry has been one of the most affected sectors in the European economy by COVID-19, it has received little support. Governments have announced support packages directly aimed at the creative and cultural industries during the past year. Still, as it can be seen from the results of this study, satisfaction with these support packages within the industry is limited.

This pandemic is far from being the first challenge the European music industry has faced over the years. Thus, it is beneficial to study how the industry overcame the previous challenges. Prime and comparable examples are the Spanish Flu, the last epidemic to shake up the early 1900s. Digitalization that changed the income structure of the whole industry. And finally, the financial crisis in 2008 crashing the economy have all affected the European music industry in various ways. These crises could provide insight into how the industry can handle and ultimately overcome the current crisis.

The music industry is a significant player in the European economy. In the EU in 2019, it employed as many as 1.2 million people, and its revenues amounted to €31 billion. The industry has been growing steadily over the past years, with its revenues increasing by 26% from 2013 to 2019.

When COVID-19 started to spread in Europe in the spring of 2020, many governments responded to the threat by limiting in-person contacts of their citizens in various ways to slow down the spread of the disease so that the healthcare system's capacity would not be surpassed. One of the first measures taken by multiple governments was to ban large gatherings, such as concerts. This has also been one of the measures that have been maintained throughout the pandemic.

The cancellation of live shows has had widespread effects on the industry. Live shows represent a large share of musicians' income. Top artists can receive as much as 75% of their income from live shows (Donoghue, 2020), while for independent artists, the figure is closer to 20% (Mulligan & Jopling, 2020). In addition to this, artists market new releases by playing shows. This means that the inability to promote their work has led to many artists postponing their latest releases. Not only are musicians suffering monetary losses due to this situation, but the whole live sector struggles. The live industry employs many more people than just artists – including artist managers, venues, festivals, booking agents, and ticket vendors all get their livelihood from the live industry (Music Finland,

2020a). Due to the pandemic, music industry turnover is expected to decrease by 76% in Europe in 2020.

Despite the challenges presented, the pandemic has also had some positive impacts. Many artists report that they have had more time to compose new music, learn business skills, and focus on projects they otherwise would not have had the time to do (Mulligan & Jopling, 2020). During this time of hardship, the live industry has ideated new ways to play to and connect with artists' audiences. Perhaps the most prevalent new product that surfaced during the pandemic was streaming live shows on the internet. Live streaming has received mixed responses from people within the industry, but its benefits have not gone unnoticed. Many new players have emerged in the sector, and established entities, like Spotify, have embraced live streaming in 2020 (Nicolau, 2020).

1.2 Research overview

With the pandemic being around for little over a year, academic articles published on the topic are scarce. There are many reports published by governmental facilities and trade unions, each of which goes over the effects of the pandemic. These are often quantitative studies and focus on the economic effects of the pandemic. They provide valuable insights on the macro-scale and give an overall understanding of the effects of the pandemic on the industry's economy. However, they fail to include the human element and understand how music industry professionals have experienced the period. This study aims to fill this gap by allowing music industry professionals to share their thoughts in detail.

This study wants to shed light on the hardships the music industry professionals have faced during this time. One of the characteristics of the industry is that a large share of workers are either freelancers or working in small enterprises (Grodach & Seman, 2013). Work is often project-based (Grodach & Seman, 2013), and the monetary success of a project is often uncertain – as is typical for the cultural and creative industries (Caves, 2000). This, combined with poor social welfare schemes aimed at freelancers and entrepreneurs in many European countries and the restrictions virtually halting all live shows for a year, means that the year 2020 was exceptionally difficult for many. We believe it is essential to record and research the experiences of the music industry professionals. At the same time, the pandemic is still ongoing, and not just look back at these times after everything is over. By interviewing music industry professionals now, an accurate representation of their feelings during the pandemic can be gained. Based on what has been described above, the following research questions are presented:

RQ1: How has the pandemic affected music industry professionals' work processes?

RQ2: How have music industry professionals expanded their use of the digital sphere to generate revenues during the COVID-19 pandemic?

To answer the stated questions, first, the existing literature is studied to get a holistic understanding of the situation. The literature review will introduce the music industry and explain its unique characteristics. To understand how the pandemic will affect the industry and the recovery process, previous crises to hit the music industry are reviewed. The economic effects of the pandemic will also be examined in detail. Afterwards, the methods part will go over how this study was designed and executed in detail, as well as the reasoning behind the our decisions. Next, the findings of the research are presented theme by theme. These themes are elaborated on within the methods section. Lastly, the study results in relation to our research questions are discussed, as well as the limitations of this study and recommendations for how this research could be expanded upon in the future.

2. Literature Review

2.1 The cultural industries

Over the years, the creative industries have received limited attention from academic research. Therefore, this chapter should define the creative industries and how the music industry is situated among them.

Creating something new out of elements that already exist is defined as creativity (Jones, Lorenzen & Sapsed, 2015). Multiple studies have tried to explain which industries should therefore be part of the so-called creative industries. Jones et al. (2010) have created a concept whereby they split creative activities into either creative processes or innovative products. Creative processes are said to have a high potential of generating something new through non-standardized and flexible business processes that enhance creative thinking, intrinsic motivation, and freedom in the employee. On the other hand, creative products are measured by their ratio between symbolic content and their practical use. Some industries and companies score high in either activity but not necessarily in both. For example, the biotech industry is a high innovation force, although the sector only achieves high on the process side. On the other hand, events and festivals rank high on the product side even though their processes have become highly standardized. Mainstream music, mainstream fashion, or advertising have a reasonably high score on both fronts. Their score is only exceeded by high creativity thrivers like the fine arts or haute couture. Those industries that score high on both have been referred to by economists as the creative industries. (Jones et al., 2010) Furthermore, Caves (2000) and Hesmondhalgh (2013) mention the importance of symbolic creativity in this context, meaning the product needs to create value and influence senses and emotions. If an industry meets these criteria, it is also considered to be a part of cultural industries. Therefore, the group of industries that score high on creative processes and creative products is part of both the creative and cultural industries.

Caves (2000) proposes that the cultural industries differ in their economic behaviour from other industries in a substantial and systematic manner: First, the value innovative products will provide for consumers is uncertain. In other words, whether the product will draw attention and revenue cannot in most cases be determined before the release of the product. This is problematic, especially for cultural pieces with high production costs, such as a movie or a professionally produced music album. This uncertainty during the whole process of creation is called the *nobody knows* property. The second difference is the economic assumption that typically, workers are hired without them caring about the job or the features of the good that they produce.

In contrast to that, creatives are emotionally involved with everything they produce. Furthermore, they primarily do not care about the success they will receive by creating the good but enjoy the process of creation. This creative effort is called the *art for art's sake* property. Another concept is the *infinite variety* property: Caves (2000) explains two ways of differentiation regarding products. Goods are vertically differentiated when one product is objectively better than the other, meaning that nobody will buy the one of lesser quality if both products are sold at the same price. Goods are horizontally differentiated when there is no clear preference, even if the products are sold at the same price. Some people may prefer one, some the other. Both aspects can be found in creative goods: "*Most creative products can differ from one another in many ways: paintings, for example, may vary in size, color, type of imagery, skill of draftsmanship. The more dimensions, the more likely it is that differentiation is horizontal: everyone might agree that the leading actor's performance was better in film B than in A, but some people like A better for other reasons.*" (Caves, 2000, S. 6) Therefore, the number of movies or paintings that could be produced is endless, and there will still be people that prefer one over the other. This is the essence of the infinite variety property. Finally, especially the performing arts but also other creative activities involve complex teams. Whereby a big group of people needs to be available at the same time. This coordination problem means that creative input requires good quality and highly depends on availability. This last property is called *motley crew*. (Caves, 2000)

With this knowledge about the cultural industries' differences in their economic behaviour compared to other industries, Jones et al. (2015) established four drivers that lead to change in creative and cultural industries: demand, technology, public policy, and globalization. Demand drives change in two different ways. On the one hand, exogenous demand occurs through consumer's purchasing power. This expectation of an audience leads to constraints such as genres in music that gain a broader appeal. Oppositely, when artists seek a new form of expression, endogenous demand occurs. When these original ways of expression are translated into the mainstream, endogenous demand acts as a basis for long-term changes in this industry. Technological change happens either by modifying the material base of a product or changing production and consumption processes. The music industry is a good example when the CD, an analog hardcopy, was substituted by the mp3, a digital softcopy. Public policy drives change through intellectual property law, such as copyrights. They shift over time, and phenomena such as digitization are putting pressure on lawmakers to sincerely enforce these laws even in the digital sphere as creative products have been missing out on income connected to them. Finally, globalization has been defined as a driver of change through the liberalization of trade

and investment that amplified the movement of money, people, products, technology, and ideas throughout regions, countries, and continents. A country's culture can now be exported to other parts of the world and might generate value and revenue there as, for example, Indian cuisine or Bollywood. (Jones et al., 2015)

A further definition of cultural economies is that the production of outputs is meant to "*entertain, instruct or embellish, and to reinforce identity*" (Scott, 2007, p. 1474). The cultural industries are characterized by highly skilled and specialized companies and individuals who respond rapidly to changes in consumer demand. Because of this, much of the work in the cultural industries is short-term and project-based. Collaboration with other people in the industry is also vital, resulting in workers moving into certain regions or cities, where other artists live. Thus, cultural industries are often doing well in cultural hubs.

The previously mentioned factors of the creative and cultural industries are making them difficult to manage. Therefore, it is essential to see how the revenue flows of the music industry are built and how the music industry was affected by the current COVID-19 pandemic and previous crisis.

2.2 The economics of the music industry pre COVID-19

The cultural and creative industry has grown to be a significant sector in the European economy. Before the pandemic, it added a total value of €253 billion to the EU, which equates to 1.7% of the real added value of the economy. The share of the cultural and creative industry was even more significant in terms of turnover. The sector's turnover was €643 billion, representing 4.4% of the EU's economic turnover. In 2019, the music industry employed 1.2 million people, and the whole industry's turnover was €31 billion. The growth of the sector in the past few years is tied to the rise of technological advancements. For example, as of 2018, as many as 81% of European internet users streamed music, videos, or games online. (EY, 2021)

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the music industry was reminiscent of a well-oiled machine. Starting with musicians, the industry has built a complex network around this creative product with many revenue streams that enhance the artists and their teams and even impact people who are only passively involved with the industry. Therefore, this chapter will focus on the biggest revenue generators of the industry and introduce the most important players.

The music industry has been battling digitization for over 20 years, and it looked like the industry finally recovered. It could finally take a breath: Looking at the industry's recording side, the revenue from streaming finally picked up and triggered growth in an industry that was struggling with sinking

revenue for over a decade. Physical recorded music has been shrinking worldwide from around €19.3 billion in 2001 to €3.6 billion in 2019. Meanwhile, the digital and streaming revenues have been growing since 2004 from €0.33 billion to €10.5 billion in 2019. This led to the worldwide recording industry being worth €16.7 billion in 2019, including the physical and digital revenues, synchronization, and performance rights, which is not far from 2001's peak of €19.3 billion. Synchronization, which is the revenue from music usage in film, TV, games, and advertising, has been a regular part of the industry since 2010 with €0.25 billion and a slight growth until 2019 to €0.41 billion. Meanwhile, the performance rights, the money that public venues or broadcasters pay to use music, has been growing steadily since 2001 from €0.49 billion to €2 billion in 2019. (IFPI, 2021)

With the recorded music industry struggling at the beginning of the century, musicians have been forced to find a revenue source to cover the initial losses. Musicians found this new revenue stream in the live performing. In the USA alone, the revenues from the live sector have been growing from 1.7 Billion in 2000 to 8 Billion US-Dollar in the year 2017. This growth resulted from more people attending concerts and higher ticket prices (Emily, 2018). Indeed, ticket prices have increased in the seven years leading up to 2019 from 78.33 to 94.31 US-Dollar (Statista, 2019). This growth is also visualized in Pollstar's data about the highest North American gross selling tours until 2017: Only four of the top 50 tours in the 1990s and 31 have even taken place in the 2010s (Pollstar, 2018).

Furthermore, touring at this scale can lead to musicians relying heavily on these revenues. For example, Guns N' Roses make around 96% of their income from concerts. But occurrences like this are not always defined as the rule: Drake, for example, the most-streamed artist of the 2010s, only makes around 37% of his revenues with touring (Sanchez, 2017). Even if the income from the live sector can be assessed very individually and varies massively across different groups of artists, concerts are crucial for the development of the brand for musicians and lead to additional income from merchandise and performance rights (EY, 2021).

Ideally, these revenues would directly go to the artists. But handling business contacts and overseeing one's career is so time-consuming that it would not leave enough room to create music if done by the artist. Hence, an artist typically builds a team around their career, concluding payments to the different players involved. These core players around an artist's career will be defined in the following paragraph. It is important to note that every artist individually chooses who will be part of their career. While these players need to be assessed separately for every artist, the industry standard revolves around the following:

The person that is coming up with the lyrics and the melody is the songwriter. This person might be recording the song themselves or hand the composition over to other artists considered to be performers (Citigroup, 2018). Assuming that the songwriter does not perform their own music, the artist might want to reach out to so-called publishing companies whose job is to get the song licensed to performers or TV, film, and commercial producers who might want to use the music. These publishing deals traditionally suggest a 50/50 split between the firm and the writer, although this split is becoming less over time (Passman, 2019). Furthermore, most performing artists and bands will sign with a record label at some point in their careers. The label finances the recording of the songs and will market and distribute the records. Depending on the contract, the label could take up to 85% of all the record's revenues. Other important players are the royalty payment collectors. They keep track of where a song or its recording is used and collect the associated revenues to the copyright owners (which could be the composer or the record label) while keeping around 10%. These five roles show the division between the publishing and the recording side of the music business. The songwriters and the publishing are part of the first group, performers and labels being part of the latter and the royalty payment collectors being part of the first group of both. (Citigroup, 2018)

Two other roles that should be considered are the personal manager and the agent of artists. The personal manager can be referred to as the chief operating officer of an artist's career. Part of a manager's job is, among others, the help with significant business decisions, including the decision whether to do a record deal and with what company to sign with, assembling an artist's professional team by selecting lawyers or agents to work with the artist and generally acting as a buffer between the artist and the music industry. For this, the manager gets around 15% to 20% of an artist's overall gross earnings. This fee can typically be lower for established artists with a stronger negotiation position. The second role, an artist's agent, is involved in booking live, personal appearances. These are primarily concerts but can also include commercials, tour sponsorship, or television specials. Agents are not participating in songwriting or the recording side of the music industry and thus, do not get any share of these revenues. Agents charge up to 10% of the fees you get from your live, personal appearances. (Passman, 2019)

With around 1.2 million people employed in the music industry in Europe and the industry being sensitive to social, technological, or economic change, it comes as no surprise that the industry has been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. But also, previous crises have left a mark, as will be discussed in the coming chapters.

2.3 Previous crises to hit the music industry

To understand how the music industry can cope with the current pandemic, some earlier crises should be looked at. Although no two crises are the same, examining past downturns in the market can help assess the current situation.

The Spanish Flu

The Spanish Flu spread around the globe from 1918 to 1919. It was one of the deadliest pandemics in recorded history, leaving around 50 million people worldwide dead (Robin, 2020). Although the virus itself caused a disease more fatal than COVID-19, its effects on the music industry cannot be reflected on the COVID-19 pandemic very well: A century ago, the world was a very different place. The virus spread all over the world during the end of the first World War. It most likely spread so quickly, as troops from various countries lived together in poor conditions and returned home after contracting the virus (Barro, Ursúa & Weng, 2020; Wheelock, 2020). Unlike the name suggests, the virus did not originate from Spain. The term was coined as the Spanish news were the first to announce deaths related to the virus. There were probably death cases in other countries before Spain, but their press was heavily censored during and after the war. Being a neutral country, Spain had a relatively free press after the war, and the flu was covered in local news more than in other countries (Barro, Ursúa & Weng, 2020; BBC News, 2020).

It was understood that the Spanish Flu spread through the air. Good ventilation and distancing from other people were effective in limiting the spread of the virus (Misláng, 2020). It was also believed that breathing fresh air regularly would help to fight off the virus. Therefore, people were instructed to take walks outside (BBC News, 2020). Like during the COVID-19 crisis, people were asked to wear masks (BBC News, 2020).

Despite the severity of the situation, its effects on the music industry and the overall economy were relatively small. The virus has been estimated to have reduced the national GDP on average by 6% (Barro, Ursúa & Weng, 2020). Although there were typically no country-wide restrictions, stores and factories were closed at times (BBC News, 2020). When the disease was sweeping across the US, concert halls were only closed for a couple of weeks. In addition to that, concerts were delayed, and some artists refused to perform. In the UK, the only safety measure taken was that music events were to only last for a maximum of three hours, with a 30-minute intermission with fresh air in between (Misláng, 2020). But by 1919, the industry had climbed back on its feet. Concert halls were full of

people again (Robin, 2020; Mislant, 2020). After many years of enduring poor living conditions and constant sorrow, people were eager to go out despite the deadly virus.

In conclusion, although the virus itself was similar to the current COVID-19 virus, the music industry has changed drastically. In order to gain an understanding of how the music industry could overcome the current pandemic, some more recent crises should be looked at.

Digitalization

Like many other industries, digitalization affected the music industry greatly. Because music became so easily accessible on the internet, people started to think that digital downloads were not worth paying (Goldman, 2010). At that time, the music industry was relying on CD sales as their primary revenue source. And for a good reason; the popularity of the medium was so high, that it helped the industry revenue to rise to an all-time high in the 1990s and early 2000s. Although streaming revenues have steadily increased ever since, they still do not match the sales revenues of the CD heydays (Daniel, 2019). As traditional jobs related to producing and distributing CDs vanished, revenue streams also changed. All of this resulted in the music industry going through a sort of recession already in the 2000s. (Baym, 2010).

Along with the popularity of the Internet increasing, file sharing and pirating became more commonplace. As CD sales were crucial for the industry, record labels did not take pirating and file sharing lightly. It threatened their most important revenue source, and they did not want to give that up. Instead of embracing change and utilizing the new digital platforms to create new income sources, many traditional music organizations focused their efforts on combating piracy. The Recording Industry Association of America started developing anti-pirating campaigns for schools (Gillespie, 2009). Lobbyists also worked on getting the Internet service providers to ban people from accessing the Internet if they had been pirating music files (Baym, 2010). In retrospect, this was always going to be a futile fight, and we now know that digital took over as the number one music listening medium. Instead of trying to fight the inevitable, the industry should have embraced the new technologies. The Internet allowed artists and audiences to communicate, create relationships, enabled new forms of engagement, and brought them closer together. All the while, the traditional big players were distancing themselves from all this (Baym, 2010). Slowly, music labels reduced their reliance on record sales and changed their business models to gain revenue from music rights instead of record sales (Negus, 2018).

The Great Recession

In 2008, the world economy crashed. The economic crisis originated from the US but quickly spread throughout the world. The Great Recession was the most severe economic downturn to hit many countries since the 1930's Great Depression (Duignan, 2019).

In their study, Gordach & Seman (2013) researched how artists' employment rates were affected by the economic recession of 2008. One thing to note here is that they included all kinds of artists in their study. Not just musicians but also people working in performing arts, film, advertising, and PR were included. Despite this, it gives a good indication of how musicians' employment developed during that time. Musicians and other artists have many commonalities that make them comparable: they are often self-employed or work in small enterprises and work in the cultural industries. The work is often short-term or project based. Their study shows that US-based artists' employment rate did not drop a lot during the economic recession of 2008. In fact, employment grew by 0.37% between 2006 and 2009 nationwide. Smaller cities and areas where the cultural industries were not thriving before the recession were hit the hardest, while the employment rate in big cities and cultural hubs grew. In terms of the employment rate, the cultural economy in the US performed slightly better during the recession than the national economy.

The US was hit relatively hard by the recession because, at that time, the US Dollar was weak. In many other areas of the world, the industry kept growing during the recession (Thakrar, 2020). Despite the less-than-ideal economic situation, the industry revenues grew in the UK by 4.7% (Keegan, 2010), and the global industry revenues returned to growth in 2011 (Thakrar, 2020).

The digitalization of the industry was ongoing during the time of the Great Recession. Music sales were down, and live music had become more important than ever. In the UK, 2009 was the first year when live music revenues surpassed music record sales in the industry (Keegan, 2010).

Although the recession's effect on the industry has not been researched extensively, it seems it left the sector relatively unscathed.

Takeaways

These three crises could shed some light on how the COVID-19 pandemic will affect the music industry. In the best-case scenario, the industry could get back on its feet relatively quickly after the pandemic passes: After the Spanish Flu, audiences started going to concerts shortly after it was allowed again. The Great Recession did not affect the industry revenues much. From this, it could be

deduced that the music industry is an integral part of society. People are willing to purchase products and services from the industry, even if there are health or economic concerns.

It seems that the greatest challenge the industry has faced in recent years has been digitalization. It changed the revenue streams forever, and the traditional cash cows, record sales, became a lot less valuable. As digital audio formats gained popularity, the industry focused its efforts on slowing down this development. This is a very typical case: Disruptive technologies often face resistance from established players in the industry, who already have set processes and structures to operate in that space (Lieberman and Montgomery, 1988; Birnbaum, Christensen & Raynor, 2013). However, these disruptive technologies are often considered engines of growth and evolution for the industry (Schumpeter, 1928). Perhaps this can be the case during COVID-19, too. As new business models and products are likely to emerge from this situation, such as live streaming, they could face resistance from the industry before being entirely accepted.

2.4 COVID-19

The Effects of the Pandemic on the music industry

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected the music industry significantly. In the spring of 2020, the virus quickly spread all over the world. It was deemed to be more deadly than a typical flu virus (WHO, 2020), and governments worldwide aimed to limit the spread of the disease. Governments responded to the threat and set out to restrict in-person contacts of their citizens to flatten the curve. It was evident that the virus would go through at least some portion of the human population, but the aim was to spread the infections over a longer time (Buchholz, 2020; WHO, 2021).

Cultural and creative industries were among the industries affected most by the pandemic. In the first quarter of 2020, the gross added value and hours worked in the arts and entertainment sector decreased by 6%. This caused the sector to be most affected by the early restrictions among all the industries (CULT Committee, 2021). The turnover in the EU is expected to fall from €643 billion in 2019 to €444 billion in 2020, equating to a 31% decrease in revenues from the previous year. This is estimated to be the most affected industry, tied with air transport, while the entire economy in the EU is expected to decrease by 9.4% (EY, 2021). And among the cultural and creative industries, music and performing arts will be impacted most. The music industry turnover is estimated to decrease by 76% in 2020. This is due mainly to the live sector not being able to work for most of the year, although its impact spread wide in other areas of the industry too. In addition to this, copyright revenues are

estimated to decrease by 35% due to stores, bars, and restaurants being closed in many countries in 2020 (EY, 2021).

The cultural industries differ from more traditional industries in that freelancers and SMEs represent a large share of all companies in the field (Grodach & Seman, 2013; EY, 2021). When it comes to audiovisual and music production, 37% of the players in the area are freelancers or small enterprises (EY, 2021). This creates several issues to the stability of the sector. Freelancers and other non-standard workers are especially vulnerable during an economic downturn. Work is often project-based, and the success of projects can be very uncertain. Many non-standard workers in the industry have low wages. (CULT Committee, 2021). In addition, many countries do not have extensive economic support programs for freelancers, making the pandemic even more difficult for the music sector (UNESCO, 2020; UK Music, 2020, Pasikowska-Schnass, 2020). Furthermore, the live music industry was one of the first ones to be shut down in the early stages of the pandemic and will likely be one of the last ones to become unrestricted (EY, 2021).

Multiple restrictions were put in place all over the world: Stores, restaurants, and music venues were closed, curfews were put in place, and all in-person contacts should be avoided. This naturally meant that all kinds of events were not to be held.

Revenue losses

Live concerts were among the first ones to get banned in many countries (EY, 2021). This caused the cancellation of an estimated 284,000 music events and 664,000 artist performances in Europe (Live DMA, 2020) and was a devastating blow to artists. Playing live has been one of the largest sources of revenue for some, especially popular musicians. Many top artists make more than 75% of their income from touring. Artists lost that whole income stream overnight, as the restrictions made it impossible to perform live (Donoughue, 2020). The live sector's struggles have far-reaching effects. Not only are musicians struggling because of it, but technicians, artist managers, and event organizers are hurt by proxy (Music Finland, 2020). Sales of physical products, like vinyl, CDs, and T-shirts have gone down by 35%. This is most likely caused by artists not selling their merchandise during concerts (EY, 2021). For smaller independent artists, playing live has not been a significant revenue source, and therefore the pandemic did not affect their revenues directly. According to a study by Mulligan & Jopling (2020), only 18% of independent artists' revenues were from playing live. The most important revenue source for them is music streaming instead.

During the pandemic, the cultural industries received a lot of monetary support from multiple sources. Arts organizations provided artists with guidance on how to handle the pandemic and earn money using digital platforms. They taught artists how to live stream, arrange online concerts, apply for grants, and release and market new music (Brunt & Nelligan, 2020). Responding to the situation this quickly was most likely enabled because most organizations in the cultural industries are small and flexible. People in the industry are used to being innovative and working with short-term projects (Grodach & Seman, 2013).

The music industry is a significant part of the economy in Europe (Pasikowska-Schnass, 2020). With the industry's turnover in the EU being €31 billion in 2019 and employing 1.2 million people, governments wanted to aid the sector during this difficult time (EY, 2021). Governments supported the players in the cultural industries in many ways. The most common types of financial aid given by governments during the pandemic have aimed to compensate for the lost revenues created by the pandemic. These aids aimed to support artists to work still even if most of their work had been cancelled (Unesco, 2020). In spring 2020, the government of Bulgaria launched a program that would grant support for freelancers working in the cultural industries and have earned less than 1,000 leva, which is equivalent to €500, in 2019. This program lasted for three months and supported around 1,200 artists. The government of Lithuania established a sizable plan to help freelance workers that had experienced a loss of revenue due to the pandemic. This €50 million package also provided a monthly €257 grant for up to three months (Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Lithuania, 2020). Some workers in the creative industries were not able to work at all during the pandemic. Because of this, governments started giving unemployment benefits to freelancers in the creative sector. Luxembourg created a temporary system in summer 2020, where freelancers can claim unemployment benefits in case of extreme conditions, like after a terrorist attack or during an epidemic. Freelancers could now get support equivalent to the minimum wage level if the government has banned their field of work due to an extreme event. As musicians have not been able to perform while social distancing restrictions have been in place, they are eligible to receive this financial support (Dutch Government, 2020). Greece supported freelancers affected by the pandemic in various ways. They gave a small, €500 support package to freelancers affected by the pandemic. The government also extended the regular unemployment welfare plan to be accessible for freelancers for two months during 2020. Furthermore, freelancers could get a 25% reduction in tax obligations, excluding VAT (European Commission, 2020).

In addition to monetary support, governments have arranged educational materials and courses for the workers in the cultural industries. The idea behind this concept has been that people could improve their skills in various areas to help them manage and grow their businesses after the pandemic. Some courses focus on marketing skills or digital services, while some are about improving or learning new artistic skills (Unesco, 2020). The Australia Council for the Arts created several webinar series that aimed to achieve just that. First, a 41-part webinar series, 'Creative Connections', explores leadership, digital, and art creation adaptation to the current situation (Australia Council for the Arts, 2020). The second series, 'Think Inside the Square', comprises 15 webinars and discusses various digital tools and platforms artists could utilize during the pandemic (Australia Council for the Arts, 2020). The government of Singapore also released an extensive support program, 'Arts and Culture Resilience Package', in March 2020. It combines both financial aid and multiple educational courses for artists and people working in the cultural industries. There were dozens of courses available. The classes were taught by local art organizations and artists and covered digital tech, entrepreneurship, audience engagement, and art form specific education (National Council of the Arts Singapore, 2020).

Despite these efforts, artists have felt like the grants they have received have not been sufficient (Brunt & Nelligan, 2020; Mulligan & Jopling, 2020). As many as 28% of musicians are worried about their ability to pay bills in the future (Mulligan & Jopling, 2020).

On the other hand, music has been streamed more than ever before, and the revenues from streaming are expected to grow by 8% in Europe (EY, 2021). Streaming is an essential source of revenue for musicians. This is especially true in independent artists' case: radio play and streaming amount to 28% of their income (Mulligan & Jopling, 2020).

Live Streaming

Later in 2020, people seemed to accept that the virus would be around for a while. Rather than just waiting for things to get better, players in the industry took action and started inventing new ways to gain income. The pandemic has been pushing the industry to be more innovative and work around the situation. The social media platform Instagram started to share live gigs for the first time, and online music festivals were held. The industry started utilizing digital platforms to their full potential (Brereton, 2020).

During the pandemic, live streaming music has become a viable product. It has come to fill the void left by live music, although the experience is still very different. There have been many different

approaches to live streaming, ranging from artists playing on Instagram live to highly produced events (Brunt & Nelligan, 2020; Mulligan & Jopling, 2020).

Many famous artists have live-streamed highly produced concerts played in empty venues and sold tickets to these events. Some shows have been pre-recorded, while some have been played live. In November 2020, the English artist Dua Lipa held a live stream concert that was very highly produced and easily comparable to a more traditional concert. The production of this event cost roughly €1.25 million, and it attracted five million viewers (Millman, 2020; IFPI, 2021). These audiences naturally could not be attained at traditional concerts, possibly making this new format a viable option post-pandemic. Dua Lipa's concert was a financial success, and the artist plans on having another one even if typical concerts are allowed soon again (Millman, 2020).

One example of a very different approach was seen when rapper Travis Scott held a concert on the virtual game Fortnite in April 2020. More than 12 million players worldwide logged in to watch the show in-game, with an estimated millions of more people watching on streaming services like Twitch (IFPI, 2021; Stuart, 2020). The event was a great success, but not the first of its kind: already in 2019, Marshmello also held a concert on Fortnite, which gained millions of watchers online (Stuart, 2020). These kinds of productions were naturally only available to top-selling artists, like Travis Scott and Dua Lipa. But many smaller artists have utilized the digital sphere in their own ways, too. As much as 20% of independent musicians have performed a live stream show during the pandemic (Mulligan & Jopling, 2020). The popularity of online concerts has not gone unnoticed by companies in the music industry. Both established players and new companies have been vocal about putting effort into live stream concerts in the future.

Spotify launched a new feature in September 2020, where artists could announce their live stream concerts on the platform. The company teamed up with Songkick and Ticketmaster to achieve this. As of now, Spotify does not have an in-app streaming service. Instead, the concerts promoted on the platform can be held on any popular streaming service, like Twitch. (Nicolau, 2020; Spotify, 2020). Live streaming has quickly gained a foothold in the industry and will probably be here to stay (Mulligan & Jopling, 2020). Popular artists have announced that they will have another live stream concert even if shows are allowed again. Spotify is adding live stream promoting features on their platform, and many independent artists consider live streaming as part of their routine.

Positive impacts

Although the pandemic has negatively affected the cultural industry, some reports say that the pandemic has had some positive impacts on companies. For example, this situation has forced companies to take a great digital leap forward. According to one estimate, the world has undergone five years' worth of technological advancements in the span of three months. Many businesses have utilized digital platforms to their maximum potential and invented new ways to deliver goods and provide services to their customers (Baig, Jenkins, Lamarre & McCarthy, 2020). The creative sector had proven to be very motivated to distribute art to the masses, even when the traditional ways were not allowed. Artists have shared their performances online by utilizing all the digital tools at their disposal (CULT Committee, 2021).

Some reports show that artists claim the pandemic has improved some aspects of their careers as well. Some musicians report that their digital marketing skills have improved throughout 2020 (Ruusuvirta, Lahtinen & Kurlin-Niiniaho, 2021). This might be at least partly aided by the training programs provided by governments, but also by merely having more time to study new skills from various online resources. It seems that independent artists have also put their new skills into action, as 57% of artists say that they have published more content on social media in the past year (Mulligan & Jopling, 2020).

The pandemic has also offered artists time to reflect and create new music. 64% of musicians think that they have had more time to focus on writing and producing than before (Mulligan & Jopling, 2020). Musicians also report that their producing skills have improved during this time (Mulligan & Jopling, 2020). Despite this, there seem to be two different schools about releasing new work mid-pandemic. Almost one in two musicians has released more new music in the past year than previous ones, while 24% have released less. Furthermore, 40% have put projects on hold because of the pandemic (Mulligan & Jopling, 2020).

The issue with most of these activities is that they do not generate much income. Composing new music or planning projects will not earn the musician any money before releasing, and new releases cannot be marketed without a live tour. New streaming platforms are also not yielding a lot of revenue for most (Music Finland, 2021, CULT Committee, 2021). Large-scale productions such as Dua Lipa's performance do not represent the working musicians' bulk (Mulligan & Jopling, 2020). Musicians see potential in the live stream sector, but currently, it does not replace the lost income caused by not being able to play live and sell merchandise during those events. As mentioned earlier, the sales of

CD and vinyl are expected to drop by 35%, while the revenues earned from streaming are expected to rise by 8% (EY, 2021).

The new normal

The months of lockdown and restrictions in almost all countries in the EU divide people. Despite the severity of the situation, some players in the industry are hopeful about the future (Music Finland, 2020b). News articles showcase music industry professionals ready to go back to work and believe that the industry will do well after the pandemic is over. A study by Livenation shows that music listeners are eagerly waiting for when they can see live concerts again (Brunt & Nelligan, 2020). This is in line with the findings of Grodach & Seman (2013). According to them, as cultural industries are often based in large cities with upper and high-income consumers, they can survive as the spending most likely will increase rapidly after a recession. The same was evident back after the Spanish Flu. Right after the imminent threat of the pandemic had passed, people flooded concert halls again (Robin, 2020; Mislant, 2020). However, some studies show the exact opposite, with 21% of the respondents saying they will feel uncomfortable going to a live concert for some years (EY, 2021). The pessimistic attitudes are apparent in other studies as well. A survey by Music Finland (2020b) reveals that many musicians do not believe that the industry will recover before 2022 or 2023. This is backed by a study by EY (2021), concluding that the cultural economies will not fully recover before 2022. Especially music export has suffered from the pandemic: negotiations with partners are on hold until the pandemic ends or new business models surface. Unlike the study by Livenation shows, many players in the industry are fearful that people are going to be afraid about going to live concerts when the situation is getting better. They believe that the number of concert attendees will be lower for a long time after the restrictions have been lifted (Music Finland, 2020b; EY, 2021). In Finland, 76% of artists feel that corona has impacted their work as far as 22% of musicians have considered a change in their career paths because of the pandemic (Ruusuvirta et al., 2021). In the UK, the equivalent number is 34% (UK Music, 2020).

From these conflicting results, it can be deduced that the future of the music industry is very uncertain. Much depends on the pace at which vaccinations are provided at. As of April 2021, the severity of the pandemic varies significantly between different countries. Denmark has estimated that all its citizens will receive at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine by the summer of 2021 and has already started slowly lifting the heavy restrictions that have been in place for the past months. The country plans to use a vaccination passport; Once vaccinated, people could travel and go to events more freely

by showing the passport. (dos Santos, Mortensen & Gargiulo, 2021; BBC News, 2021b) The European Commission has also proposed introducing a Digital Green Certificate that would allow free movement of vaccinated people within the EU (European Commission, 2021; BBC News, 2021b). Meanwhile, Brazil and India see record-high numbers in new COVID-19 cases and deaths (BBC News, 2021c, Pandey, 2021). Brazil experienced over 4,000 new deaths for the first time on the 7th of April 2021 (BBC News, 2021c).

Live music

It is uncertain when concerts can be held normally again. Like Glastonbury and BST Hyde Park in the UK, some festivals have already canceled their events planned for summer 2021, while others are still feeling hopeful about the future. With vaccinations being given out to people rapidly, event organizers are feeling more optimistic than in 2020 (Savage, 2021).

There has been research and experiments on strict testing and how it could enable organizing concerts even during the pandemic, without a risk of a large virus breakout. During the spring of 2021, several shows were held on a trial basis. On March 28th, 2021, 5,000 people gathered to listen to a concert in Barcelona, Spain. All attendees were tested before the show, and people in the risk group were encouraged not to be part of this experiment. Furthermore, all attendees were strictly required to wear a face mask. Local authorities also approved the concert. (BBC News, 2021a; The Guardian, 2021). Similar experiments have been run in the Netherlands. A research group has organized several events where thousands of people gathered to listen to music and dance.

Similarly to the concert in Spain, all attendees had to be tested negative for COVID-19 before the event. The audience was divided into five different groups at these events, each of which had varying rules about wearing a mask and keeping a distance from the other attendees. The aim here was to learn whether the virus could spread easier in groups that had fewer restrictions. (Boffey, 2021). Six of these events were attended by 6,200 people, and only a handful of new cases were recorded after the events below the nation's average (NL Times, 2021).

3. Methodology

The purpose of this research is to find out how music professionals' working processes have changed and how they have expanded their use of the digital sphere during the COVID-19 pandemic. In this chapter, the methodology of this study will be discussed in detail. This chapter is structured the way Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill (2012) explain research as an onion with different layers. It starts with the thick outer layers of the research philosophy and the approach and then thinly layers in methodological choice, strategy, time horizon, techniques, and procedures (see figure 1).

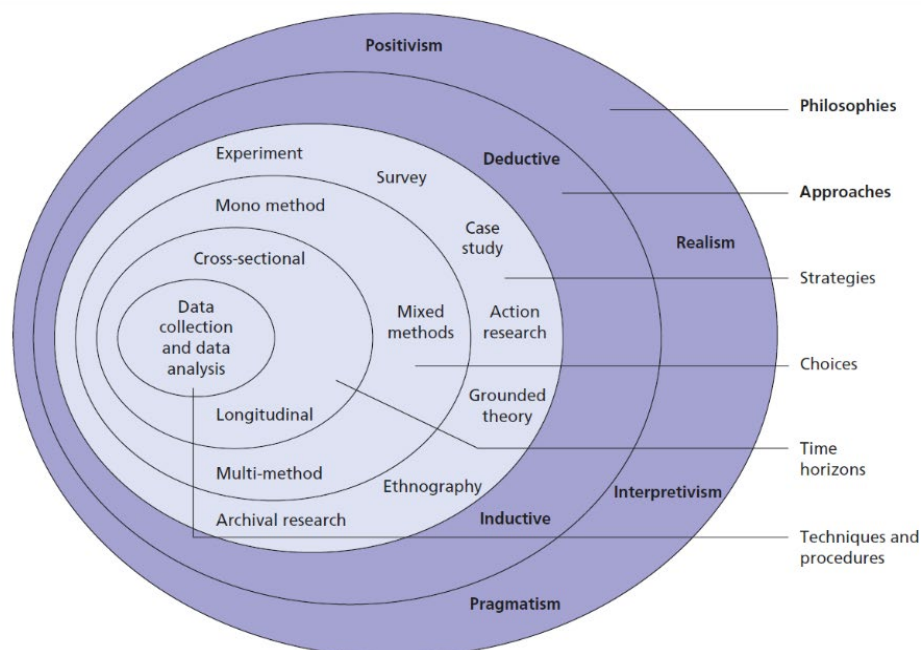


Figure 1: The research 'onion' (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 124)

3.1 Research philosophy

The philosophy of science is part of the sense-making process of research. In every study, assumptions are made which lead the process. Therefore, research philosophy is an essential part of understanding the research question, the methods used, and the way findings are interpreted. The philosophical approach is a helpful way to commit to one's research path throughout the different stages of the process. It has a significant impact on the way we look at results. (Saunders et al., 2012)

Over time, scholars have described different key concepts in the philosophy of science (see Saunders et al., 2012; Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008; Egholm, 2014). The two main concepts that have always

been discussed in this context are *ontology* and *epistemology*. This discussion does not mean that philosophy must be one or the other, but these concepts have instead become part of a framework that relates to each other. First, *ontology* concerns the ideas about the nature of reality. It focuses on the assumption that relationships between people, society, and the world in general exist.

On the one hand, the truth in ontology is understood as subjective, meaning that experiences and perceptions depend on each person individually and can change over time and context. This is also referred to as social constructivism, which claims that reality exists because it is socially constructed. On the other hand, ontology can also assume that the social world exists as an independent unit outside of people's actions and activities, whereby this aspect is called objectivism (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). While ontology is looking at reality as the researcher assumes it, epistemology studies the relationship between the phenomenon that is researched and the researcher (Veal and Burton, 2014). The three ways on how to approach this philosophical concept are *positivism*, *realism* and *interpretivism*. While positivism and realism are used in natural science to collect data of an observable reality that shows relationship and regularities in the data and interpret it with slightly different approaches, interpretivism is critical about its counterparts, and researchers argue that rich insights are lost when the reality is reduced to law-like generalizations (Saunders et al., 2012). Hence, the interpretivism approach focuses on people's explanation of their experience, situation, or behaviour. "*The interpretive researcher tries to 'get inside' the minds of subjects and see the world from their point of view*" (Veal and Burton, 2014, p. 33).

In the research conducted for this study, the philosophical approaches of social constructivism and interpretivism are being used. So, rather than depicting an objective truth, the study focuses on subjective perceptions from music business professionals working in Europe. Finally, as research subjects are all pursuing different career paths in the industry, this study focuses on people's explanation of their own experiences and behaviour throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. From an ontologist viewpoint, it is assumed that people's perceptions are built through social interaction and change over time and context. Therefore, it is considered that their views on the music industry and the pandemic might vary depending on who they are talking to or for how long the pandemic is going to last. Government restrictions and communication also seem to impact how one's work is perceived, so it can be assumed that with every official announcement, the perception of the music professionals could change.

Background of the researchers

As the interpretivist and social constructivist views attach importance to one's values and own experiences, this subchapter is dedicated to our background. It is essential to understand which values we represent if experiences should be analysed based on subjective norms:

First, Lauri Arjas is a master's student at Copenhagen Business School (CBS) studying management of creative business processes. He is originally from Finland, where he also completed his bachelor's degree in international business at Aalto University. He has worked in marketing and photography and played in a band in Finland. Second, Mara Deuschle is also a student at CBS completing the same master's degree. She is from Switzerland, where she studied business administration at the University of St. Gallen. She has gained practical knowledge of the music industry in various sectors such as live music, music management, and digital marketing.

In conclusion, we both have broad academic knowledge in the business field and have touched upon the creative and cultural industries in our master's degree. This helps us to understand the business models of the research subjects and how revenue with creativity, in this case, music, is made. Lastly, we both are familiar with the music industry and other creative processes such as marketing. Therefore, we will look at the data with an understanding of the creative processes of the music industry while keeping the business perspective in mind.

3.2 Research approach

This subchapter focuses on this study's research approach and deals with the topics of methodological choice and the research strategy.

There are two logics to follow when conducting research: *deduction* and *induction*. The process of deduction is linear to get from theoretical knowledge to empirical research. This comes from the deductive idea that theory is the primary source of knowledge. The data collection is done to falsify or verify a hypothesis related to an existing theory. Whereby induction takes the opposite approach and is used to explore phenomena and create conceptual frameworks that lead from empirical research to theory generation and building. These two approaches are rarely used just individually. A mix of both systems is *abduction* and is the process that keeps jumping between the two main logics. Basically, in abduction, data collection will be used to explore phenomena and locate these in conceptual frameworks, which are then being tested again through data collection. Thus, creating new or modifying existing theories by incorporating appropriate existing theory. (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008; Saunders et al., 2012) As this study is based on subjective cases and explores the phenomenon of the

music business during the pandemic, and the process is answering a research question rather than verify or falsify a hypothesis, the primary approach of this research is inductive. The data gathering process is not built on theoretical frameworks, which further speaks for the inductive research approach. It is an important element of this study to connect existing theory with empirical findings from the interviews, in order to maintain our interpretive and social constructivist standpoint. However, the knowledge that has been gathered in the literature review has been used to work out the interview guide. After every interview, the guide was also reviewed to ask more specific questions for the individual music professionals, which is an abductive approach we took in this study.

Further, the methodological choice of the research was selected to be qualitative. Qualitative studies are associated with non-numeric data such as words, images, or video clips. This definition is narrow, as qualitative and quantitative methodologies and results could change their meaning depending on what philosophical lens is used. (Saunders et al., 2012) This is further proven to be true, as qualitative research is connected to an interpretive philosophy. Hence, it is also referred to as a naturalistic research choice as analysing phenomena comes with a sense-making process of the subjective and socially constructed experiences, values, and meanings expressed during the study. This means the researcher has to act in a natural setting to gain first of all trust and access to the data and in-depth understanding. (Saunders et al., 2012) Moreover, the belief that qualitative research is based on is that *"the people personally involved in a particular situation are best placed to describe and explain their experiences, motivations and world view in their own words, and that they should be allowed to speak without the intermediary of the researcher and without being overly constrained by the framework imposed by the researcher"* (Veal and Burton, 2014, p. 218). In this context, Saunders et al. (2012) describe that most qualitative studies start with an inductive approach, whereby the naturalistic logic helps to develop a broader theoretical perspective than the present literature. However, they explain that in practice, many qualitative studies follow abductive reasoning. This is reflected in this research, as mentioned earlier in this chapter. Furthermore, as clarified in the subchapter about techniques and procedures, one can see that the conducted interviews were not based on any framework, and thus, the interviewees were able to express their values and experiences freely.

To further define this research, the way the results are being presented can be distinguished between *exploratory, evaluative, or descriptive* research. This study chooses its nature to be exploratory. Exploratory research *"is a valuable means to ask open questions to discover what is happening and gain insights about a topic of interest. It is particularly useful if you wish to clarify your understanding of a problem, such as if you are unsure of the precise nature of the problem"* (Saunders et al., 2012, p.

171). Flexibility and adaptability are both advantages of exploratory research. One must be willing to change the view on one's own research with every new insight gained and new data received. Hence, conducting in-depth individual interviews that are relatively unstructured is a coherent way to conduct exploratory research. (Saunders et al., 2012) This is also true in the case of this research as is described further (see chapter 3.3).

Finally, there are a variety of research strategies that can be found in qualitative research, depending on the scope or a specific emphasis. As this research focuses on a small sample of music professionals from different European countries with different roles in the music industry, the study is conducted as a case study research. Case studies are beneficial to understand a specific phenomenon through one or more examples; these examples are geographically and temporally unique (Veal and Burton, 2014). Common misunderstandings form from this aspect. For example, it is being said that case studies are only helpful to form hypotheses rather than hypothesis testing or theory building. However, in Flyvbjerg's (2006) study, the author refutes these claims explaining that with unique cases, one can demonstrate the deeper causes behind a given problem and its consequences rather than describe the symptoms of an issue of how frequently those occur. From an understanding and action-oriented perspective, these insights seem to be important as "*random samples emphasizing representativeness will seldom be able to produce this kind of insight; it is more appropriate to select some few cases chosen for their validity*" (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 229). One other positive aspect of a case study is that contextual variables are not highly controlled, as would be the case in an experimental study. Here, the context is at the centre of attention (Saunders et al., 2012).

Saunders et al. (2012) describe four different case strategies: A single case or multiple cases and holistic or embedded cases. A single case is mainly used when the case represents an extreme, rare, or unique case. A case study can also make use of multiple cases – as it is used in this particular research. (Saunders et al., 2012) These numerous cases can be chosen either to determine if results can be replicated across cases or that the selected cases are deliberately different. The latter is the case for this research and is referred to as theoretical replication as described by Yin (2009, in Saunders et al., 2012). For this reason, the different cases were chosen, so a wide variety of professions in the music industry were covered to study if the COVID-19 had an impact on a particular field, and if yes, how these professionals have handled the challenges and opportunities. Another differentiation can be made between a holistic and embedded strategy. This refers to the unit that is analysed. Saunders et al. (2012) use an example of an organization to define these strategies: If the research is focused on getting an overall view of the organization as a whole, the study is referred to as holistic.

However, if the research focuses on different departments or workgroups – even if it is in a single organization – the research is referred to as embedded. In this study, the embedded strategy was chosen as the study's goal is not to represent a holistic view of the music industry but to establish a deep understanding of the individual cases in the context of the music industry in connection to the COVID-19 pandemic.

According to Veal and Burton (2014), there are four types of processes for the selection of case studies: *Purposive, illustrative, typical/atypical, and pragmatic/opportunistic*. In this study, we have used the purposive and pragmatic selection processes. Purposive means that a logical scheme has selected multiple cases, for example, organizations that are the same size or in the same or contrasting geographical location. Pragmatic/opportunistic means that cases have been chosen pragmatic, meaning that the researcher has ready access to the information (Veal and Burton, 2014). The former was used as different parts of the music industry should be covered with the cases. Ideally, the music professionals would be based and working in different countries. The latter was used, as most of the cases were chosen based on our existing contacts or referrals of acquaintances. This use of the pragmatic process led to the majority of cases being based in the our home countries Finland and Switzerland. The cases and their selection will be discussed more thoroughly in chapter 3.3.

Now that the research approach has been discussed in detail, the specific cases are presented, and in-depth information on the data collection is provided in the following chapter. Further, the data analysis is discussed.

3.3 Techniques and procedures

Data collection

In order to answer the research questions of how the pandemic has affected music professionals' work processes and how they have used the digital sphere to overcome pay gaps due to the COVID-19 pandemic, interviews with music professionals in different countries have been conducted over video communication platforms. In table 1, the main information of the interviews can be looked at:

Table 1: Conducted Interviews (own representation, 2021)

Nr.	Date	Music Professional	Based in	Length of transcript
1	18 th of March 2021	Simon Fülleemann	Switzerland	45 minutes
2	22 nd of March 2021	Alex Treharne	UK	57 minutes

3	23 rd of March 2021	Fabienne Schmuki	Switzerland	41 minutes
4	11 th of April 2021	Iivari Nenonen	Finland	30 minutes
5	13 th of April 2021	Katariina Uusitupa	Finland	56 minutes
6	20 th of April 2021	Anssi Tähtinen	Finland	40 minutes

As described earlier, the interview partners were chosen in a pragmatic and purposive selection process. The two contacts from Switzerland are personal contacts of Deuschle. The UK contact was introduced to us through an acquaintance from Deuschle. Iivari Nenonen is a close personal contact of Arjas, and Anssi Tähtinen was introduced to us by Iivari Nenonen. Solely Katariina Uusitupa was reached out to individually; she was purposely chosen because of her position at a big festival in Finland, but we had no personal contact with her before the interview. The following table (see table 2) shows the occupation of the interview partners that lay the ground for the purposive selection process:

Table 2: Details of the interviewees (own representation, 2021)

Nr.	Interviewee	Firm	Occupation
1	Simon Fülleemann	Aisa Music	Simon Fülleemann is the founder and CEO of Aisa Music, which is a music management, distribution, and “direct to customer (DTC)” company that operates worldwide. The firm only operates within the music industry with bands, labels or whoever wants a DTC solution.
2	Alex Treharne	Latch	Alex Treharne is the founder and CEO of Latch Media is a digital marketing company that offers design work, social media strategies and handles Public Relations (PR). The firm operates mainly in the entertainment industry where they work closely with artists and music labels.
3	Fabienne Schmuki	Irascible Music	Fabienne Schmuki is the CEO of Irascible Music and operates as Head of Promotion and Label Manager for the company. The firm works in the recording side of the music industry and operates as a distribution and publishing company, a PR agency and a record label.

4	Iivari Nenonen	Freelancer	Iivari Nenonen is a musician and music producer with various musical projects, some of which are signed to labels based in Finland. Furthermore, he is studying Cultural Management at Metropolia University of Applied Science in Helsinki, Finland.
5	Katariina Uusitupa	Flow Festival	Katariina Uusitupa works as a production manager at Flow Festival in Helsinki. Flow Festival welcomes 30,000 guests per day for three days a year. She works as the technical production manager of the festival. That means she is in charge of everything concerning the area, including cooperation with the city, permits, and security, among other tasks.
6	Anssi Tähtinen	Alt Agency & Management / Lepakkomies / Freelancer	Anssi Tähtinen works as an agent at Alt Agency & Management, books and promotes shows at Lepakkomies, and takes on agent mandates as a freelancer. At Alt Agency & Management, he handles a Finnish artist roster and takes up management tasks. Lepakkomies is a music venue in Helsinki, Finland.

The music professionals have been chosen so different views of the music industry can be analysed. First, Fabienne Schmuki is concentrated on the recording side of the music industry. Meanwhile, Anssi Tähtinen and Katariina Uusitupa are both concentrated on the live sector with different focuses. Iivari Nenonen as a musician and Simon Füllemann as a music manager represent the artist side of the industry that is dependent on the recording and live sector. Alex Treharne is a special case, as he is neither reliant on the live nor the recording sector. However, he offers his work to the music industry. Therefore, we determined that his insights are highly relevant to the perception of whether and how the pandemic has affected other parts of the music industry.

It should be noted that we have reached out to a variety of music professionals that could have been possible interview partners. Unfortunately, we have either not received an answer or declined the interview due to COVID-19 or personal issues. For example, we wanted to get insights from big labels like Universal Music or Warner Music and reached out to the two companies. Unlucky for us, Universal Music is currently undergoing an initial public offering (IPO) and was unwilling to give out any information at that moment in time. Furthermore, the contact person at Warner Music responded to us by saying that the pandemic did not affect her job and, for this reason, declined an interview.

All interviews were held in a semi-structured and in-depth manner. Semi-structured interviews are non-standardised, meaning that there is room to explore various topics during an interview, and no strict, standardised questionnaire is being followed. These kinds of interviews may follow some topics and key questions but vary from interview to interview. Some questions may seem more appropriate for one case than the next, or the order of questions may change as the interviewee already addresses certain topics in their earlier answers. (Saunders et al., 2012) As for this research paper, the interview guide was adapted after each music interview. This was because some questions were not formulated understandably, and that multiple questions were allocated to the different careers the interviewee was following.

Furthermore, Veal and Burton (2014) explain that in-depth interviews last much longer than fully structured interviews and tend to last from 30 minutes to several hours. As can be seen in table 1, all conducted interviews lasted between 30 and 60 minutes. Lastly, semi-structured interviews are a fitting way to conduct an exploratory study, as they can provide crucial background and contextual data (Saunders et al., 2012). As an addition, after Flow Festival was officially cancelled, follow up questions were sent to Katariina Uusitupa via e-mail, and she answered them on the 30th of April 2021. This was also used in the analysis of the data.

All interviews were conducted over the internet communication platform Microsoft Teams due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, restrictions, and social distancing rules that were in effect in all the examined countries. James and Busher (2012) describe that although an internet video call can mirror a face-to-face interview situation quite well when conducted correctly, there is often a challenge about how a research relationship can be established over a short period of time. *“In a face-to-face interview, the presentation of self is based not only on what we choose to show, for example, through gesture or tone of voice but also how that is perceived by others in the space of social interaction”* (James & Busher, 2012, p. 5). Hence, it must be remembered that it is easier to misinterpret tone of voice and body language in an online call compared to a face-to-face conversation. However, as most of the interviews were chosen pragmatically, the risk of not establishing a trusted relationship online was minimal. Further, during every interview, a warmup and small talk occurred before the interview started to establish a first bond between the interviewers and the interviewee. This helped establish trust with the music professionals, whom we had not known or met personally.

Due to the way the interviews were conducted, we have experienced various challenges: The digital format of the interviews presented challenges of technical nature to the research team. These chal-

Challenges manifested themselves, for example, in the importance of a stable internet connection, as otherwise sentences were cut off or a time-lag in the conversation had to be factored in. Additionally, the reliability of the hardware used to conduct the interviews was insufficient, as during one of the interviews, the recording device used [crashed]. The research team integrated this learning by ensuring backup recordings with multiple devices. Lastly, one other challenge we had to overcome at the beginning was that at that time, we were residing in different countries. Arjas was based in Finland, and Deuschle was based in Denmark. Therefore, every interview that was conducted led to someone being in a different time zone. For the interview with Alex Treharne, even all three participants in the internet video call were in a different time zone. Luckily, when setting up a meeting with Microsoft Teams, the organizer can set up the time zones so every person will see the time of the meeting in “their” time.

Data analysis

As a qualitative study, the existing research data is mainly made up of words in the form of audio recordings. Thus, the data analysis process started with transcribing the interviews from an audio file to written words. This process helped us to get familiar with the data and begin looking for patterns between interviews. To compare and match the data from the different cases and to stay true to the interpretivist and social constructivist lens, every interview was qualitatively coded. Codes are labels used to give symbolic meaning to different “chunks” of information. It is primarily used to retrieve and categorize data to cluster the data strings according to the research question and the research approach. (Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2014)

The coding was done in two cycles. The first cycle used the descriptive and the in vivo method to code the raw data. The in vivo method stays true to the spoken language of the participant. However, to not end up with an overwhelming number of codes in the first round, we decided to name the codes with the help of the descriptive method to bring more clarity to the codes as this method assigns labels by summarizing data in only a word or a short sentence. (Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2014)

After coding all interviews and revising and tidying up the codes, we ended up with 32 codes that are presented in the following coding book (see table 3):

Table 3: First Round Codes (own representation, 2021)

Nr.	Code	Definition
1	Company tasks	This code is used when the person talks about the company's role and tasks in the music industry.
2	Location	This code is used when there is a mention about where the company is based and where the person is working.
3	Company background	This code is used when it is explained how the company came to be and how its product offering has developed over the years.
4	Company strategy	This code is used when there is a mention of the company strategy.
5	The nature of the music industry	This code is used when it is explained how the industry operates, and attributes of the industry are mentioned.
6	Revenue sources	This code is used when there is a mention of the revenue sources of the company.
7	Revenue losses	This code is used when revenue losses are discussed that have occurred due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
8	Changes in billing	This code is used when the person is talking about changes in the billing process of their company's clients.
9	Changes in revenue	This code is used when the person talks about changes that have occurred in the revenue streams or sources.
10	Inability to work	This code is used when the inability to work due to restrictions made by the government is explained.
11	Work during pandemic	This code is used when the person discusses how they have been working since the start of the pandemic.
12	Effect on work	This code is used when there is a mention of how work processes have changed because of the pandemic.

13	Additional work tasks	This code is used when there is a mention of additional or new tasks people have been working on since the start of the pandemic.
14	Communication	This code is used when the person talks about the communication with stakeholders before or during the pandemic.
15	Declined working processes	This code is used when the person talks about working processes that have been declined by the company.
16	Restrictions	This code is used when the person talks about restrictions set by the government or other institutions.
17	Streaming	This code is used when products are mentioned that are being streamed.
18	New products	This code is used when new products are being discussed that the company newly offers.
19	New products thought about	This code is used when products are mentioned that the company has been thinking about introducing.
20	Funds received	This code is used when there is a mention of funds received from labour unions or the government because of the pandemic.
21	Credit received	This code is used when there is a mention of credits received from labour unions or the government because of the pandemic.
22	Using credit	This code is used when the person mentioned how the credit the company received is being used.
23	Funds pending	This code is used when funds are mentioned that have been applied for but not yet received.
24	Sufficiency of funds	This code is used when the recipient talks about the sufficiency of funds/credits received due to the pandemic.

25	Social welfare structure	This code is used when the social welfare structure of the person's country is being discussed.
26	Satisfaction of government actions	This code is used when the satisfaction of government actions during the pandemic is being discussed.
27	Effect on others	This code is used when the person shares their perception of the pandemic's effect on other people/players.
28	Mental effects of the pandemic	This code is used when mental effects of the pandemic such as happiness or social life are being discussed.
29	People's relationship to music/the industry	This code is used when the person is explaining their perception of people's relationships to culture and the music industry at that moment in time.
30	Perception of the music industry now	This code is used when there is a mention of the interviewee's perception of the music industry at that moment.
31	Work after the pandemic	This code is used when the person describes their perception of how work will be like after the pandemic.
32	The industry after the pandemic	This code is used when the person describes their perception of how the music industry will be like after the pandemic.

In the second coding cycle, the 32 codes were then summarized into smaller categories using pattern coding and, finally, ordered by themes. The second round of coding is used to analyse the data in a structured way in the next chapter. The second round of coding contained seven codes that are shown in table 4:

Table 4: Second Round Codes (own representation, 2021)

Code Nr	Codes (First Round)	Codes (Second Round)
1	Company tasks	Theme Number 1:

2	Location	<p style="text-align: center;">Music Company</p> <p style="text-align: center;">It includes codes 1 to 5 from the first round.</p>
3	Company background	
4	Company strategy	
5	The nature of the music industry	
6	Revenue sources	
7	Revenue losses	<p style="text-align: center;">Theme <i>Number 2</i>:</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Revenue</p> <p style="text-align: center;">It includes codes 5 to 9 from the first round.</p>
8	Changes in billing	
9	Changes in revenue	
10	Inability to work	
11	Work during pandemic	<p style="text-align: center;">Theme <i>Number 3</i>:</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Work</p> <p style="text-align: center;">It includes codes 10 to 16 from the first round.</p>
12	Effect on work	
13	Additional work tasks	
14	Communication	
15	Declined working processes	
16	Restrictions	
17	Streaming	<p style="text-align: center;">Theme <i>Number 4</i>:</p> <p style="text-align: center;">New Products</p> <p style="text-align: center;">It includes codes 17 to 19 from the first round.</p>
18	New products	
19	New products thought about	
20	Funds received	Theme <i>Number 5</i> :

21	Credit received	Government It includes codes 20 to 26 from the first round.
22	Using credit	
23	Funds pending	
24	Sufficiency of funds	
25	Social welfare structure	
26	Satisfaction of government actions	
27	Effect on others	<i>Theme Number 6:</i> Perceptions It includes codes 27 to 30 from the first round.
28	Mental effects of the pandemic	
29	People's relationship to music/the industry	
30	Perception of the music industry now	
31	Work after the pandemic	<i>Theme Number 7:</i> Future It includes codes 31 to 32 from the first round.
32	The industry after the pandemic	

Every statement from the interview was assigned to a code. In the following chapter, these statements will be put into context by using the second round of coding themes. Similarities and differences between the cases will be analysed and later linked with the gained knowledge from the literature review in the discussion chapter.

4. Results

4.1 Music Company

The first theme in this research revolves around the companies the interviewees work for, or - in case they are freelancers - their own careers. The answers presented in this section also relate to the companies' strategies and the nature of the music industry in general. This section works mainly as an introduction to the interviewees and their work tasks and provides some information of what the interviewees perceive the music industry to be like.

The interviewees operate in various sectors of the music industry and different countries. Three of them are working in Finland, two in Switzerland, and one in the UK. Four of the interviewees mentioned that they work directly with the live sector. Iivari works as a musician and producer, Anssi as a booking agent and venue booker, Simon as the CEO of AISAmusic, a management, distribution & direct-to-consumer company, and Katariina as the production manager for Flow Festival.

Not working in the live industry connects Fabienne and Alex's businesses in this group of interviewees. Fabienne works in the recording side of the music industry as CEO of Irascible Music, a company that operates as a PR agency, a distribution and publishing company, and a record label. Alex's company Latch is mainly focusing on music PR but has recently expanded their service portfolio and changed their clientele: *"It [the industry] moves so fast that if you are stuck in one vertical, you will find very suddenly, you are out of work. Because doing enough just music PR work, is incredibly difficult. There is enough of the work, but from a time point of view, like being able to invest that much time in doing that work is almost impossible."* They started doing radio plugging, working with non-music clients and major labels instead of independent artists.

Although Fabienne and Alex's companies operate in the same space, they have very different ethos. Fabienne stated that although they know working with mainstream bands would be profitable during the pandemic, they did not want to do so. *"And at the same time not to go [work] into a musical style, which really does not fit us or we [do] not [want to] suddenly start working with very mainstream bands, [just] because we know they are going to make the money back. But we do not want to be that mainstream company."* Alex took a very different approach and started changing Latch's client base quite significantly at the beginning of the pandemic: *"And the reason why it [major labels] has become such a large part [of the clientele] is because one, they pay more, so you can have less of them, you can have less of those clients for more money. So, everyone needs to work less campaigns, which is great because I do not want anyone feeling overworked or burning out. And in order to do that, for*

independent artists you need, you might need to work six, seven campaigns a month. For majors, you might only need to work three. That is a big difference. And the other reason is because we decided, like I said earlier, that we want to work on projects where everyone can work on the project together. Because that is how we do our best work. And it makes the work more fun.”

While Flow Festival operates in a different place from Fabienne’s company, they too decided not to deviate from their typical product offering. They have a strong vision of what Flow Festival is about: They differentiate themselves from other Finnish festivals in that half of their performers come from abroad. This has made organizing the festival during the pandemic difficult. They have not wanted to give up their unique signature, as *“it is not Flow Festival anymore if there are only Finnish acts.”* Like most festivals around the world, Flow Festival had to be cancelled in 2020. During the interview, Katariina stated that Flow Festival was not cancelled, but shortly after they decided to cancel the festival in 2021. The cancellation of the event will be discussed in more detail in the third theme.

Flow Festival decided to stay true to their brand. It determined that they would rather cancel than organize a lesser version of the festival: *“They [customers] have bought the product with the image they from the previous years. So, people who bought the ticket for Flow Festival, they have festival 2019 in their minds. We cannot sell just something we can make. We cannot just put Paula Koivuniemi [a Finnish artist] on stage in Suvilahti [the festival area] and say, “Hey, it is Flow Festival”. It needs to have the same kind of elements that we used before. So, it is not working for Flow to have just national names. Then it is something else, totally something else.”*

While Fabienne and Katariina thought it was very important to stay true to their company values and brand, and only take on certain types of customers or provide certain types of products, Alex steered their company in a new direction to avoid monetary losses caused by the pandemic.

4.2 Revenue

The second theme in the results section revolves around revenue sources and revenue losses experienced by the interviewees during the pandemic. The music industry has been one of the most affected industries in the past year, and especially the live sector has experienced significant difficulties. As expected, the pandemic had affected the interviewees’ revenues negatively. This was even more apparent for those who are closely working in or with the live sector.

Revenue losses in the live industry

Anssi, who works closely with artists as a venue program manager and a booking agent, reported significant revenue losses since the pandemic began. *“It [revenue] has dropped for about 70 to 80%. And I have not had any revenue since last December.”* He has not been able to get any revenue after December because the Finnish government implemented strict restrictions, which did not allow any events to be held. Even despite this, he considers himself lucky, as he managed to sell out some shows before the pandemic and book some shows in the summer. Similar revenue losses were stated in other interviews, too. Simon reported his company’s revenues also plummeted by 70%. *“Well, the revenue shifted. Absolutely, immensely. We lost about 70% of our revenue.”* The revenue losses are mostly tied to not being able to play live because of social distancing restrictions set by governments. Many players in the industry have multiple revenue sources connected to playing live concerts, and as live shows are not allowed, many of these income sources were taken away. Iivari noted that because they have not been able to play live, they have lost the concert fees and any additional income that they provide. These include copyright fees and selling merchandise at the shows.

Copyright organizations pay copyright fees to copyright holders when their music is played live. This is also true when the copyright holders themselves are playing the music at their own concert, as it can be a significant source of revenue to be added on top of the typical concert fees that are paid to the bands. In Finland, the two organizations that pay the royalties are Teosto and Gramex, while in Switzerland, it is SUIISA. Both Iivari and Simon recognized that they had essentially lost this revenue source altogether. Iivari mentioned that: *“The biggest sources of income are Teosto and Gramex, who pay royalties from radio play and such. So that is still happening, and we are getting money from there. But [currently, there is] no money from gigging, which is kind of sad. Also, because there are no live gigs, you do not get any income from Gramex for doing live shows. Especially big festivals are a really good source of income for artists because you get such big exposure. And that means you get more money from Gramex.”* The loss of copyright revenues was also mentioned in the interview with Simon. *“The payment you get through SUIISA, for example, for playing live, all the merchandise you produce, extra payments that come with sponsorships, everything you get for free is basically income. And that just falls away.”*

Bands typically sell merchandising during and after the concerts. This is another significant source of income for some, and as live events are cancelled, the merchandise sales have plummeted. Iivari mentioned this in the interview: *“[Merchandise] is also one [income source] that is suffering right now because there are no gigs and the best place to sell shirts and everything related to merchandise*

is at the shows.” Simon’s interview also backed Iivari’s notion: *“We are producing a lot of tour merchandise. So, if that falls away, I am losing, basically on three ends. You know, producing merchandise, we have a margin. Then selling it, we have a margin. And then of course, if we are doing a management product for the band, you get a certain kickback. So, it is very hard when this falls away.”*

Losing multiple revenue sources simultaneously is a devastating blow to many in the industry. Notable here is that, although artists, managers, and booking agents have various sources of revenue, many of them are built around live concerts. Once the ability to play live is taken away, these revenue sources are compromised.

Live Streaming concerts

Thus, many have tried to find new ways to connect with their audiences and provide musical experiences for them. Live streaming concerts have been perhaps the most prevalent new invention to emerge from the pandemic. As discussed in the literature review, numerous examples of well-executed live stream concerts have attracted large audiences and yielded high profits. It seems, though, that not all live streams have been as successful. For many smaller artists, getting the audience to pay enough for the live stream to cover the costs can be difficult. Furthermore, organizing live stream concerts has many new issues the organizers have to tackle. Anssi gained experience in organizing live stream concerts after all live concerts were banned: *“Money-wise, it is peanuts. If there is an organizer for a [live] stream show, then we are okay to do it. But if we have to pay the expenses for ourselves then it is really too big of a risk. I mean, I think it is like... it has 100 times more cost to do the show. And the money is 10 times less.”* The revenues from live stream concerts have been very low, while the cost of production is higher compared to a regular live show. One show he produced did not yield any profit, even though he got a grant for it. *“I have done one bigger stream in a proper venue with proper gear, and sold tickets, but it did not go that well that I would want to do it again. And we also got a grant just for that show. And [with that grant] we managed to get the budget to zero.”* Simon, too, mentioned that live streams are not very profitable. *“Also, the virtual shows and everything - that does not pay you as much as live shows, and everything [that] comes with it.”*

These two experiences show that not all live stream shows have been a success. Organizing a live stream show can include a lot of extra work compared to a typical show, and the monetary return for the event can be very low or even negative.

Flow festival

Not only have artists suffered from the missing live sector, but also event organizers had to experience revenue losses. Flow Festival has multiple revenue sources, but the majority of its revenue comes from ticket sales. In the interview, Katariina mentioned that *“70% of our income is ticket sales.”* Additionally, 8% is gained from partnerships with various brands.

In Flow Festival’s case, their primary source of revenue has been compromised for two years at the time of the interview. They cancelled the festival for two years in a row, which implies heavy revenue losses. On the flip side, the organizing costs have also been a lot lower than they would have been had the festivals been organized. In 2020 and 2021, Flow Festival has promised to either refund the tickets to people who have already purchased them, or the guests can use their tickets from those years in 2022. As many people have already purchased the tickets in advance, the revenues from ticket sales in 2022 will most likely be lower.

Other sectors in the industry

The struggles of the live sector also affect other facets of the music industry. Although Fabienne’s business does not deal directly with the live sector, she noted that the hardships endured by the live industry do spread to other facets of the industry, too. Their business had also taken some losses in revenue due to the pandemic. As mentioned earlier, Fabienne’s company offers multiple services for artists. Although their service offering is extensive, many of them are targeted towards artists. Fabienne noted that: *“The artist has less income because of less touring and less selling merchandise, for instance, he or she also has less income to pay for our PR services. So, of course, we suffered also because the industry suffered.”* Fabienne did note that the different sectors of the industry are all connected, and the revenue losses experienced in the live sector do mirror into their work, too. *“We do not do live ourselves. But of course, everything is linked.”*

Not all of their services were affected equally by the imposed restrictions. While the distribution department experienced a significant decrease in revenue and promotion fees went down, the company has other revenue sources that have helped them through the pandemic. *“Due to being a publisher, we also get revenue through copyright, for instance. So, we have so many different sources that we were not harmed, you know, as heavily as others.”* Having operations in categories not directly linked to the live industry has helped the company during this time.

The situation has been even better at Latch, the company led by Alex. He has managed to grow the company during the pandemic. The revenues and margins increased, the service portfolio expanded,

and new employees were hired. During the pandemic, Latch started taking on different kinds of clients. They used to work with independent artists mostly, but as independent artists had less money to spend on marketing and PR, Latch started working more with major labels. *“Yeah, that was a big shift in the kind of client we took on. Because before what we were doing a lot of, is independent artists’ marketing. And we still do a lot of that. That makes up, I would say, 60% of all our work. But now the other 40 to 50% is made up by major labels. And the reason that has become such a large part is because one, they pay more, so you can have less of them, you can have less of those clients for more money.”* (Alex) This increased the margins the company was making significantly: *“Our margins across the board increased around 15%”*. Alex commented on the fact that despite the pandemic, major labels already had their budgets decided for the year. *“There was definitely a shift from it because clients could not invest in live. They had to reinvest that money somewhere. And they reinvested that money in campaign marketing. Like the stuff that we do, they bought services then. And especially the majors, all of the budget that we had already been put aside had to be poured into something.”* (Alex)

This shows how Latch’s case differs from other interviewees. Whereas all others reported substantial losses, Latch was able to increase their margins and grow their business.

The next theme will focus on how much the interviewees could work during the pandemic and how it affected their work processes.

4.3 Work

The third theme revolves around how the pandemic has affected the interviewees’ work. This part follows the interviewees’ work during the year, starting from spring 2020 and leading to spring 2021. Later, specific challenges the interviewees faced during these times will be highlighted.

Spring of 2020

The social distancing restrictions brought the whole live industry to a halt. The restrictions hit the hardest in the live sector, and the interviewees working in it reported significant income losses and inability to work.

In Finland, concerts were virtually cancelled in the spring, with the restrictions eased in the summer. Anssi mentioned that his roster of artists could not play during this period: *“From March to June there were not any... hardly any live concerts. And I managed to do some stuff in the summer.”* Iivari also mentioned that his band could not play in the spring either: *“The last show we played was on*

March 7th last year. That was the last show without restrictions in Logomo [venue] in Turku. And after that everything got cancelled. But in the summer, we had one show.” In Switzerland, Simon reported that the issue has not been that there would be no work; the problem was that the work does not pay. When the restrictions were put in place, Simon had to cancel and reschedule all the scheduled shows: *“Well, we have a lot of work, but it doesn't pay. So, when the pandemic started out, we had a lot to do, because we had to move out the tours. We had over 250 shows scheduled for the whole last year. So, that took a lot of work, just to move the shows. And not thinking about what else comes with it, you know, cancelling all the merchandise stuff, not losing all the income on that side of things, postponing the release and all the things. So, for us, it was extremely a lot of work.”*

For the interviewees not working directly with live, the spring of 2020 was a bit easier. Fabienne and Alex mentioned that their clients had already decided on their budgets and bought services. This was enough to keep both companies busy during this time. *“When it [the pandemic] started last spring, we still had jobs to do that were agreed on before. So, we kind of kept on working until the summer break.”* (Fabienne) As explained earlier, Alex had started working more with major labels, which also had their budgets set for the year. Working outside the live industry and having major labels in the client base seemed to, at least to an extent, safeguard Alex and Fabienne from the effects of the pandemic at the beginning of the year.

Summer of 2020

Events were not fully banned due to the social distancing restrictions. In the summer of 2020, Finland had the COVID-19 pandemic under control, and some of the restrictions were lifted, allowing some concerts to be held. Some concerts could be held in the fall as well. Restrictions were still in place, and none of the concerts were completely normal. *“After the summertime, I did only five shows in Alt, and they were just under the regulations from the government. And they were just getting stricter, because the [number of] infections, they were rising all the time.”* (Anssi) Iivari also mentioned that he was *“able to tour a little bit during the summer.”*

Fabienne mentioned that the summer was relatively slow for them, but that was nothing out of the ordinary: *“Summer, usually it is anyway quiet because there are not that many releases. And then after the summer break, it just did not pick up as it usually does. So then we had a break of, I would say, for four months, where it was really kind of quiet.”*

Fall of 2020

After a summer that seemed relatively normal, the business slowed down again in the fall. COVID-19 cases were on the rise in many areas, and new restrictions were put in place. This made it harder to play live. Iivari “*had maybe 15 shows booked in October and November, but about half of them got cancelled because the clubs were closed.*” And as noted in the second theme, Fabienne mentioned that the business was slower than usual in the fall.

Flow Festival had cancelled the event for summer 2020. Katariina joined the organization after this decision was made, and she started working on producing the event for 2021 “*like a normal Flow.*” They felt optimistic that the pandemic would pass before summer 2021, rent the festival area, negotiate salaries with festival staff, and build their team for the festival. However, there was one difference to a typical year, as there was no way of ensuring that the 2021 event would happen. Because of this, Katariina “*did not really confirm anything*” with their stakeholders. The inability to confirm anything made it quite hard to work with Flow Festival’s partners. The partner brands typically sponsor the event and account for 8% of the organization’s revenue. They also pay for and build their own areas or booths within the festival area. This is a great financial commitment, and not being able to confirm whether the next year’s festival will happen made the negotiations more complex: “*But obviously, the partnership and the amount of money that is [worth] [...] is kind of in line with the amount of people that we gather together. So, if the normal Flow is 30,000 people per day, almost 100,000 people in three days... That is the kind of baseline we said when we started discussing how big the partnership is.. If it suddenly is only like 2000 people per day for three days and then it is 6000 people [in total]? Obviously, that is very different.*” Katariina emphasized that all their stakeholders have been very understanding about the situation and have continued having these discussions with the festival.

Beginning of 2021

The winter and the beginning of 2021 have been slow for many of the interviewees. In December, Finland imposed strict social distancing rules, closing all music venues, restaurants, and bars. This had a significant impact on Anssi’s work: “*From last December, I have not been able to do any live shows, just streams, like only a handful of streams. So not much. It has been really quiet since December. And I really hope the situation is taking a turn for the better.*”

By this time, Simon had already finished with the releases they had in their pipeline, and new ones were not in the works. “*It was built up to the releases and as soon as the releases were done, it totally*

calmed down, so for us by the end of January. Now it is very quiet because we moved everything.” The year 2021 does not seem very promising for the company, and they have decided to push many things further into the future. *“Everything is scheduled for next year [2022]. So, for this year [there] is basically nothing going on because I am convinced there will not be international live shows going on. [...] Actually, there is only one tour we are going to book for 2022, which I know is going to happen because it is going to be within one country. And that is going to be fine. But all the rest is already moved to 2023.”* This does not mean Simon would not be working in 2021. He stated he’s already ideating new directions the company could take. *“There was no waiting around because for me it was like how do we use this period of time now to get further being creative. What can we do? How can we get creative? What can we try out? And we tried out a lot of things.”*

During the winter, Flow Festival grew less sure of whether they would be able to organize the festival in the summer of 2021. *“Once we got to January, the situation changed quite heavily.”* As seen from Simon’s comments, many international artists cancelled their tours for 2021. *“So that was the first thing that happened in early 2021, early this year. International acts started, well not cancel, but to move them for the next year”* (Katariina). As it became apparent that a normal festival could not be arranged in the summer, Flow Festival started planning different events they might be able to host. The events were planned with various restrictions in mind. *“So, I have been building eight different kinds of concepts for different kinds of pandemic scenarios. So, I have been doing absolutely nothing that has to do with the original or like the regular Flow Festival.”* Shortly after the interview with Katariina, the news broke that Flow Festival had cancelled their event for 2021. We reached out to Katariina via email to inquire more about the decision. *“The biggest factor for not going for even any of the smaller capacity event plans was the program. Flow is all about international acts and at this point, it seems that there will be no tours this summer as most of the European festivals have been cancelled. As the content of the festival is the most important reason for us to organize it, we do not want to produce an event that we are not fully proud of.”* They are now planning a small club event in the fall, but none of the planned scenarios will be used.

Challenges and new processes

The pandemic meant that companies in the music industry had to face new challenges and tackle problems that had not existed before. To overcome these, the music professionals had to adopt new strategies and processes.

Releasing new music was a topic often discussed in the interviews. Many bands postponed the release of their album in 2020 but then decided to release them after all as there did not seem to be an end to the pandemic in sight. Although not being able to market the album with a tour might negatively affect sales numbers, bands “*can just not release for a year*” (Alex).

Iivari was originally going to release his band’s new album in spring 2020, but they wanted to postpone the release as the pandemic hit. “*We delayed it until the autumn. We were thinking about delaying even more, but we talked to the label and decided that there is no point in keeping the album not released for more time because we do not have shows, so we cannot engage with the audience that way. And if we do not release anything new either, that just means that we do not get any exposure anywhere. So that is a lot worse than releasing the album, and not being able to promote it with gigs.*” (Iivari) This is in line with Alex’s comment about artists having to release new content constantly.

Simon had also initially postponed many album releases but decided to release them later anyways: “*We had two major albums that were coming out during the pandemic: One was scheduled for May and one for June, then we moved one to October and one to January.*” Pushing the release date back meant that they had more time to market the releases, which had a positive impact on the sales: “*So we basically worked the same two major releases four times. Which was interesting on one side because we could do way more on the marketing side, which led to much bigger sales, funny enough. But on the other hand, you just do work that does not really pay off.*” Simon was also worried about not being able to utilize the momentum from the release by not playing shows. And as it is uncertain how long the pandemic will last, it might be that the traction gained from the releases will have died down when the bands start touring. “*The question is, how long does the success of the album actually hold? To turn into something bigger in the live sector?*”

In some cases, the absence of live shows had also affected streaming negatively. Anssi mentioned that his roster’s streaming numbers had dropped during the pandemic, and that discouraged his artists from releasing music: “*Their streams have dropped. And it is really hard for musicians [in my roster] to have reasons to release new material.*”

Because the pandemic changed the landscape so drastically, companies have needed to change their approach to their work tasks. Fabienne’s company was not focused on digital marketing pre-pandemic, but this has changed. As it has become more challenging to do PR and be directly in touch with journalists, digital marketing has proven to be an efficient way to navigate the situation. “*We are doing more traditional online marketing these days. And like actual PR, where we used to be in*

touch with a journalist and press and recommend them music. [...] This has totally stopped.” As Fabienne’s company has been viewed as a PR company, their customers have not approached them with digital marketing services in mind before. *“The bands would rather pay us for traditional promo.”* This has changed during the pandemic. Now the company uses the budgets given by clients in digital marketing. *“And now we just take a part of what they used to pay for us and put it into online marketing. So, there is kind of a shift of where we invest the money that is being paid for.”* Although this new approach has been working, Fabienne feels like they have lost something in the process: *“I would say we promote them more on a non-personal level, like not really talking about the music anymore, but just like sending stuff through hoping that someone will like it.”*

In the spring of 2020, Alex’s business experienced some slower periods as well, and he utilized his time to take a look at Latch as a whole and see how the company could be improved. *“I do not think actually, from an organizational point of view, I would have been able to grow the business without having to sit down and just be like, you are sat at this desk all week. [...] But really, that manifested itself from March to May. And I sat down, and I was like, ‘Okay, so how do we really make this thing future proof?’”* He worked with independent artists until now but decided to take on more work from major labels. His client base used to be *“100% independent artists, and now it is somewhere like 50-60%.”* Alex even decided to take on some non-music clients.

Like Fabienne, Latch also started doing more digital marketing during this time. This was a change both for the company and their clients: *“I sort of labeled spending a lot more money on digital marketing, like running paid ads. And artists too, actually something that they had to get to grips with, that they have not really done before on the scale.”*

New side projects

As the pandemic stripped many music industry professionals of work, they had to look for alternative sources of revenue. Both Iivari and Anssi mentioned that they have started doing production jobs now that their everyday work had taken a hit. *“I mean, I have had to find other ways to earn some income. I have had to start doing production again.”* (Anssi) Iivari emphasized that he probably would not have taken these jobs if the times were normal: *“I have been able to get a few gigs outside of my band, mixing other people for labels. And I do not think I would have been able to do that without the pandemic. I think I would not have put effort into that.”*

Not all projects the interviewees took on during the pandemic were aimed to gain more revenue. Iivari reported that he had a lot more free time during the pandemic, and he had started several music projects for fun: *“I have got a lot more free time. Also, for doing other fun projects with music.”* Others also started working on issues they found important or exciting. Fabienne had spent time working with Indie Suisse, the independent labels’ association in Switzerland. The pandemic had uncovered problems in the music industry and made Fabienne realize how important it is to stay connected with others in the industry. *“If things are not working the way we want them to work, we have to help them and make things change so it is better for the industry. [...] So, I am just investing a bit more time in all the background work and networking, kind of trying to shift things. We talked about lobbying and talking to politics, etc., with this association. [...] I think everyone realized how important it is that you are connected and that you are in a team. Because alone, you just do not have any power. So, I think the pandemic really showed everybody how important that is.”* (Fabienne) Simon was also involved in communicating to policymakers how the restrictions affect the cultural industry and how widespread the effects might be. He had been vocal about how valuable the sector is to the Swiss economy but put extra efforts into this during the pandemic. *“I became an accountant-politician-mix. So, my daily work really became secondary. I had to focus on how do we get money and do my political work to keep an eye on the politics that decides over everything. [...] I was involved early enough with the cultural department because it was always important for me to tell them what the culture department... or what we do means for the whole society. [...] As soon as the pandemic started, I had to make them aware [of] what this means for not only the industry that we are, but also for everybody involved; what it means to shut it down. So that was a big part of my work.”* (Simon)

Communication

The pandemic changed the way people communicate with each other. Suddenly, it was impossible to meet people face-to-face, which had implications for music industry professionals' work. Many interviewees mentioned how not meeting and connecting with people during the pandemic affected their work immensely.

Alex was an outlier among the other interviewees in that his business was thriving during the pandemic. His greatest challenge was not the question if he will have work during this time but being able to do all the work remotely. All the normal processes of communicating with stakeholders had to be reinvented. *“But in terms of how it affected us specifically, it was not really whether the work was there or not. It was more ‘Can everyone get this work done without doing it how they would*

normally do it'. Like if you were normally PRing a track, you might go out and have coffee with some writers or meet some people or go to a gig or you would have a showcase. Or, I do not know, if you are a radio plugger you go for in-person meetings at say the BBC. And you will play the track live, and you will look at the producer's face and see if they like it or hate it. And then you will figure it out from there. And then everyone had to transition to doing everything remotely via email or Zoom calls. And that was a process. Adjusting to doing the mechanics of the work in a completely different environment. That was difficult. But the work coming in was fine. And also the other thing, like from a top down point of view, trying to keep everyone incentivized, and enjoying the work for the whole calendar year with no reprieve. That has been the biggest task, I think.” (Alex)

livari mentioned that he could not network within the industry during the pandemic, and it worried him: “Networking with other artists and labels and venues and promoters is such a big part of the music industry and as a producer or an artist. [...] And that is not a thing [currently]. So that worries me. Such a big part of building your audience and making opportunities in the industry is meeting new people in the industry.”

4.4 New Products

Live streaming during the pandemic

Perhaps the most prevalent new product to surface during the pandemic was live streaming concerts. This was probably a natural evolution from not being able to gather many people in the same area. When discussing funding given out for development projects, Simon had the opinion that there is only so much you can invent within the space: *“You know, when working with music, there is nothing you can actually really evolve.”* He then went on to mention live streaming, as one possibility.

Many artists took on this new trend and played live concerts online. Anssi talked about this in the interview: *“There was a kind of [live] streaming boom, in... since the pandemic started, and everybody was really excited about the streaming possibilities.”* Streaming could be one way to gain revenue and connect with fans. And as there are no constraints in terms of space, streamed concerts could, in a best-case scenario, attract larger audiences than a regular live concert could.

Multiple of our interviewees had experience with live stream concerts from 2020. Anssi had held numerous small-scale concerts and one bigger live stream concert at a venue with a film crew on set. *“The [live] streams that I have done have mostly been from rehearsal spaces. [...] And I have done one bigger [live] stream in a proper venue with proper gear and sold tickets.”* Simon had also held several live stream concerts with his artists but offered them for free for everyone to see. *“All the*

[live]streams we did last year, they were basically free, because I wanted to see how this goes and use it as a marketing aspect of it. And also see how does [the] technology keep up with it.” As many were live streaming concerts for the first time, there can be failures in the technical department. Simon did not want to risk charging the audience and then not being able to deliver a product that would match the price of the ticket. Iivari had yet to play any live stream shows but had agreed to play one in the near future. *“We did agree to one live stream gig coming this spring. That works like a normal gig. We all go to Joensuu (city) and they pay us pretty much our normal gig fee. And we go there to play a few songs for the live stream. [...] There are going to be a few artists that are playing stripped down shows. So, we are going to go there and play a few songs.”* Initially, his band was not too keen on accepting live stream invitations but decided to take this one on as restrictions did not allow playing other types of shows. *“We got offered a few [live stream concerts]. But at that time, there were so many of them. And we just thought that it is not worth it. We still had the tour coming up and everything. So, we knew that we were going to play live shows, so we just did not do it.”*

Opinions about live streaming in the industry

Despite the possibilities streaming could provide, the interviewees were not very optimistic about the future of live streaming. This was due to many factors – profitability, fees and taxation, and the lack of human connection at the event.

First, revenue: Anssi organized numerous live stream concerts, but they were not great successes in monetary terms. Like Simon, Anssi did not charge anything for the smaller live streams played in rehearsal studios. The one concert Anssi organized and sold tickets for was not an economic success either. As mentioned earlier, he got a grant for organizing the live stream show, and only with the help of that grant were they able to not lose money on the show. Second, Simon commented on the fact that as the live stream audiences can be international, the organizer has to take into account all national tax laws. In addition to taxes, copyright organizations take their cut from the ticket price, too. *“Let us say a show costs 20 Euros. You have to pay VAT to every country you sell a ticket to. So, either the platform does it or in my case, I do it. So, there is no rule right now because a usual ticket is 7.7% in Switzerland. But on a digital ticket, there is no rule. So, they said okay, we charge 19%. I said okay, since nobody knows, I have to calculate with 19 or 30%, depending on what the VAT is in each country, because nobody knows. And then TONO in our case or SUISA comes, they are like, hold on, you need to pay us for every sold ticket 15%. I was like, why do you not do anything? Well, that is just how it is. There is no law, but you have to pay. But then you can imagine when there is 20*

*Euros, you have to pay 15% to SUISA, and you have to calculate with about 25% paying VAT, so 45% of your income is just gone. And that is not covered, that is just for somebody that opens his hand and does not do anything. So doing a quality stream paying, you know, sh*tloads of money I have offers here from Switzerland, it is just not valuable anymore. It just kills everything.”* (Simon)

The lack of clear legislation on who needs to be paid and how large the share makes it hard to organize a live show and charge for it. However, the third and perhaps the biggest issue with live stream concerts with the interviewees is that the medium does not entirely convince them. Live stream concerts lack the essential characteristic of a typical live show: the lack of crowd leaves the artists and watchers wanting more. Katariina discussed her opinions of live streaming shows at Flow Festival: *“This is my favorite topic. I hate streaming. [... The] whole idea of the festival is to bring people together. So, it [streaming] does not really work. We could do some content, but it would be for other purposes than what Flow is all about. It is all about bringing people together, offering experiences and offering a world of utopia. In the sense that you are three days somewhere else, like detached from your everyday life and reality. So, you cannot really do that with a [livestream]. Like it is not bringing anything extra value, what we want to give to our audience.”*

Anssi's notions are in line with Katariina's. He thinks that although he was excited about the possibilities of live stream shows, in the beginning, the result has been very lacking compared to a regular concert. People watch a live stream from their homes; a typical concert is a social gathering with many additional activities connected to it. *“[Live streams are] never going to replace real live shows. I may sound like a boomer, but I do not think... It is what I said – it [a live show] is such a different social experience and it [a live stream] is just not the same. If you think of a live show, it is kind of the highlight of the day. You make every plan around the real live show. [...] There are a lot of things happening outside or around the real live show. You go to a restaurant before the gig after. Or you go to a nightclub. You go to the merchandise stand. You talk with people, you meet new people, drink some beers... It is just not the same. I was really excited about the streaming things. And I was really, really excited about the AR and VR things. And I really thought that they are really coming now when the pandemic got here. But it is just not ready, or the people are not ready or whatever is not ready, but it is just... it is not going to replace real ones unfortunately.”* He further mentioned that the bigger show he did was not so successful that he would do it again. He mainly organized live streams with his artists so that there would be something to do during this time. *“It is better to do those shows than do nothing. But it is still like, I do not feel the artists are too excited about them. Well, they have nothing else to do. So just to keep the spirit alive and have a little income.”* (Anssi)

These are very negative notions. None of the interviewees mentioned being very excited about the possibilities of live streaming concerts in the future. It seems most treat it as a product that will help artists get over this challenging period of time but has no chance of replacing live shows once the pandemic has passed.

Live streaming in the future

In order for live streams to be a viable option for live concerts in the future, they would have to offer something a live concert cannot. If they are just a lesser version of a traditional show, they might not sell well after the pandemic. Simon commented on the topic: *“From the beginning, when this came up, I said, like, we have to build this in a different way. That the media is completely different than the live shows. What you need to offer is basically a movie to people because they sit in front of a TV, so they need to experience the difference. So, if there is a distinct difference between a live show and the stream concert, then I think it has a chance to stay. If the content you offer for a stream show, during live is going on, then it has a value to be there and the value to be paid for. What if you offer the same thing? virtually that you offer live? Why should somebody pay for it? That is a little bit... the tricky thing about the stream thing.”*

Many interviewees compared live stream shows to traditional concerts as if live stream shows would replace traditional concerts. But perhaps live streaming does not have to replace traditional shows. Some of the interviewees entertained the idea that live streaming could be an additional product alongside traditional concerts in the future. Before cancelling the festival for the summer of 2021, Katariina discussed the possibility of streaming some smaller events for those that could not attend: *“We have discussed it as an additional feature. If we can organize any kind of event this summer, let it be like concerts for 2000 people even. Then we discussed that we could have streaming from the festival area. So that could be for the people who could not be there. But as a primary product, no.”* Anssi had the same notion and added that many venues have already purchased the technology: *“It can come as a side product. Some venues have invested in cameras and streaming tech. So, it can come as a side product for people that cannot come to the show or it is sold out, or there is a possibility for a band to do a live DVD or something like that. I hope that it will stay in some form, but it will not be the main form. For me.”*

Live stream concerts could perhaps supplement traditional live shows – tickets could be sold to people who otherwise could not attend. Live streams could just be an additional feature to add on top of a concert, not something that is supposed to replace them. If live streams are here to stay, the legislation

and fees need to be sorted out. Simon felt like there are going to be many issues if there is no clear legislation and regulation for live streams: *“Technology is always the first thing that is really fast adapting, but the laws and all the other companies that profit from it, they come right after and that is where the mess is going to start.”* Creating clear guidelines for organizers would make it easier to host live stream shows in the future and make sure everyone is treated fairly.

4.5 Government

The fifth theme revolves around the help governments have provided to the cultural sector and how the music professionals have perceived the government during this time. Due to the pandemic, the cultural industries, especially the live industry, have been greatly affected. Companies were forced to either forfeit revenues or at least adapt to a new standard of work. The governments of the different chosen cases have taken various measures to help companies and individuals affected by the pandemic.

Help received from governments

As for Switzerland, both interviewees were able to apply for *Kurzarbeit* (short-term work¹) for team members in departments that were affected by government restrictions. Simon’s company additionally received compensation for live shows of his artists that fell through. Alex, who is active in the UK, was not able to apply for any grants, as his company did not match the criteria of the government: *“Aside from me, everyone works on a consultancy basis freelance. A lot of the grants are tied to how many people you have on your payroll. We need two or three people on the payroll to qualify for the grant or something like that.”* The Finnish interviewees all shared different answers: Flow Festival was able to get a grant of over €750,000 from the Finnish government as the festival was cancelled in 2020 and additionally got financial support to organize a Corona-safe concept in 2021, Iivari was able to receive a working fund for an album production for one of his projects and Anssi received around 3,000 from the Finnish government in summer 2020 which is meant to last a year for him. Additionally, Anssi got financial support for a live stream concert that he organized for a band. These funds are understood that the receivers do not have to pay back the money to the government. However, Fabienne’s company has applied for and received a credit of around €90,000 that needs to be

¹ Short-term work (STW) is defined by the European Commission as *“public programmes that allow firms experiencing economic difficulties to temporarily reduce the hours worked while providing their employees with income support from the State for the hours not worked”* (European Commission, 2020, Explanatory Memorandum).

paid back at a certain point. Fabienne stressed, though, that the money is more meant to be for security: “[...] it is something that we would rather not touch, like, you know, in the best of cases, we just keep it there until we are safe. And then we give it back. Because if we touch it, we need to make it [the money] again to pay back.” Furthermore, Fabienne applied with her company to receive around €27,000 from the canton² the company is based in; however, the approval for this money is still pending at the time of the interview. Also, Katariina at Flow Festival is waiting for additional cancellation funds for 2021. Anssi applied for further funds as well and is expecting to receive between €4,000 and €8,000. Iivari is planning to apply for additional funds as well. The Swiss interviewees mentioned a program introduced by the government called *Transformationsprojekte* (transformation projects), which provides monetary aid to companies that transformed their business because of the pandemic. While Fabienne’s company worked on a dossier and handed it an application to this program, Simon stands critical to it and is not sure how to apply for this money.

When it comes to the sufficiency of this government support, both Simon and Katariina point out that these funds were received very late. “So you must have a lot of cash flow to go through it” (Simon). Still, the amount of money that Flow Festival received was enough to cover the losses of the 2020 edition and helped them start planning 2021 as if it were a typical year. Fabienne also explained that the money they have received was sufficient for the time being, but depending on how long the pandemic will last, it might not be enough. Iivari clarifies that he is in a lucky position to be a student still and receiving student funding from the Finnish government, which helps him get through this time. Hence, the fund he received is sufficient for the time being. Anssi explained that the €3,000 were supposed to last for a year without any other income. Therefore, he eagerly hopes to receive the funds that are still pending. He stressed that it is essential and necessary for him to receive this additional money.

Furthermore, the money Anssi received for the live stream concert was just enough to cover the costs. However, it was impossible to make profits with the show. Simon shared the same standpoint and said that only covering the expenses might not be enough for this industry: “[...] they [the grants] are not sufficient because most grants to my experience, [...] what they still do is they value, what do you need to survive, not what you earn. So you cannot build reserves to do investments for periods, [when] you do not have shows, or you know, to hire somebody else when you want to build this part of the company a little bit more. So this support solely gets you through the day.”

² A canton is a subdivision of a country established for political or administrative purposes. Switzerland is divided into 26 of these.

Opinions about governments' efforts

Finally, both Anssi and Katariina shared their perception of the Finnish government connected with how they have been treating freelancers. Anssi clarified that freelancers had not received enough support from the government. He mentioned that some people have not received any money in over 400 days and that the government does not understand the expanse of the music industry in Finland and how it works. Katariina said that the fact that freelancers do not have a social welfare structure is not solved with money but that the values must change: “[...] *it [freelancers in the music industry] is silent work. It is something that people do not see when it does not make any sound. [...] And we are trying to bring the microphone closer to get people to listen. But I do not think that there is one way to solve it. But it is more like an ethical thing and more like a conversation thing. I would hope, for example, from our government, that it would distinguish the whole music industry and the whole event industry.*” After Flow Festival was cancelled, the Finnish government announced a €230 million support package to help the cultural industries. However, the team around the festival has not budgeted any support money as they are unsure if and when that money will be made available. Furthermore, the proposed package value will not be enough to help the people in this sector in Finland. “*Yes, there is a promise but no real actions yet. Finnish cultural industry has suffered more than 500 million Euros loss during the past year so 230 million Euros is nice but not enough*” (Katariina).

Fabienne said that the initial support for artists, clubs, venues, and festivals was executed well in Switzerland; however, industry-related sectors necessary for music but are not really considered culture were overlooked. “*But it [the grants] is also not a very prosperous economical thing. So, there is kind of nothing. So, you have these projects like this transformational thing. So, you have to write huge dossiers and do, you know, big applications, which is always kind of annoying because you need this time to work and not to write these things. You know, so I think for a country that is as rich as Switzerland, and where there is so much money, it will be quite harsh for some companies, which are not working like we do.*” (Fabienne)

In contrast, Simon has been in close contact with politicians in Switzerland from the beginning. He understood that the politicians do not understand how the music industry works because they never cared about this sector before. With help from an external firm, Simon and the government started figuring out what it means to really get help.

4.6 Perceptions

This theme focuses on how the interviewees perceived the effects of the pandemic on others and how they and consumers perceived the music industry during the pandemic.

The effects on other stakeholders

To start, it is said that consumer spending shifted away from the live sector to other things. Alex found that especially major labels that already set budgets for 2020 reinvested the live event money on digital marketing campaigns, especially paid ads on social media. In Fabienne's experience, consumers who could not pay for a live experience invested more money in purchasing records. Compared to Alex' opinion, Fabienne said that bands were aware that they would not tour for some time and therefore would not get paid. However, Fabienne explained that most of the semi-professional bands still have a day job next to music in Switzerland. So, if someone is a part-time teacher, they would still be able to afford Irascible's PR work, so in her perception, there are not many bands that could not afford their services anymore. Besides that, she pointed out that the traditional media has been hit hard by the pandemic, which in turn affected her PR work. Alex further described that artists had used the digital sphere and apps like Tik Tok to create content to engage with fans during the pandemic. This leads to artists being pressured to produce creative content regularly even when the resonance is not as satisfying as a live show. *"You could play a support slot for a relatively big band and pick up 500 or 600 fans at the end of the night. To do that, you might have to make like 20-30 short-form videos. It is a lot of work"* (Alex). Anssi mentioned that people have also been working on projects they did not have time for before COVID-19. But also clarified that he was lucky to have at least work to do compared to others who might be out of work for over 400 days already.

The popular Finnish artist Paula Vesala was vocal about this and addressed the Finnish government about this issue. *"It is not just the top artists that are suffering because they cannot play gigs. They have 10s of people maybe, not hundreds, but 10s of people working for them as tech techs and roadies and drivers and everything. Also that companies that you rent all the equipment for the shows do not get any like income"* (Iivari). Anssi explained the state of the cultural industry in Finland, saying that entrepreneurs from big firms had to find another job as they had to sell their house or even the company to pay the bills and stay alive. This also affected the health of people working in the industry. The time during the pandemic has been depressing and filled with anxiety as for a lot of people. It is still uncertain what will happen next autumn, in the summer, or even next month. It will take them a long time to get back to normal, if ever, which is something that needs to be considered. Also, Iivari

shared that he felt less creative during the pandemic, and Katariina said that the pandemic had changed her perception of herself: *“[The pandemic] has made me realize how much I reflect myself through the people I meet. And as most of the people are from this industry, the music industry, and now when I do not see them at all, like only my teammates through Google Hangouts, it kind of reflects to myself. I am seeing myself as a totally different person.”*

Perception of the music industry

When it comes to how people perceive the music industry at the time of the interviews, Alex and Simon shared the same opinion. The longer the pandemic goes on, the fewer people seem to be interested in staying in front of a screen. It is fatiguing to only engage with the things you like and interact with through a phone. *“Okay, that [scrolling through your phone] is fun for a second. And then you pick it back up again, you are like, why have I been on my phone for four hours? So, yeah, I think hopefully, we will see a lot more in-person engagement. And I think that helps to build the stickiness for an artist and a fan”* (Alex). According to Simon, the declining engagement rate is also coming from the lack of representation. The industry is not present in people’s eyes since they cannot go out or enjoy a concert, so they have to look for something else to do. Anssi further explained that it is not only the missing concerts that impact the engagement but also that people do not see each other, do not listen to music together, and do not recommend music to each other. Therefore, they do not spend a lot of time finding new music.

Katariina and Fabienne both mentioned that their social environment is a bubble filled with music enthusiasts who cannot wait to go back to see live shows and are missing this social aspect of the music industry. Iivari also wants to think that people are going back to normal as soon as possible. But he also referred to the uncertainty in these times. *“But who knows? During the summer in Helsinki, there were quite a few gigs with restrictions and everything, and people did go. So, I hope it [the pandemic] will not affect their attitudes towards music and live shows in the future. But there might be a short transition period after the gigs start rolling again”* (Iivari).

When it comes to their own perception of the music industry, the interviewees shared a variety of opinions. As the cultural industries were the first ones to close and will be the last ones to open, the situation seemed hopeless if nothing can be done. That led Simon to question the necessity of the industry: *“Well, is what we do really central to life? Is it just something nice to have? You know, so my perception of myself within the music industry, I always found myself being like, yeah, I think we do some important work. But by the end of the day, if you think about it, do we really?”* But in the

end, he is sure that what his company is doing is essential as entertainment is a big part of social interactions. Anssi shares this thought and wants the government to recognize that their jobs are real and meaningful jobs. Even if he is not happy with the situation right now, the passion for working in this industry is still with him. For Fabienne, the biggest realization was that even though she does not work with live music, everything she does is still somehow connected to it. Going to a record release at the end of a day to see how the PR work has paid off is satisfying. Without that, it would not make a difference whether she promotes music or some hygiene product. *“Without the shows, it [work] really makes less sense. It is way more of an office job. I really realized how much I enjoy working with my team or with people or with strange people that I have not known before, like running into someone or organizing an event and suddenly you are in a room with 20 people that you had not met before.”* (Fabienne) Finally, Alex described that he perceives the music industry as more reflective than it was before. The industry and the way it operates have been criticised, and the mental health aspect of the industry is widely discussed now. The question occurs if the real incentive should be to go back to how it was before, where 95% of artists are not able to make a living. There should be a discussion about how artists can take more advantage of what they are creating.

The pandemic helped to get people more into the direct to fan and subscription products. Artists got more comfortable with creating content and special physical products, and the artist makes a variety of them. Before the pandemic, many artists were falling in one sphere of content, while now these boundaries have been lifted. *“You know, there are a lot of artists getting comfortable making different modes of content, which was not happening before. You had artists falling into, like one sphere of content, which would be: I am an artist that automates short-form video, or I am an artist that makes long-form video on Instagram TV, or, I am an artist to post a lot, lots of my stories, or I do a lot of like, playing demos on Instagram Live. And now artists are kind of thinking I could do a bit of all of that stuff - makes it more interesting for me and for my fans.”* (Alex)

4.7 Future

Work after the pandemic

With ever-changing restrictions by different governments and the pandemic not being under control, forecasting the future of the music industry seems undoable. *“I really do not know what has changed before we can get the live shows happening again”* (Anssi). For the future of Flow Festival, Katariina believed that a strong team and staying true to their brand would continue to help them operate in the future. Further, big festivals like Flow need a year to prepare. If the vaccine numbers are looking

promising during the summer of 2021, then 2022 could be a good year. However, Alex was not as content about going back to *business as usual*. Being indoors, locked down alone or only with close acquaintances, and deciding what to do with the time is different from how it was before. “[Artists think:] I have got to go play that festival, then get to the studio, then go do an interview, then go do like a radio session. Coping with all of that stuff was wild before. And it is going to be way more wild now after a year of not doing any of it. Getting back into that pattern of living how we were living before, and just going 100 miles an hour all week is going to be tough” (Alex).

Moreover, Fabienne’s company has used the urgency of the situation to build up a position and focus more on digital marketing during the pandemic. For her, this is an addition to their daily work that will not disappear once the industry gets back to normal. It has become substantial to the company’s workflow as Irascible has been shifting away from traditional PR work to digital over the past five years already. Fabienne further explained that due to the restrictions and working from home, the software to connect online is now set in place for many companies, making the home office more manageable and more available in the future. In connection to this, she hopes that flying to London to meet two people will not be the norm in the future but can be replaced by online communication services, improving the ecological perspective for her work in the industry.

As new social media platforms have been growing during the pandemic, Alex does not think that the engagement will stay the same after the pandemic. Especially *Clubhouse*, an app that lets you listen to scheduled live conversations, is an app that will probably not succeed when actual meetings and conferences will be able to take place again. Also, the music listening behaviour of people will change again as social gatherings are allowed again. “But honestly, who knows, we might all spend less time listening to music. Once we are back in - because we are making up for lost time socializing or making up for lost time, like just having dinner with people, you know” (Alex).

The industry after the pandemic

When talking about the future of the industry as a whole, a majority of the interviewees were cautious with industry forecasts. Simon was convinced that the industry would take on speed again, and so do the rest of the professionals. However, some have the uncertainty of the economic consequences: In Finland, companies went bankrupt, and freelancers have chosen other career paths. Concert venues have closed down and Anssi mentioned that no one knows for sure how many festivals will survive this summer. Simon shared that what will be left behind by the pandemic is unknown. Therefore, even the steep learning curve that has occurred during the pandemic is questionable if it will bring

any value when life gets back to normal. Iivari mentioned that it will take the industry a long time to recover because this knowledge is lost.

Considering the live sector, Anssi explained that ticket sales are not going well now, although the industry hopes to get back for autumn or even during late summer. Also, Fabienne's perception was that smaller venues might have a better chance as it might be easier to find 200 people to go to a concert rather than 5,000. Katariina forecasted the economic situation for the live sector in Finland as problematic, especially if ticket prices for festivals keep going up. She clarified that most deals they have with artists include flights, transportation, and local hospitality, and especially flights are expected to become more expensive in the future. She also anticipated that the artist budget will go up, at least in the short term, as artists were not able to invoice anything for two years now. But prices for live events, especially for festivals, seem to be already at the maximum. *"Everything is going to be more expensive. It is also the suppliers. It is going to be more expensive in the years to come. So it is interesting to see how the economy rebuilds itself. It is not only the festival or live music scene, it is everything, like for example, the transportations and the flights and such. What happens and how long can the Central Bank of Europe, you know, pump it up, the money. So, how the economy in the big picture is gonna change after the pandemic. We are not an island. Even though Finland is an island, we are not an island as a live music industry."* (Katariina) Also, Iivari saw how in the future organizing live events could take up more resources, like risk management and safety concepts will take up time and money to implement. *"I think the music industry as a whole has done so much to play by the book with the corona restrictions and everything that I think for some time some of the measures will be implemented into the festivals and stuff like that"* (Iivari). Additionally, Fabienne mentions that in the PR sector, the way of working will also change for good: *"I don't think that the traditional media is going to recover, you know, amazingly, and then hire tons of music journalists again."*

When talking about the adaptability of creative industries in times of uncertainty, Simon mentioned that technology constantly evolves before applicable legislation will come in place. And second that there is always a certain kind of holdback from the consumers and users. *"It needs one generation to change something. That is what we are kind of animals. Unfortunately. You see, streaming is the best example. It is still widely not accepted. But if you look at the age group that accept streaming compared to those who do not accept it, you see clearly that the generation who grew up with it. They do not have an issue with it. Everybody who comes from a world from before has an issue with it."* (Simon)

5. Discussion

In the discussion, the gained knowledge through the literature review will be connected to the data gathered during the research to answer the research questions and enhance the research around the state of the music industry during the COVID-19 pandemic. This particular research answers how the pandemic has affected music industry professionals' work processes and how they have expanded their use of the digital sphere to generate revenues during the pandemic. A variety of reports were released to picture the status quo of the music industry. However, they have mainly been quantitative research focusing on the macro-scale of the industry, and if the human factor was included, it was mostly limited to the artist's perspective. Hence, this research wanted to focus on music industry professionals and their experiences during these times.

Revenue losses

Five of the six people interviewed for this study reported having experienced revenue losses during the pandemic. The revenue losses were the largest within the live sector, where both Anssi and Simon said having lost 70-80% of their revenue compared to the year before. This is in line with the study made by EY, which estimated that the revenue losses experienced by the industry in 2020 would be 76%.

These numbers are devastating. Even though Anssi has lost such a large portion of his income, he still considered himself one of the lucky ones – he had heard stories of people not getting any revenue for 400 days or selling their houses to keep the business afloat during the pandemic.

The cancellation of virtually all live shows affected the revenues of artists significantly. Top artists can get up to 75% of their income from playing live (Sanchez, 2017), and this revenue stream naturally has been compromised during the pandemic. While independent artists get only 18% (Mulligan & Jopling, 2020) of their revenues from live shows, it could be argued that the negative impacts for independent artists have been far more significant than 18%. Many of their revenue streams are directly tied to being able to play live – not only do they get the concert fees and copyright fees, and merchandise revenue. Merchandise and record sales in the industry have decreased by 35% (EY, 2021). Iivari and Simon both also mentioned that not selling merchandise during the shows has negatively affected their revenues.

The restrictions on live events do not only hurt artists but everyone working in the sector. As Iivari mentioned in his interview, touring artists have techs, roadies, drivers, and many other people working for them. In addition to them, artists managers, booking agents, venues, and festivals have had their share of revenue losses, too.

Flow Festival has cancelled its event two years in a row. They get 70% of their revenue from ticket sales. Despite cancelling the events, the company has fixed costs and had already spent money organizing the event. As they have either needed to refund the tickets or allow the customers to use them in the next festival, Flow Festival's primary source of revenue has been compromised, too. In 2020, they were able to get a fund that covered their losses, but at the time of the interview, they were still waiting for the fund for 2021.

To an extent, Alex and Fabienne's businesses seemed to be safeguarded against the effects of the pandemic. Both mentioned that their companies had money coming in during the spring of 2020, as their clients had already set their budgets for the year and bought services. Alex even managed to grow the company and increase their overheads during this time. While Fabienne did not share exact numbers, she mentioned that the fall of 2020 was exceptionally slow. Some areas, for example, the distribution, of her business suffered because of the pandemic. She noted that as their clients, mostly independent artists, had low revenues during 2020, they did not have the money to invest in Fabienne's services. In Alex and Fabienne's case, it was interesting to see how their revenues were affected. Although they offer similar services, Alex shifted their client base from only having independent artists to including major labels. This move, along with not working directly within the live sector, might be the reason why Alex's company was able to do so well during this time. Fabienne also mentioned that she knew she could have made more money if she took on work from major labels but did not want to, as her company is catered towards independent artists.

As people have been staying home more than usual, the use of streaming services was expected to increase. This has been estimated to increase streaming revenues by 8% compared to before the pandemic (EY, 2021). Alex commented in his interview that the industry streaming revenues did increase over the past 12 months and that the streaming revenues account for 70%-80% of the industry revenue. Iivari mentioned that their streaming revenues had increased but that it was difficult to judge the pandemic's effect. His bands streaming numbers have been steadily growing over time otherwise, too. Increasing streaming revenues have been a continuous trend in the whole industry, too. The industry streaming revenues had increased from €0.3 billion in 2004 to €10.5 billion in 2019. With this tre-

mendous increase in streaming revenues in mind, it is difficult to judge what kind of effect the pandemic has had on streaming revenues if they continue going up during this time. On the other hand, Anssi mentioned that the artists in his roster had experienced a decrease in streaming numbers. This might be due to not being able to play live and market the music that way.

Live streaming

As presented in the literature review, many artists took on this new trend and played live concerts online. Mainstream artists like Dua Lipa organized a high-end show that cost \$1.5 million to produce and attracted hundreds of thousands of listeners. Meanwhile, independent artists have organized other smaller streaming concerts. As promising as this development sounds, the results of this research show that music industry professionals are somewhat sceptical about the economic sustainability of these concerts. First, for small artists, the proper organization of a live stream concert is financially not feasible: The organization is more costly than a traditional concert. The returns are way less. Even with a grant given for the live stream show organized by Anssi, they did not make any profit from it. It should be noted here that the costs might go down, as the knowledge and technology might already be in place after multiple live stream concerts. Second, the lack of clear legislation on who needs to be paid for what and how large the share of these payments are makes it hard to manage and organize such a live show and charge money for it. Additionally, the interviewees miss the lack of a crowd which is the essential characteristic of a typical live show. They are convinced that as soon as regular live shows are the norm again, digital concerts only exist when they explicitly offer another dimension to the product. Having a streaming show as a competing product to the traditional live shows is out of the question. However, the results show that the music professionals are not averse to using the streaming technology as an additional feature to enhance the live show for the people that cannot make it to the show and would still be willing to pay. Entirely abandoning streaming concerts would not make sense because specific venues have already invested in the necessary technology.

Accepting new technologies in the industry has taken a while in the past too. Perhaps live streaming will become more widely accepted as time goes by. In his interview, Simon mentioned that it would take a generation to change things in the industry. As explained in the literature review, disruptive technologies often face resistance from established players in the industry, but these technologies are also considered engines of development for the industry. There are still people who are opposed to streaming services like Spotify. According to him, people who have grown up with music streaming have no issues with it, but those in the industry before it. When digital downloads took over CD sales

and pirating music surfaced, music industry players focused on hindering the change. Educational anti-pirating programs were set up (Gillespie, 2009), and some even lobbied for denying access to the Internet for those who had downloaded files on the Internet.

The digital sphere

In connection to this, Baig et al. (2020) found that in the spring of 2020, the world has undergone technological progress of five years in a period of three months. Music professionals have used the urgency of the situation to take a step back and optimize their companies. Fabienne from Irascible used this time to establish a digital marketing department in the company, whereby this change is here to stay. Furthermore, Fabienne thinks technological progress will help with international meetings and remote working. Also, Alex took a step back to review the company to see how they do their best work. In the end, their clients changed quite a bit as they started working with major labels rather than independent artists. This led to more group work within Latch and less but better paid projects throughout the year. But there are also critical voices saying that the steep learning curve might be questionable because it is uncertain if these things will bring any value after the pandemic. Besides that, with people leaving the industry and companies disappearing, it is unknown if the technology growth can balance the knowledge that is lost on the way.

Mulligan & Jopling (2020) explain that musicians have used the digital sphere during the pandemic to market themselves and create more content. As presented in our results, Alex backs this up. The artists got more comfortable with apps like Tik Tok that let them engage with their fans during the pandemic. Furthermore, the variety of content a particular artist puts out grew. This means that an artist might have been good at marketing themselves on Instagram or generated engagement through short-form videos. At the same time, now they seem to be more comfortable doing a variety of these things. However, while the consumer enjoys this during the pandemic, it is fatiguing. They might substitute that time spent on a mobile phone with real social interaction as soon as possible again.

Moreover, Mulligan & Jopling (2020) say that almost half of the artists released more music than usual, although many projects were put on hold due to the pandemic. However, this cannot be seen in the data collected. Although Simon put out the previously postponed albums, he shared that they performed well among other factors because they were not competing with as many artists as they usually would. Additionally, Iivari talked about how he felt less creative during this period of time, but he got to work on projects he would not have had the time for. However, in terms of his release schedule, there was not much that changed.

Effects on work

One of the main issues during the pandemic is that music professionals' work has no direct income, as Music Finland (2020a) described. Hundreds of shows had to be rescheduled, releases were postponed, and being in constant exchange with politicians and the government takes time and energy but leads to no direct revenues.

Music Finland (2020b) notes that music professionals are eager to get back to work and are hopeful about the future. However, we found that especially the professionals with work connected to live music are being cautious with making any predictions. For example, Simon has pushed almost all of the tour dates for his artists all the way to 2023. Only one tour is still scheduled for 2022, whereby this one will take place in one country, which makes the organization a little more certain. Also, Anssi is not sure what exactly has and is going to happen before traditional live shows can be organized again like they used to. In addition to that, also the interviewees who are not directly connected to the live music sector have voiced concerns. In connection to that, Alex talks about the music industry's *business as usual* and how that can be extremely tiring for people involved. Going back from being home alone to going “100 miles an hour all week” will be challenging and will take some adjustment time. These negative opinions are backed up by EY (2021) and Music Finland (2020b), whereby the latter mentions that many musicians do not think that the world is going back to normal before 2022 or 2023. In our research, the forecast might even be worse: With the know-how and companies lost along the way, the music industry's recovery might even take longer and will not be back at its full potential until a few years down the line. Despite the negative voices, Katariina is hoping that 2022 could be a good year if the vaccine campaigns and the handling of the virus will be successful during the summer of 2021, which is also in line with Savage (2021), who mentions that event organizers are feeling more optimistic than in 2020.

Between the negative and hopeful voices of industry professionals, Brunt & Nelligan (2020) found that music fans are eagerly waiting to go back. The data shows that the interviewees have the same perception of the audience. Katariina and Fabienne mention that in their social environment, people cannot wait to go back to see live shows and are missing the social aspect of the music industry.

While it is tough to predict just how long it will take for the industry to return to where it was pre-pandemic, some ques could be taken from the previous crises to hit the industry. Soon after the Spanish Flu pandemic passed, people flooded the concert halls again (Robin, 2020; Misland, 2020). It has to be noted that the situation now is very different, although the virus has similarities to the one a century ago. The understanding of viruses and how they spread has increased dramatically since the

Spanish Flu. Concert venues probably will not be fully opened before most people have been vaccinated in their respective countries.

Furthermore, live music was the primary way to enjoy music in the early 20th century. They did not have access to CDs, vinyl, or streaming services that we take for granted today. Because of these two reasons, it might take a bit longer before the concerts attract as many people as they did pre-pandemic. Finally, Ruusuvirta et al. (2021) mention that 76% of artists in Finland feel that COVID-19 impacted their work, and 22% have even considered a career change because of it. All our interviewees, even if they are not from Finland, mentioned that the pandemic impacted their work, which means that artists and music professionals had to endure the consequences of the restrictions. However, Iivari and Anssi have mentioned that they reconsidered working in the music industry. But in the end, as this industry is driven through passion, both do not see themselves working in another industry. This is aligning with the definition of the cultural industry that Caves (2000) describes. Even if success is not guaranteed, people still want to be creative, which is the property that Caves (2000) presents as art for art's sake.

6. Conclusion

This study answers the following questions:

RQ1: How has the pandemic affected music industry professionals' work processes?

RQ2: How have music industry professionals expanded their use of the digital sphere to generate revenues during the COVID-19 pandemic?

In order to answer the research questions, six qualitative interviews with music industry professionals were conducted. Enriched by literature about the state of the music industry, we were able to gain a deeper understanding of the effects of the pandemic on the music industry.

The first research question explores the pandemic's effect on the working process of music industry professionals. This research shows that all the studied cases feel some impact on their work processes. A major consequence of the pandemic were the revenue losses that have occurred due to the lack of live concerts. This led to most of the music professionals being dependent on government support. This means that the work processes of the music professionals focused on the exchange with politicians. Furthermore, the lack of economic security left the professionals working to survive as money for future investments is missing.

All industry players felt the lack of the live industry revenues, although the professionals that rely heavily on these revenues obviously suffered the most. The effect on work processes was that most of the work that was done did create no direct income from it. Tours and concerts were rescheduled, release dates for albums were postponed, and applications for government support were written. These tasks cost time and energy while not helping to secure economic stability. However, for festival organizers, the government grants helped to establish relatively normal work processes for organizing the 2021 festival. However, partnerships with brands sponsoring the event had to be renegotiated, and contracts with suppliers could not be approved to avoid prepayments in case the festival gets cancelled.

But even if the company was not directly involved with the live music industry, the effects were felt. While the beginning of the pandemic was running normally for those companies as contracts have already been made between them and the artists, the impacts were felt as the pandemic went on, and independent artists were running out of money. The workflow dried out as clients were not able to afford services like digital marketing or PR. One solution was to change the client base to more

prominent artists or major labels that have already set a budget for the year and had to reinvest the money for live music into something else.

The second research question sought to answer how the music industry professionals have used the digital sphere to generate revenues during the pandemic. In this research, it was found that companies that received most payments from traditional offline processes like PR have developed their business and now offer services that are tailored to the digital sphere, such as digital and social media marketing. In connection to this, artists have spent more time on social media to create and share content. Through this, artists could grow and strengthen the relationship with their fans and position themselves as a brand even more compared to before the pandemic. Hence, by creating content tailored to fans and having less competition due to the pandemic, better performance of music releases was observed. It will be interesting to see if these advantages will be translated into further revenues once the live music sector can operate again.

One of the main topics discussed in this research was the organization and execution of live streaming concerts. While prominent artists like Dua Lipa were able to spend and earn great amounts of money from live streams, independent and smaller artists had a hard time getting any revenue out of the medium. In addition to the lack of revenues, the overall opinion music industry professionals interviewed for this study had towards live streaming was negative. They did not consider this medium to be scalable as soon as traditional live concerts can be held again.

Although technology had a significant push throughout this pandemic, it must be noted that legislation takes a greater amount of time to be implemented. This is bothersome, especially when revenues should be made in the digital sphere. For worldwide ticket sales and collection of copyright revenues, an elaborate legal basis is necessary.

As already shown in the introductory quote, music industry professionals have not considered switching careers despite the situation being serious and somewhat helpless for some people. They have worked hard to be in the position they are in now and are passionate about the industry. It is still uncertain how long-lasting the effects of the pandemic on the industry are. However, the professionals are eagerly waiting for the live sector to reopen so they and everybody else can enjoy concerts again.

Research limitations and further research

Due to the nature of qualitative research, this study cannot provide a comprehensive view of the state of the music industry in Europe. Instead, the aim was to get a more detailed idea of how a select group of music industry professionals has experienced this time. The main problem with the timing of this research is that most reports for the year 2020 have not yet been released. Hence, the research could

have been enhanced by a more stable literature base for the year 2020, so the interviewees' experiences could have been studied in more depth and discussed more widely.

Furthermore, qualitative research is also vulnerable to attitudinal fallacy; as this research is purely based on the interviewee's perceptions, it is hard to understand and differ between what the people say they do and what they actually do. Therefore, the results of qualitative research are difficult to verify as the interviewees have more control over the information they share than the data collector. The researchers must be careful not to lead the interviewees with questions and be somewhat neutral in interpreting the results. Therefore, this research should be connected to further observation studies and could be improved upon by a more profound analysis of the companies through more interviews or data collection of documents.

Moreover, as the cases were chosen pragmatically, most of our research subjects are based in the countries that we are from. This needs to be taken into account when analysing the results as different countries had different government restrictions and help packages in place. A broader look could have been realized by choosing cases from more countries around Europe. Additionally, a bigger sample size would give an even deeper understanding of the industry's current state. For example, people with the same profession but based in different countries could be interviewed to see how the location and even the genre of music might influence the effects of the pandemic on the working processes. Another possible shortcoming of the research was carried out the interviews online. Given the current state of the world, arranging interviews in person was not an option. Having conversations through Microsoft Teams is never a completely natural conversation. The dynamics can be off; body language can be hard to interpret, and there might be distractions in the background. In several instances, the video and audio cut off for several seconds, leaving holes in the interviewees' answers.

The COVID-19 pandemic and its effects on music industry professionals are constantly evolving, and it is challenging to accurately forecast how and within what timespan the situation will pass. Some interviews were conducted around two months before the end of this research, which meant that the research could only look back at how the interviewees had experienced the pandemic until that very moment. Thus far, it is important to keep researching this topic throughout and after the pandemic to recognize just how big of an impact COVID-19 has on the industry. This study can function as one piece in the puzzle, but only after the world is rid of the virus and back to a more normal way of living can its real impact be analysed thoroughly.

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