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DIGITAL LITERACY FOR MUSICIANS: NAVIGATING MUSIC STREAMING SERVICES FOR INDEPENDENT ARTISTS IN KENYA

Author
Amon Kipyegon Kirui
Email: kipnoma@gmail.com

Kabarak University, Kenya

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Abstract
This paper explores the crucial role of digital literacy in the music industry, emphasising its specific relevance to independent artists in Kenya who rely on Music Streaming Services (MSS) for global exposure. The digitalisation of the music industry at the onset of the millennium has tremendously transformed the monetisation of music by not only granting artists unprecedented access to global markets but also enabling them to connect directly with their fans like never before. This transformation has prompted independent artists in Kenya to increasingly adopt (MSS) as their primary platform for marketing and distributing their content. Therefore, digital literacy has become a vital skill that empowers artists to effectively utilise diverse digital tools, software, and MSS. Digital literacy equips artists with the knowledge to manage their online presence, engage with their audience on social media, and make data-informed decisions using algorithms, curation, and analytics. Through a combination of phenomenological primary research and secondary data sources, this study delves into the experiences of independent artists, shedding light on the challenges they face and the opportunities that MSS presents. By enhancing their digital literacy skills, these artists can increase not only their global reach but also their revenue streams, enabling them to thrive in the evolving soundscape of the music industry.

Key terms: Algorithms, analytics, curation, digital literacy, music streaming services.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Digital literacy plays a pivotal role in the contemporary music industry, providing artists with essential skills to thrive in the digital era. The Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) has profoundly transformed the industry, emphasising the need for artists to adapt quickly. Hagen (2022) emphasises the significance of digital literacy, stating that "the ability to access and analyse data – or what might be called data literacy – has become a key skill or core component for success in the digital music industry" (p. 185). This underscores digital literacy as a prerequisite for every artist to reach a global market. Cavalheiro et al. (2020) support this notion, finding that "creative professionals demonstrated a meaningful level of digital literacy" (p. 561). Digitally literate artists, therefore, can effectively create, produce, market, and distribute their music. This literacy empowers artists to utilise music streaming services (MSS) digital tools, manage their online presence, connect with audiences on social media, and analyse streaming data for informed decisions. The Centre for Data Ethics and Innovation (CDEI) emphasised the importance of investigating algorithmically-driven recommendation systems, specifically focusing on music recommender systems (MRS) operated by MSS (Hesmondhalgh et al., 2023). As much as algorithm systems are quite complicated, understanding the backend of MSS could empower artists to adapt to the evolving music landscape, especially on curation, reaching wider audiences and maximising revenue potential. The centrality of digital literacy has complex implications for independent artists compared to 'superstars' signed with major record labels such as Sony, Universal Records, Warner Music Group, and Capitol Records.

In Kenya, MSS have emerged as vital digital ecosystems for independent artists, enabling them not only to display their talents and get recognition but also to monetise their music content (Lal et al., 2023). These platforms provide a level playing field, allowing artists to disseminate their music worldwide without the use of traditional record labels or extensive financial resources. Morris (2020) alludes that MSS “connect artists with a global audience of listeners in an attempt to monetise a massive network of music listening activities” (p. 7). Through the massive support of social media, MSS allows artists to reach a diverse audience and receive royalties for their work, providing a significant source of income (Kirui et al., 2022). Given the prevalence of smartphones, mobile devices and the internet in Kenya, MSS has become a primary means of music creation, distribution and consumption (Beukelaer & Eisenberg, 2020), making it crucial for independent artists to be proficient in how to navigate and leverage MSS. The significance of MSS for artists in Kenya extends beyond mere exposure; it represents a path to financial sustainability and recognition in the industry. This article explores the topic of digital literacy in Kenya, specifically concentrating on independent artists. It evaluates the existing level of digital literacy among these artists, examines the strategies they have adopted to adapt to digital changes, and proposes methods through which artists can enhance their digital literacy skills.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Understanding Music Streaming Services

MSS, such as Amazon Music, Apple Music, Deezer, Google Play Music, iHeartRadio, Pandora, SoundCloud, Spotify, Tidal, and YouTube Music, has revolutionised the music industry, reshaping the way people interact with music in the era of digitalisation (Casagrande, 2021; Hagen, 2022). These platforms give customers access to a massive online library of songs, albums, and playlists, replacing traditional physical records with music in the cloud available through access-based services, downloading or streaming platforms. MSS utilises sophisticated algorithms to perform intricate data analysis, enabling a comprehensive understanding of users' preferences. Anderson et al. (2020) allude that "understanding how algorithmic recommendations are associated with consumption diversity is a central question for online platforms" (p. 10). These algorithms track various factors, including favourite genres, preferred artists, and listening times. According to Gingerich (2022);

> *Paradigmatic applications of this sort of AI include the uses of algorithms by YouTube, Spotify, and Netflix to suggest music and videos to users, Google and Bing to respond to user queries, and Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok to moderate and promote certain stories, photos, and artworks posted by users (p. 237)*

Algorithms power personalised playlists and recommendations, blending human expertise with algorithmic suggestions to strike a balance between popular hits and introducing users to new, upcoming, and independent artists. Additionally, advanced analytics enable platforms to gauge user engagement, popular tracks, and emerging trends, refining their content offerings. This blend of algorithms, curation, and analytics ensures a highly tailored and continuously evolving selection of music, enhancing the user experience and making these platforms not just tools for music consumption but also sources of music discovery and exploration. Born et al. (2021) argue that "recommendation systems make highly normative assumptions about the listening subjects they model and whom they purport merely to serve" (p. 5). Consequently, this transforms algorithms into platform intermediaries, playing a pivotal role in determining the music content featured on MSS Playlists.

MSS adopts a dual business model featuring both freemium and premium options. In the freemium tier, users enjoy complimentary access to MSS's extensive music library, supported by strategically placed advertisements. Anderson et al. (2020) note that "users will periodically be served advertisements and have some limitations on what can be played on demand" (p. 3). Freemium operates as an ad-supported model, acting as a catalyst for users to consider the advantages of transitioning to a premium subscription. The allure lies in the promise of an enhanced, ad-free, and uninterrupted listening experience, motivating users to explore the broader spectrum of features and higher audio quality offered by the premium tier. According to Anderson et al. (2020), "premium users have much more diverse organic listening patterns than free users" (p. 5). Subscribers opting for the premium model, involving a monthly fee—such as Spotify's Premium subscription priced at $9.99 per month—gain exclusive privileges such as superior audio quality, offline playback, unlimited track skipping, shuffle functionality, personalised playlist curation, and auto-generated playlists.

The freemium tier acts as a gateway, enabling users to explore MSS's offerings at no cost, fostering accessibility while providing compelling incentives for those desiring a more elevated, ad-free, and feature-rich music streaming experience. This thoughtful balance ensures a seamless transition for users ready to embark on a more gratifying musical journey in the digital age. Amidst this, debate has surfaced around the free access to music and premium pro-rata payment model, with concerns raised about its potential exploitative nature, particularly in how it disproportionately benefits superstars over independent and up-and-coming artists. Critics argue that the pro-rata approach tends to channel a significant portion of revenue to already established and popular artists, leaving independent and emerging artists with a smaller share of the pie. This system perpetuates inequalities in the music industry, hindering the financial growth of independent and upcoming artists who may rely more heavily on MSS revenue. As subscribers access unlimited songs each month, the pro-rata model's distribution mechanism may inadvertently favour the already prominent artists, raising questions about its fairness and inclusivity within the broader MSS. This debate underscores the need for a nuanced examination of payment structures to ensure a more equitable and supportive environment for all musicians.

The MSS market in Kenya has embraced a new business model, incorporating both local and international platforms. According to the Statista website, the MSS market in Kenya is projected by 2023 to generate revenue of Ksh US$19.19m (2023, November 22). This underscores the pivotal role MSS plays in the industry's growth. Statista website reveals that with an expected annual growth rate of 8.75 per cent the Kenyan MSS revenue is anticipated to reach US$26.84m by 2027. With the existence of several MSS, Anyango (2023) reported that the most utilised MSS is YouTube, with Spotify, Tubidy and Mdundo following, respectively. This is summarised through the statistics provided in Figure 1. Based on the provided statistics in Figure 1, Anyango (2023) indicated that YouTube is the most widely used MSS in Kenya, with Spotify, Tubidy, and Mdundo following in succession.

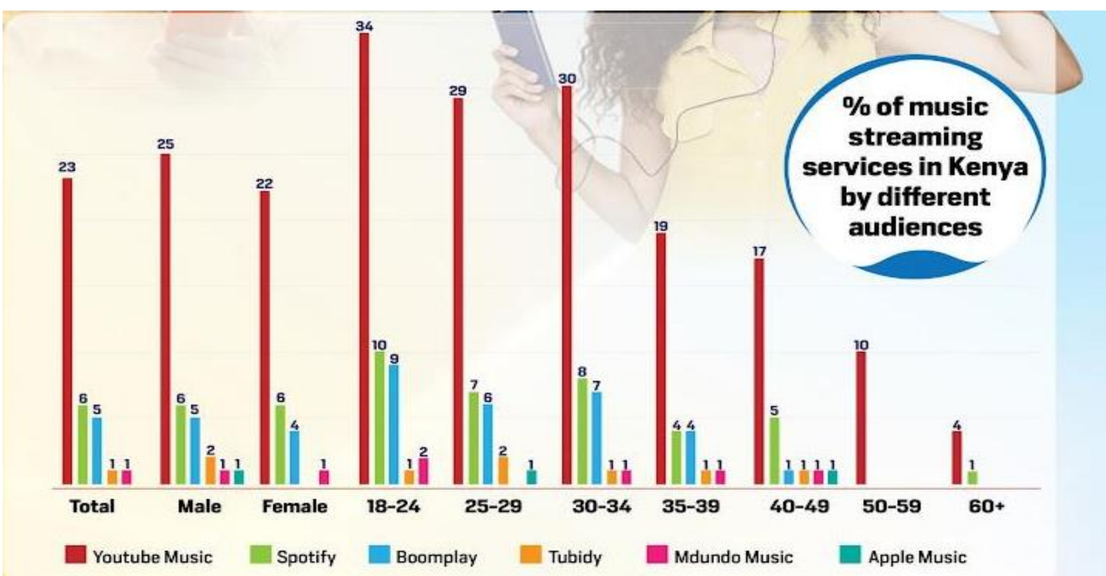

Figure 1: Radio Africa Group Survey November 13, 2023

Benefits and Challenges of MSS for Independent Artists

Music streaming services offer a myriad of benefits for independent artists, enhancing their presence and reach in the highly competitive music industry. One of the foremost advantages is the amplified visibility and extended reach provided by these platforms, allowing artists to reach a worldwide audience. Hesmondhalgh et al. (2021) reported that "streaming services were important in terms of helping them develop their audience" (p. 190). The augmented visibility of the artists is enhanced by the seamless interoperability between the social media platforms and MSS. Beukelaer and Eisenberg (2020) allude that "the rise of digital media technologies has created new forms of intermediation and interdependence in music sectors worldwide" (p. 107). Secondly, MSS contributes to revenue generation for independent artists through various monetisation models, and the receipt of royalties serves as a crucial source of income. The rise of the music industry since 2015 is majorly attributed to MSS, which "brought in US$1.9 billion in 2014, and US$11.4 billion in 2019" (Hesmondhalgh, 2021, p. 3595). These platforms also facilitate the building of a dedicated fan base and encourage community engagement, fostering a sense of connection and support among listeners (Kirui et al., 2023). Through MSS, Autio (2019) highlights the generation of additional revenue streams through avenues such as touring, merchandising, and crowdfunding. Finally, the ability to analyse streaming data provides valuable insights into listener preferences and behaviours, empowering independent artists to make informed decisions about their creative direction and promotional strategies. Maasø and Hagen (2020) suggest that the "true power of MSS resides in the way in which they have become central information hubs" (p. 29), establishing links and feedback loops with all other stakeholders in the music industry, thus playing a crucial role in empowering independent artists to navigate and succeed in the contemporary music soundscape.

However, artists, mostly independent, confront a multitude of challenges as they navigate the complex soundscape of the music industry. A primary obstacle is the limited access to resources and information, as many independent artists may lack the financial backing and industry connections available to their mainstream counterparts. Barneva et al. (2021) allude that digital literacy will “provide the curriculum-specific instruction and real-life experience that will best prepare music industry graduates for the myriad of possible professions” (p. 14). Many independent artists from developing economies enter the music industry without prior access to digital literacy, potentially impeding the pace of their career progression. Secondly, copyright and royalty concerns also loom large, with independent artists grappling to secure fair compensation for their creative work and navigating the intricate legal landscape of the music business. Beukelaer and Eisenberg (2020) advocate for the necessity of instituting new forms of regulation and legislation to safeguard artists from exploitative outcomes, underscoring the significance of establishing a fair and transparent environment that provides artists with accurate information about their earnings and shields them from monopolistic practices. Lastly, the highly competitive nature of the industry poses a significant hurdle as independent artists strive to distinguish themselves and stand out in a crowded market saturated with talent and MSS platforms. "The market has become saturated, and that it has therefore become a challenge to get through the noise, to make people aware that one's music exists and to make them listen to it" (Primschitz, 2016, p. 26). Saturation has, therefore, shrunk the returns from music sales. Marshall (2015) identifies that the "payment being given to artists for allowing their music to be made available on streaming services such as Deezer and, especially, Spotify" (p. 177) has led to economic discontent.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

This qualitative phenomenological study investigates how digital literacy influences the experiences of independent musicians in Kenya, particularly in their engagement with digital streaming platforms. Focusing on understanding the nuanced impact of digital literacy on revenue generation in the music industry, in-depth interviews were conducted with Kenyan artists, utilising purposive and snowball sampling for diverse perspectives. The research framework, based on the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) by Venkatesh et al. (2003), adapted to the context of digital literacy for musicians, explores key determinants—performance expectancy, effort expectancy, social influence, and facilitating conditions—to understand their influence on the intentions of independent artists and their audience in navigating the digital soundscape.

4.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Digital Literacy Skills for Artists

Digital literacy is a cornerstone for the success of independent artists in Kenya, particularly within the realm of Music Streaming Services (MSS). Proficiency in creating and optimising profiles on platforms like Spotify, YouTube, and Mdundo is foundational, as highlighted by Hagen (2022), who emphasises its role in securing power and advantageous positioning for artists. The absence of digital literacy exposes artists to risks, especially concerning revenue splits. According to Cavalheiro et al. (2020), "innovation in technological developments can influence and modify the way these workers practise their work processes" (p. 20). One of the respondents, while referring to the MSS, noted that;

> *Most of these platforms can be a bit complex to set up, to be honest. So, you end up having to entrust someone with the responsibility of creating the account for you. There are so many backend things that happen that are so complex.*

Understanding metadata intricacies and implementing effective tagging strategies, therefore, enhances an artist's visibility, ensuring their music stands out in searches and playlists. In essence, digital literacy not only guards against exploitation but also paves the way for innovation and visibility in the ever-evolving music industry landscape.

Secondly, digital literacy empowers independent artists for effective online promotion through algorithm utilisation in information retrieval, content filtering, and recommendation systems (Hesmondhalgh et al., 2023). Proficiency in social media and email marketing enables direct audience engagement, fostering a community around their work. This connection is vital for cultivating a dedicated fan base, driving new release promotions, and generating interest in upcoming events. While acknowledging the importance of digital literacy, a respondent highlighted the challenge of understanding platforms due to constantly changing algorithms on platforms like YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram. Keeping up with these changes proves to be a formidable task. Additionally, interpreting analytics and streaming data is essential, allowing artists to refine promotional strategies based on audience behaviours and preferences, maximising the impact of their creative endeavours in the digital space.

Lastly, digital literacy skills extend beyond self-promotion, enabling networking and collaboration within the digital realm. Hagen (2022) posited that "a platform's potential for data delivery now justifies support for certain priorities and collaborations in the music industry" (p. 194). Independent artists can effortlessly connect with peers, producers, and industry professionals, unlocking potential collaborations that will eventually push their careers further. Navigating digital platforms for communication and collaboration is essential for expanding networks and enhancing creative endeavours. A respondent emphasised the impact of digitalisation, stating,

> *Digitalisation has made me known to a larger audience; it has made me famous, if I may say so. It also made me earn some money from my music.*

The multifaceted nature of digital literacy, from optimising online profiles to interpreting analytics and fostering collaborations, therefore, is crucial for independent artists, shaping success in the dynamic soundscape of MSS.

Legal and Copyright Aspects

In the contemporary music industry, an essential consideration for artists is the comprehension of copyright laws in the digital age. One respondent noted that;

> *We have to take charge of our own socio-economic growth when it comes to music. We have a responsibility as artists to learn because we are giving it up to people who are just taking advantage of us. As artists, we also have a huge role to play in understanding what is happening as best as we can.*

Artists, based on the research findings, must have a thorough understanding of copyright laws to avoid being exploited by intermediaries and other industry players. Navigating these intricacies of the music soundscape necessitates a clear understanding of these laws, which serve to safeguard the intellectual property of musicians. Copyright in the Kenyan music industry is governed by the Copyright Act Cap 130 Laws of Kenya. Through the grant of exclusive rights to their creations, including reproduction, distribution, and performance, copyright laws play a pivotal role. Beukelaer and Eisenberg (2020) noted that "limited enforcement of copyright regimes and weak market regulation created new entrepreneurial business models" (2020, p. 192), highlighting the importance of knowledge to advocate for enforcement. Given the ease with which content can be shared and accessed in the digital music industry, it also becomes imperative for artists to possess this knowledge. Such understanding is crucial not only for protecting their music from unauthorised use but also for ensuring fair compensation for their creative endeavours, all while retaining control over the use of their work.

Integral to the sustainability of a viable career in the music industry is the protection of intellectual property rights. Prasad (2023) alluded that "it is essential for content creators, rights holders, and stakeholders to remain vigilant, adaptable, and proactive in their approach to intellectual property rights (IPR) protection and enforcement" (p. 205). One respondent claimed that;

> *The work of the government is not only to create laws but to follow up and make sure they are being implemented. So, our biggest challenge is probably not even the lack of law, but the follow up of laws, improving existing laws and creating new ones that protects the artists*.

Musicians must, therefore, proactively implement measures to protect their intellectual creations, including songs, lyrics, and compositions. This involves advocating for their rights and pressing the government to address their concerns. This proactive stance involves the registration of their works with relevant copyright authorities, providing legal evidence of ownership. Additionally, artists can explore technological tools such as digital watermarks as deterrents against unauthorised use. Dewi et al. (2023) suggested that "using a watermark in work is considered to reduce the risk of misuse' (p. 7). This understanding of how to protect IPR empowers musicians, allowing them to exercise control over the use of their work, negotiate favourable agreements, and capitalise on the investments made in their creative pursuits.

Central to the dissemination of music in the digital realm are licensing and distribution agreements. Musicians entering into these agreements find themselves navigating a complex legal soundscape (Hesmondhalgh, 2021; Kirui et al., 2022). Licensing agreements delineate the terms under which music can be used, spanning various mediums such as streaming services and advertisements. On the other hand, distribution agreements outline the mechanisms by which music will be disseminated across different platforms (Hesmondhalgh et al., 2021). Another respondent alluded that;

> *There are these other collecting bodies that are in between that do not allow us to see the logs, so you cannot really get to know whether what you're being paid is what really should be paid to you, and we have had so many complaints about that so it's a major issue.*

Given the complexities at play, artists are strongly advised to prioritise digital literacy and seek legal counsel. This ensures that these agreements align with their interests, protect their rights, and facilitate fair compensation for their significant contributions to the digital music industry.

Support Systems for Independent Artists

In the dynamic realm of independent music, robust support systems are indispensable for artists navigating a dynamic and competitive industry. Collective Management Organisations (CMOs) like the Music Copyright Society of Kenya (MCSK), the Kenya Association of Music Producers (KAMP), and the

Performers Rights Society of Kenya (PRISK) play pivotal roles in managing and administering the performance and mechanical rights of independent artists. One crucial task CMOs play is the collection of royalties on behalf of artists, ensuring equitable compensation for their music when publicly performed or reproduced. Joining these societies not only establishes a structured mechanism for financial remuneration but also serves as a safeguard, nurturing the financial well-being of musicians in the digital age. This support becomes paramount for sustaining a viable career, allowing artists to concentrate on their craft without undue financial burdens. Beside this, CMOs are seen by artists to be exploiting them. One of the respondents pointed out that;

> *Even the three main bodies that collect royalties, KAMP, MCSK, and PRISK, are like the government not doing anything to regulate them. Last month, PRSIK sent a flat rate of Kshs 2,000 (USD 14) to every artist. You can imagine this is the amount I made for the whole year.*

MCSK, a prominent CMO, acts as a representative for the rights of publishers, composers, and authors. It diligently collects and distributes royalties for the public performance and broadcasting of its members' rights. Additionally, MCSK administers mechanical and synchronisation rights, with the latter being voluntary, as members may choose to manage these rights individually. Covering rights in ringtones as well, MCSK ensures that its members receive due compensation from users. KAMP, representing the rights of sound recording producers, is an essential component of this support ecosystem. It is entitled to royalties derived from the public performance and broadcasting of sound recordings. Although collecting from the same users as MCSK, such as broadcasting stations, entertainment venues, malls, restaurants, and hotels, KAMP focuses on the sound recording aspect, not the underlying musical work. PRISK, the Performers Rights Society of Kenya, stands as the advocate for performers, including musicians, thespians, actors, actresses, acrobats, dancers, and more. PRISK diligently collects royalties on behalf of its members for the broadcasting and public performance of their fixed performances, contributing significantly to the financial well-being of performers in the independent music soundscape.

Government initiatives and grants form another integral pillar of support for independent musicians. Governments recognise the cultural and economic contributions of the music industry and implement programs to offer financial assistance. In Kenya, these initiatives facilitate various aspects of music production, promotion, and distribution. By nurturing artistic talent and contributing to industry growth, these government programs provide essential resources for independent artists to not only survive but thrive in the highly competitive digital music landscape. The financial backing offered through these initiatives allows artists to invest in their creativity and contribute meaningfully to the artistic and cultural tapestry. Artists, however, complain about unequal treatment when it comes to state performances. One artist noted that;

> *An example of the PPMC has done a song for Madaraka Day. But when you look at the artists available, they were all secular, and no gospel artist was present. I think the government should also consider us as gospel artists.*

Navigating the complexities of the music industry is made more accessible through active engagement with organisations such as the Music Copyright Society of Kenya (MCSK) and the Performers Rights Society of Kenya (PRISK). These associations offer a wealth of resources, providing independent artists with professional development opportunities, industry insights, and networking events. Joining these bodies grants access to a supportive community of peers, industry professionals, and potential collaborators, fostering meaningful collaborations, mentorship opportunities, and increased exposure. In linking this to digital literacy, artists must recognise the crucial role these associations play in safeguarding their rights and ensuring fair compensation in the digital realm. Digital literacy, in this context, entails understanding how these organisations function, the rights they represent, and the mechanisms through which artists can benefit. One of the respondents agrees with these assertions, claiming that;

> *I would also encourage artists to learn and empower themselves because the system is also moving, and they will keep moving and take advantage of you as long as you are complaisant and not taking time to understand what is being done.*

Acquiring digital literacy empowers artists to engage effectively with these bodies, reducing the risk of exploitation and enabling them to make informed decisions, negotiate fair deals, and protect their creative endeavours in the ever-evolving digital music landscape.

Future Trends and Innovations in Music Streaming

In the dynamic evolution of the MSS soundscape, the emphasis on personalised user experiences, driven by advanced algorithms tailoring recommendations to individual listening habits, underscores a shift in the industry's landscape. In navigating this intricate soundscape, digital literacy is not just advantageous but imperative for artists, particularly independent ones from developing economies. Understanding the algorithms that influence content visibility empowers artists to strategically position their work within the competitive streaming environment. Moreover, as collaborations between streaming services and artists expand to include exclusive content and immersive experiences like virtual concerts and augmented reality features, digital literacy emerges as a vital tool. Independent artists from developing economies, equipped with digital literacy, can seize these opportunities more effectively. Further research in this realm could delve into the specific challenges faced by independent artists from developing economies in enhancing their digital literacy. Examining potential barriers and proposing targeted educational initiatives could foster a more inclusive and globally representative music streaming landscape, allowing artists from diverse backgrounds to navigate and benefit from these transformative trends.

In the dynamic realm of MSS, the integration of cutting-edge technologies presents a transformative landscape for artists. Blockchain technology, in particular, is revolutionising royalty payments and music rights management, introducing unprecedented transparency and ensuring fair compensation for artists. Augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) are enhancing user experiences with immersive encounters, and high-fidelity audio formats like spatial audio and 3D audio offer a more realistic listening experience.

Developing digital literacy, especially among independent artists from developing economies, becomes a crucial factor in navigating these changes successfully. It involves not only understanding the technical aspects of blockchain and immersive technologies but also grasping their implications on revenue streams and user engagement. Independent artists, particularly those from developing economies, can benefit significantly from acquiring digital literacy. It empowers them to actively participate in the evolving digital music landscape, make informed decisions about technology adoption, and safeguard their intellectual property. Further research in this context could explore the specific challenges and opportunities faced by independent artists from developing economies in enhancing their digital literacy. Understanding the unique needs and constraints of these artists can contribute to the development of targeted educational initiatives and support systems, fostering more inclusive and equitable participation in the digital music ecosystem.

The transformative role of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Machine Learning (ML) is paramount, shaping recommendation algorithms, content curation, and even extending into music production for the creation of unique sounds and compositions. Amidst this technological evolution, digital literacy emerges as a critical asset for artists, particularly independent ones from developing economies. Digital literacy entails not only understanding the technical aspects of AI and ML but also recognising how these technologies influence content discovery and user engagement. Independent artists, armed with digital literacy, can strategically navigate the changing landscape. Moreover, further research in this domain could explore the specific challenges faced by independent artists from developing economies in enhancing their digital literacy. Examining potential barriers and proposing targeted educational initiatives could empower artists to harness the capabilities of AI and ML, ensuring their meaningful participation in shaping the future of music creation and consumption. As the fusion of AI and music continues to define a dynamic and personalised soundscape, fostering digital literacy becomes imperative for artists to thrive in this evolving landscape while ensuring a more inclusive and globally representative music industry.

The future holds promising opportunities as digital platforms empower artists to establish direct connections with global audiences. Anticipated trends foresee a rise in direct-to-fan models, offering independent artists a chance to forge direct and sustainable relationships with their audience, bypassing traditional intermediaries. Blockchain technology is likely to play a key role in ensuring transparent and equitable royalty distribution, reinforcing the need for digital literacy among independent artists, particularly those from developing economies. Digital literacy in this context involves not only navigating the technical aspects of blockchain but also understanding its implications on financial interests and intellectual property protection. Further research in this space could delve into the specific challenges faced by independent artists from developing economies in enhancing their digital literacy, exploring potential barriers and proposing tailored educational initiatives to empower these artists. As the democratisation of music production tools and digital distribution continues, it is likely to foster a surge in diverse and niche content, creating an environment where independent musicians can thrive. The envisioned future foresees a more inclusive and artist-centric music industry, with digital literacy emerging as a key factor in avoiding exploitation. Independent artists, equipped with a nuanced understanding of digital distribution platforms and the democratisation of music production tools, can strategically position themselves in this evolving landscape, ensuring a more equitable and diverse representation in the global music ecosystem.

5.0 CONCLUSION

A comprehensive exploration of MSS for independent artists in Kenya has revealed the fundamental importance of digital literacy. This recap illuminates key takeaways, emphasising how digital literacy serves as a linchpin in shaping the success of independent musicians within the ever-evolving digital music ecosystem. Understanding the nuances of MSS, grappling with legal and copyright complexities, and leveraging support systems stand out as critical components that form the pillars of success for independent artists. Maasø and Hagen (2020) suggest that the "true power of MSS resides in the way in which they have become central information hubs" (p. 29). This journey through the benefits of MSS, therefore, highlights the clear potential for global reach and monetisation, calling for the need for digital literacy skills, particularly in legal issues and fair compensation. Recognising the impact of support systems, including music-collecting societies and government initiatives, underscores the collaborative nature of success in the digital age. This dynamic approach empowers independent artists not only to traverse the complexities within the music industry but also to continually learn, adapt, and thrive in the digital age. As the future of music distribution unfolds with innovative trends and technologies, the emphasis on digital literacy becomes even more paramount. Independent artists who cultivate a proactive and digitally fluent approach will easily position themselves to adapt to the expansive and ever-changing soundscape of MSS. In essence, digital literacy emerges as the cornerstone, enabling independent artists to not only survive but thrive amidst the transformative waves of the evolving music industry. Independent artists must, therefore, seek digital literacy as a way of mitigating the challenges that are brought about by the MSS.

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