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Individualization, Platformization, and Claims of Democratization

Motivations, Processes, and Experiences of People and Their Practices of AI Music

ABSTRACT This work studies users of commercial AI music platforms and their practices. Who are some of the users of these platforms, why do they use them, and how? What are their experiences of using these platforms? How do they reflect on their creative practice? We conduct semi-structured interviews with nine users of commercial AI music platforms and apply thematic analysis to our data. Our principal aim is to provide a detailed account of our informants, applying an inductive approach to identify themes relevant to our questions. The first of three themes, Creating and Sharing with Platforms, describes why and how the informants use certain platforms and discusses some of the music they create. The second theme, Costs and Critique, discusses aspects of physical effort and time, financial aspects, informants' reflections on quality and AI automation, and some ethical considerations of AI. The third theme, Individualization, identifies three emerging aspects of practice particularly concerning the individual user and their social circle in terms of processes, content, and experiences—aspects we see are uniquely formed by uses of commercial AI music platforms. We then discuss the alignment of our analysis with broader aspects of music platformization, captivating "traps," the "algorithmic sublime," and claims of "democratization." We conclude with reflections on the motivations, processes, and experiences of AI music practices expressed by our informants in relation to these wider contexts of current music technological culture.
KEYWORDS commercial AI music platforms, users, interviews, thematic analysis

INTRODUCTION

Online platforms for making music with AI (AI music herein) have been growing so numerous and popular over the past few years that major music copyrights holders, rights organizations, and streaming services are maneuvering to counter its impacts. On June 24, 2024, the Recording Industry Association of America filed lawsuits against the AI music platforms Suno and Udio alleging an infringement of their copyright-protected music by the training of the underlying AI models.[1] A report commissioned by French and German music rights organizations in late 2023 surveyed over 15,000 of their members and found over 90% of them "demand credit and transparency, consent and remuneration when their work is used in the context of generative AI in music."[2] The music streaming company Deezer reported in January 2026 that it is receiving "over 60,000 AI tracks" every day (39% of its daily intake), and so are actively taking steps to detect and de-monetize it.[3] AI

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music artists and bands have even begun to emerge, some racking up millions of streams on Spotify or reportedly being signed by record labels.[4] Even though commercial AI music platforms make the generation of music deceptively easy, people are still needed to press the button. Some users go beyond that and interact more deeply with a platform to make music. In this work, we ask: Who are some of the users of these platforms, why do they use them, and how? What are some of their experiences of using these platforms? How do they reflect on their creative practice?

Existing studies of AI music users, or of music practitioners using AI in their work, focus primarily on the use of AI tools and applications in artistic practices, while studies of users of commercial AI music platforms are still few. Anna Huang et al. investigate the approaches taken by teams who submitted songs to the first AI Song Contest organized in 2020, conducting a thematic analysis of written materials submitted by teams reflecting on their creative approaches.[5] The study finds that co-creating with AI systems for a time-limited task requires individual strategies and solutions for managing the unpredictable nature of machine learning models and steering them toward the creative goals of the artists. Emmanuel Deruty et al. look specifically at popular music production using AI tools developed by Sony Computer Science Laboratories collaboratively with musicians and formulate recommendations and validation criteria for how AI can be developed and applied in popular music production.[6] Jordi Pons et al. assemble a dataset of 337 musical works created by many artists using AI and focus on how these works exhibit ways of working with AI.[7] Their findings demonstrate some artists exploring uncanny aesthetics emerging from AI glitches, flaws and artifacts. Artists' experiences also range from perceiving AI as a co-creator to feeling a loss of artistic agency when working with AI.

Other work takes approaches that are more ethnographic. Nina Kehagia and Manoli Moriaty interview five composers from electroacoustic music, contemporary music, and popular music about their use of AI tools in their work.[8] The authors seek to understand how the tools are adopted in these three communities of practice, how they are affecting attitudes and discourses permeating them, and how those norms influence the way such tools are used. Ford et al. similarly study how artist-researchers with heterogeneous practice backgrounds reflect on their use of AI tools in their workflow when creating an assignment.[9] The study combines first-person accounts of these experiences with interviews and questionnaires and uses a thematic analysis to further understand the participants' reflections. Jonathan Herington et al. interview 43 musicians in the USA over the period January to August 2023 and apply thematic analysis to gauge their perceptions of the application of AI to music.[10] They find a "significant ambivalence" about this technology among their informants, and highlight ethical concerns about redundancy, exploitation, and lack of representation, productivity, and access. The authors mention their informants did not have much experience with using AI in their work, and that AI-generated music was of rather low fidelity at the time of the interviews.[11] Their last interview was conducted a month before Suno launched, the quality of which has increased significantly since. Finally, Yiren Zhao and the authors of this article shift focus from artistic practices to commercial AI music platform users, primarily Boomy users and AI metal music creators using Suno.[12] There, we elaborate on the digital ethnographic methodological approaches needed to study such user

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groups in online spaces, and how researchers must navigate challenges of access and gatekeeping, trust-building with participants, and the blurred positionality of the researcher in this online field.

Our positionality as interviewers and researchers in this article is informed by our previous work in this space. Bob L. T. Sturm et al. (2024) calls for the development of a new discipline, AI Music Studies, combining different methodologies from multiple disciplines to study and help understand what they predict as a coming flood of AI-generated music.[13] We focus on the AI music platform Boomy in that work, which brought us into contact with the Boomy Discord and many of its active users at the time. Our autoethnographic work creating music with AI platforms also provides us first-hand insight into their use, the choices one must make, and how it feels to make music this way.[14] This information helped us approach and speak with users of these platforms with a shared interest in music technology, and knowledge of how they can be used.

The present study aims to provide an understanding of some of the people using commercial AI music platforms and their practices. We conduct semi-structured interviews with nine users of several platforms and apply thematic analysis with an inductive and constructionist approach to produce a rich account of our informants and their experiences. We identify three major themes that describe how and why our informants use particular platforms, the costs involved with such use and their reflections on and critique of AI, and finally their experiences with individualization. In the next section we discuss our methods and materials. We then present the results of our thematic analysis with material drawn from our interviews. In the fourth section we discuss our findings with reference to several concepts, including platformization, captivation and traps, the algorithmic sublime, and claims of "democratization." We end with some conclusions drawn from our work.

METHODS AND MATERIALS

Semi-Structured Interviews and Selection of Informants

Between June 2024 and June 2025, we interviewed nine users of commercial AI music platforms, all detailed more below.[15] All interviews were around one hour long and were conducted in English. We used a semi-structured interview approach guided by a set list of questions (see Appendix A). We would start by asking the informant to tell us about themselves, their musical background, and how they would describe their work and influences, which then led to further elaboration. Other major points of discussion included workflows, how they see themselves as part of an AI music community, and tensions that they have experienced with regards to AI and their work.

Our first contact with some informants came via direct Discord messaging after observing them being active members of the Boomy and/or Suno Discord servers. We reached out to fifteen users this way asking if they would be interested in being interviewed about their work and experience. A typical invitation said: "A group of us (engineers and musicologists) at a university in Sweden are interested in interviewing you about your use of AI music services, like Boomy. We are writing a paper about how artists like you employ artificial intelligence in your practice. What do you feel it brings to your art? How does it empower you

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as a creator? How do you work with a system such as Boomy, and perhaps push its boundaries?" We purposely kept the invitation positive and compelling, as we wanted people to contribute and we did not want to appear as judging users of AI.[16] The interviews then had more value neutral contributions and even drawbacks of the informants' experiences. Many did not reply to our invitation, but seven did and agreed to take part, and four were finally interviewed and assembled into our dataset. We also reached out to several people through personal contacts by email using a similar invitation. During some interviews we would learn about other users they knew and thereafter contacted them by email. We interviewed five people that way.

Data Collection and Analysis

We recorded all interviews using Zoom streamed to the private cloud of our institution. We applied automatic speech transcription to the interviews and downloaded the resulting text files to our local computers. Our data consists of these interview transcriptions and URLs to informant works, and observations of activity on Discord. We apply thematic analysis to our interviews. Following Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, we aim to provide a detailed account of our informants in their use of AI music platforms, how they use them, and why.[17] We use an inductive approach to identify themes, starting by reviewing interviews, then proposing and revising codes, and finally arriving at themes. The themes we identify are at the latent level, going beyond the transcriptions to include musical works created by the informants. To contextualize some of our informants' statements, we triangulate them with our observations and prolonged engagement in these online spaces, which we described above. This triangulation provides insights into both platform affordances and social politics on discussion forums, for example, which complement and strengthen the data drawn from the interviews. Some informants shared examples of their work before the interview, which we reviewed and then discussed together.

We initiate our thematic analysis by rewatching each recorded interview and cleaning and correcting its transcript. We add links in the transcriptions to music they discuss, and to YouTube pages. We code our interview data by reviewing one transcript in depth together and considering our research questions: who the users are; their motivations for and experiences of using AI in their creative practice; and how they reflect on their practice. We then review the rest of the transcripts individually and across all others, and recursively refine the codes as needed when encountering new, relevant aspects in the data. We do this refinement by building together a spreadsheet collecting quotes connected to the codes. We then identify themes based on the codes on a latent level with the aim of contextualizing and theorizing the interviews and acknowledging how our informants perceive their experiences and creative contexts. We finally arrived at three themes: Creating and Sharing with Platforms, Costs and Critique, and Individualization.

Informants

Details of our nine informants are provided in Table 1. They all identify as male, 26+ in age with a majority in the range 46–55 years old, and at the time of the interview were in Sweden, the United States, and Germany. We struggled to find informants identifying

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TABLE 1 Details of our nine informants: Chosen ID, their date of interview, age range, how we contacted them, their physical location, self-described gender, and occupation.

ID	Date of Interview	Age	How Contacted	Physical Location	Gender	Occupation
Alpaca Rhythm	5/6/2024	26–35	Discord	Maine	Male	Various
RVDION	21/8/2024	36–45	Discord	Los Angeles	Male	Various
John	15/11/2024	46–55	Discord	New York	Male	Care worker
The Producer	3/12/2024	46–55	Email	Stockholm	Male	Music producer
Dave	15/4/2025	56+	Discord	New York	Male	Instructional designer
Brett	14/5/2025	46–55	Email	Stockholm	Male	Film producer
Patrik	30/5/2025	46–55	Email	Stockholm	Male	IT consultant
Karl-Johan	5/6/2025	46–55	Email	Stockholm	Male	Audiovisual production
Phivos-Angelos Kollias	13/6/2025	36–45	Email	Berlin	Male	Composer, researcher

with other genders than male, informants from other parts of the world, and informants younger than 26.[18] The homogeneity of our group, including their age range, therefore only represents a specific group of AI music platform users—a group which might be generally open to talking to researchers about AI music. This aspect is of course a demographic limitation of our study, but as will be seen below, the materials we collect provide quite varied perspectives and experiences.

We let informants decide whether to stay anonymous and under pseudonyms or to use their real names in this article, to protect them from judgement or exposure.[19] When linking to works created by informants, we have their consent to do so and thus their consent to expose their real name or online persona. Considering all our communication with informants initially took place online and in messages or emails, we also took extra care to be transparent about our positionality as researchers in the field of AI music—that is to say, two researchers located in Sweden who have researched music and AI for several years.[20] The informants were all made aware of how their interviews would be used and analyzed.

Alpaca Rhythm grew up with a punk rock father in the 1980s and in a household that had a recording studio in the basement. He describes himself as coming from a spiritual and shamanic background and studying llamas and alpacas in Peru. He first learned about Boomy from his mother—also a user of the platform—and has explored other AI music platforms.[21] He is a fan of the pop artist Grimes, who has been exploring the use of AI in her own work, in particular releasing a model of her singing voice for fans to use.

RVDION describes himself as an experienced musician who played in rock bands 15–20 years ago.[22] Together with his partner, they "channel" deities using generative AI for creating images and video, and then create music to accompany using AI music platforms, such as Boomy and Stable Audio.

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John has decades-long experience as a singer-songwriter and of performing in open mic sessions, while working professionally as a care worker. His music influences mainly come from American popular and rock music from the 1970s and 1980s. He describes always having had a creative urge with much of his recent work exploring Suno for songwriting.

The Producer is a highly successful producer of popular music mainly for European and Asian markets. He has won several awards for songs he has written and produced and has managed to make a living as a producer in a highly competitive music business for over 30 years. Having had to adapt to a changing music market, from being reliant on CD sales to now competing for streams on digital platforms, he is always looking to optimize and streamline his work. The Producer is an experienced user of various music production tools, applications and plugins, some of which use AI for stem splitting or pitch correction. He describes trying Suno for songwriting inspiration.

Dave is an instructional designer for education who describes a life-long interest in music and says he creates music as a hobby, with music influences as ranging from pop, rock, and jazz to Wendy Carlos' "Switched on Bach" and Laurie Andersen's "Oh Superman." He has owned several instruments but has limited interest in sitting down learning to play any of them. To create music, he uses several plugins, and sampling from copyright free materials. Dave describes how he likes "pulling things together kind of as a montage" and used Boomy for a period to explore this method.[23]

Brett composes music for self-produced documentaries and independent films, often on topics of society and culture. He describes having a great urge to learn, and has studied music composition, electroacoustic music, and musicology alongside his professional career. For his film music work, he has collected a huge library of sampled instruments, with which, as he describes, "you can fake [realistic performances] really well." Brett used Udio for a few weeks and describes becoming completely absorbed by the platform.

Patrik is an IT consultant who says he has no previous experience in playing or creating music. His musical interest lies in listening to "hit music," i.e., the latest popular music releases and charts, and music recommended by Spotify DJX. Patrik, known among his friends and colleagues as "the AI guy," quickly picked up music prompting after having experimented with other generative AI applications, such as image prompting. Still, he describes himself as a consumer rather than a producer of music, as the way he creates AI music reflects his habit of listening to new music and caring more about new releases than establishing a long-term relationship with a specific artist or genre.

Karl-Johan, Patrik's brother, has experience working as a DJ and now owns a digital media company that produces audiovisual content. He describes having a "hardcore country band" and a synth band together with some friends when he was younger. He says he wanted to pick up music creation a few years ago, but "didn't get very far until the first AI started to show up." He describes himself as "a YouTube person," learning about trends from that platform, which is how he first encountered Suno: "I was suddenly able to do something that I wasn't able to do before, but [without] too much effort."

Phivos-Angelos Kollias (herein Phivos) is an internationally awarded composer with a PhD in composition who is critically exploring AI in his creative practice. He composes electroacoustic music together with visuals and has explored incorporating deep-fake

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technologies in his works.[24] Together with a colleague, he is also developing an educational platform using AI to help children explore musicality.

THEMES

Creating and Sharing with Platforms

This theme encompasses aspects related to creating and sharing with platforms. A platform is an online service and associated forums that people use to generate, share and discuss content; for example Suno and the Suno Discord server.[25] We discuss *why* and *how* an informant uses a particular platform. We also provide detailed descriptions of music by some informants.

Why Particular Platforms are Used Our informants use a variety of platforms for creating and sharing music, ranging from those that output music audio (e.g., Suno, Udio, Boomy, Triniti, Stable Audio), to images (e.g., Midjourney, Stable Diffusion), video (e.g., Runway, Hailou), and text (e.g., ChatGPT, ChatboxAI). Some platforms can generate text, sound, and visuals.[26] All informants combine platforms to create and share their music. Patrik uses ChatGPT to create lyrics that he inputs to Suno and uses Runway to create video material. RVDION uses Midjourney and Stable Diffusion to generate visuals and then combines these with music created using Boomy. While some informants share their music over only email or social media (Patrik), others upload to Soundcloud and YouTube (John, RVDION, Phivos, Alpaca Rhythm), release music with Boomy or Bandcamp (Dave), or pay to have their music distributed on Spotify and other providers (Karl-Johan). Sharing music on online spaces, such as company-run Discords, comes with opening oneself to criticism. John discusses creating a private Discord messaging group with other AI music creators whom he finds to be more positive and supportive than other users of the Suno and Udio Discord servers. Phivos remarks that he does not distribute AI music, and that everything he has generated using Udio remains private on that platform.

An informant's judgement of output (e.g., sound quality, memorability, vocal delivery, lyric intelligibility, and stylistic consistency) guides them in using particular platforms. Patrik, Karl-Johan, and John describe a dedication to using Suno because of its quality for what they want to create and how they create. Phivos, however, finds the musical quality of material generated by Udio to be better than Suno. Informants may also use a platform because of its affordance (e.g., text prompt input, or uploading a sound file).[27] John describes how with Suno he is able to upload a recording of himself singing ("because I want my voice in these songs"), and the platform corrects his pitches and timing while preserving his vocal timbre and then arranges and mixes it with accompanying music. Dave mentions that by working with Boomy he can create a foundation upon which to add musical layers.[28] Our informants speak about different creative goals, e.g., making hit songs, expressing life experiences, or exploring mystical realms. RVDION discusses working with his wife—a duo he describes as "spirit channelers, magick practitioners, and iconographers"—to create images of goddesses accompanied by music.[29] Alpaca Rhythm mentions how text-prompt-based music-making fits his experience of writing like a poet. For his work "Fake"—which won

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third prize at Iannis Xenakis International Electronic Music Competition 2025—Phivos uses Udio because it represents for him "an artificially constructed representation of collective memory" from it being trained on a lot of human-made music.[30]

We see that the factor of access, or the logistics involved in interfacing with platforms—e.g., through a paid or gifted subscription, or without the need for a studio—can play a role in an informant using a platform. Some informants pay for platform access (subscriptions) or have won access to paid subscription plans through platform-organized contests. Others are satisfied with the limited access that comes with free subscriptions. Alpaca Rhythm finds making music with AI platforms fit well with his nomadic lifestyle, shifting employment, and limited access to studios or musical instruments.

RVDION says that a major reason he uses Boomy is that it also distributes the music he creates with it.[31] Since he frequently accompanies his music with visuals, he also shares his music via YouTube.[32] Dave mentions that an attractive aspect of Boomy is how it connects making music to making money from streams of that music. However, he mentions that Boomy's restrictions on how he can use the music he creates with it make the platform less appealing to him. Patrik describes sharing his music on YouTube and LinkedIn.[33] Karl-Johan pays to have his music distributed on Spotify. His page there shows his music is garnering listeners.[34] John pays for a subscription to a tier of SoundCloud that has mastering capabilities and distributes his music.

In one case we see an informant using a particular platform because of its link to a musician they respect. Alpaca Rhythm describes being motivated to create music for Grimes, who is an inspiration for him. He participated in a competition on the platform created by GrimesAI where competitors were told the winning song would reach the artist themself. He further describes being drawn to the platform because of how Grimes embraces AI technology in her music. The involvement of established or upcoming artists in sponsoring AI music platforms is becoming more common. For instance, Grammy-award-winning artist Timbaland has been sponsoring Suno since October 2024 by appearing in various advertising campaigns.[35] We understand this kind of artist promotion to be one way for AI music platforms to legitimize themselves as actors on the digital music market.

Our informants' accounts demonstrate that some of them are motivated to use certain AI music platforms and digital service providers because the platforms help to distribute their music, or that some informants are motivated to use AI because they believe it enables them to explore realms—such as spiritual and mystical—otherwise inaccessible to them. From this, we understand that these platforms are designed from the start to on the one hand attract users by providing these types of services, and on the other hand to directly attach the platforms to the broader digital music infrastructure and economy.

How a Particular Platform is Used Our informants describe different ways of using platforms to make and share music. Some use deliberative processes while others work more intuitively. Some let a platform create entire songs, while others limit their use of a platform to generate materials or ideas with which they then create. Some informants also highlight unanticipated behaviors of platforms that require them to find ways to guide the platform to create what they want. This diversity of use is also demonstrated in their music, as discussed

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in some works below. Not only do our informants use multiple platforms for creating their music and other content but also rely on many platforms—and their integration—for distributing and sharing their music online. No informant describes taking their creative work into live performance contexts.

The Producer describes how he in lack of inspiration has experimented with Suno to get ideas (for example a melody line, a chord progression, or a sound) and then reworked them into an original song. For a songwriting session, he prompted the platform ten times and got twenty results, and by listening to some of the chord structures and harmonies and hearing them together with drums and vocals, he finally got ideas of how to proceed. However, he confessed that he "feel[s] bad by doing it," and for reasons of quality and ethics he says that he would never release anything that directly uses the music audio generated by Suno. Karl-Johan, also working with Suno, describes a workflow that involves multiple generations aiming for a finished song, starting with lyrics and then tweaking to find a style he likes. But, he says, "if I don't get anything after like five generations, I quit and I start over with something new." He says that all he feels he has to do to the Suno output is apply some mastering to make the music "a little bit more punchy and [to improve the] audio quality." An example of his work using lyrics is "Gone," an electronic dance music piece with additions of male vocals and some instrumental melodic solos, which has over 160,000 streams on Spotify.[36]

When John first encountered AI, in particular Suno, he describes how his music practice was "taken to another level," and how imperfections in his singing and the way he plays can be adjusted by the platform. He still considers himself a musician and continuously practices his singing. John considers his work with AI "just as creative as the next singer who will write lyrics and sing a song." He describes in detail his deliberative process in writing his song "Fever On The Yellow Brick Road"—a unique take on the story of *The Wizard of Oz*.[37] He began by imagining himself in place of Dorothy and then wrote each stanza of the lyrics in succession. He then recorded himself singing while improvising a melody. He uploaded excerpts of the recording to Suno for it to extend and remix. Suno resynthesized his input, correcting any off-pitch singing, and generated and mixed an accompaniment. John finds that Suno does not always do what he wants and describes some tricks he uses to control it. For example, he adds symbols like "O's" or stars to make Suno transition to a bridge. He says, "the AI a lot of times … could be stubborn and it wants to sing the song the way it wants to sing it." The resulting song is an up-tempo rock/pop song with drum, bass, and guitar accompaniment, and other instrumental features such as guitar solos and brass sections. John paid a friend to make a music video using AI platforms. The video features animations of John and some characters from *The Wizard of Oz*, some of which play instruments in synchronization with the music.

Phivos describes his piece "Fake" as a "multi-channel electroacoustic non-music piece created entirely using AI-generated fragments." He recounts using a deliberative process in generating sound material using Udio prompted with sound excerpts of another of his compositions.[38] He maintained records of the quality of each output using a spreadsheet, which he used when composing with the material. He describes the curation and composition with these materials as intuitive, and "maybe the most creative process" in forming his work. "Fake" can be described as a chaotic collage of many audio samples, ranging from

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operatic singing to orchestral music, electronic noise, choral music, speech, and modernist piano music. The composition is an example of a use of Udio that is quite different from our other informants. Rather than creating full songs or finding inspiration for popular music production, Phivos pushes the platform to generate diverse audio content to be used as raw compositional material.

While some of our informants generate materials with platforms to download and work on locally, RVDION restricts himself to one platform to make music. He describes his Boomy piece "Final Destination," which won a competition organized by the company on their Discord.[39] He reflects that he enjoys the creative challenge of this restriction, and feels satisfaction that the Boomy management and other users are impressed by his results. The song "Final Destination" is an ambient electronic music piece, and its music video can be described with terms such as dark, futuristic, and steampunk. The video features AI-generated still images of what RVDION describes as "deities" in the shape of anthropomorphic female cat characters. The sound—a down-tempo, synthesized recurring pattern—is typical of Boomy's "style" called Lo-Fi, described by the platform as "Grainy beats melt into nature-infused ambient sounds to center your focus, rain or shine."[40]

The diversity of styles represented between and even within our informants should be noted. John is focused on songwriting and keeping his own voice identifiable in what he creates using Suno. Alpaca Rhythm and RVDION both have electronic aesthetics, and are inspired by spiritual elements, but sound quite distinct from one another even though they both use Boomy. Phivos is an electroacoustic composer with a clear command of the digital sound medium. Dave's music is humorous and highly sample based. Patrik and Karl-Johan, on the other hand, explore a variety of different styles depending on the context of their creation.

Costs and Critique

This theme encompasses aspects related to costs involved for an informant to create and distribute their music, which includes physical work and time (e.g., the effort required to create music) and financial aspects (e.g., platform subscription fees). It also raises aspects of critique regarding their reflections on quality and AI automation of certain creative processes and some ethical considerations of AI, particularly regarding training models on unlicensed music, and model misuse. One assumption about using commercial AI platforms for music creation may be that users want to find cheaper ways to make music, take shortcuts, automate certain processes, or game the system to earn money on streams.[41] We see that while some aspects of labor are eased and simplified according to the informants, such alleviated costs are weighed by them against output quality and the "labor" of the AI models alongside some ethical considerations.

Physical Work and Time Some of our informants note the ease and speed with which they can create music using AI music platforms. Patrik says "that I [need] about two generations per [song] … I can make a good song in 15 minutes." In contrast, he estimates spending dozens of hours making a video to accompany a song. Karl-Johan mentions that he sees using AI to make music as the "easy way … taking hours, not days." He says that he does not need to learn many software tools or even music theory to make music he likes.

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In contrast, some informants describe spending a lot of time and effort to create their music. Alpaca Rhythm mentions that even with AI tools it can take him weeks to finish a song. He describes a three-week "shamanic journey" of creating a song, with time to reflect before finishing it. Phivos also speaks about how the labor he put into his piece "Fake" moves him from being just a DJ to being a composer:

> You start from taking [an AI-generated] piece and you remix it. You are a DJ. Maybe you mix two pieces and you start to do a mash up. It's a little bit more complicated DJing. Then maybe you cut the layers and you start to put [together] different layers from other pieces. Then the process starts to blur towards composition … At the end what you have [is] a new composition.

Some informants describe a friction between the apparent ease of creating music using AI platforms, and the effort they feel they put into creating their music. John notes how some can look down on AI artists because of the seeming lack of effort, but he wants to be recognized for the work that he puts into recording and processing his voice: "I'm still doing the work of a singer, and I don't want to be looked at as taking the easy way out." At the same time, John suggests there are limits to who can call themselves "artists" when using AI platforms based on their efforts, saying that "an artist has to actually act out an art form." If you let Suno do all the work, he argues, "how could you copyright a song that you didn't sing, you didn't write, you didn't do any of the work on?" Dave reflects on a long-term cost in using AI: "The insidious nature of this is that it's taking away the artistry from people in the sense of maybe not wanting to even learn an instrument any longer and to learn to play." RVDION, however, sees an upside of substituting humans with AI and finds the labor involved with working with AI systems quite different from working with musicians, some of whom are more dependable than others. He describes arduous experiences in his younger years of playing in bands, organizing practice sessions, touring and playing concerts, and keeping several bandmates together. He implies that machines are things he can rely on, which is his major reason for using AI to create music.

Some informants explain why their creative goals impact their choice of platform. John says he prefers writing his own lyrics rather than using ChatGPT: "I like to put my own personal touch on it. For me, this is coming from my soul and that's where music comes from." Dave mentions he does not use full-song platforms like Suno to create music because he feels a lack of authorship. From these accounts, we understand that some informants debate what makes someone an artist or creative worker, and how much work one needs to perform to be defined as one, while others' interests lie in producing content more efficiently. Karl-Johan seems more interested in the latter, in creating what he considers to be good-quality music without spending too much effort in making music or learning new tools and theory. John, however, thinks some level of effort is needed for someone to call themselves an artist—just using AI does not suffice. Phivos sees a transition happening somewhere between remixing AI-generated material as a DJ to becoming a composer when a certain amount of work is put into the process. Exactly where they see borders between artistry and non-artistry, however, seems fluid and individually interpreted.

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Financial Aspects Some informants describe the money they spend on creating and sharing their music, e.g., to access platforms, or in commissioning others. Karl-Johan says he pays subscriptions to 20 different AI services as it relates to his work and pays to have his music distributed by Spotify. Patrik says he pays subscriptions to only Midjourney, Runway ("~100 USD/month") and Suno. The Producer discusses paying a premium subscription only to the vocal generation platform lalals.com. John happily pays for a subscription to Suno ("96 USD/year"), as well as a tier of SoundCloud that distributes music and has mastering capabilities. For his song "Fever On The Yellow Brick Road," John says he commissioned a music video from a friend for "60 USD." Phivos mentions he pays for a subscription to Udio, but only when he uses it for a composition. He also raises a skepticism about having to pay to access AI platforms created using data obtained without remuneration or permission and believes subscriptions should be free.

Some informants describe receiving money for some of their work, e.g., streaming revenue. Patrik mentions being commissioned by a musician to create a video for their (non-AI) song, but admits: "[for me] there is no money in this compared to what I make as a software consultant."[42] Dave mentions that he had made some money ("but nothing to live on") from his music, but that "the absolute flood of music that's available these days is both encouraging and fun, and frustrating if you want to make a buck." RVDION similarly mentions the difficulty he has in making money from Boomy, who at the time distributed users' Boomy music via the platform to potentially monetize on their streams while Boomy kept a portion of the revenue.[43] However, he wonders why he sees some Boomy users acquiring thousands of streams for music that is "straight Boomy songs ... and to me, don't feel musical at all." As such, several informants recognize misalignments between perceived effort and financial gains regarding both their own work and that of others. At the same time, some of them are willing to spend up to several hundred dollars per month to have access to these platforms.

Quality and Automation Karl-Johan, Patrik, and Brett all express being amazed by the output quality of Suno and Udio. However, they discuss occasions when the platform is not generating what is expected, or when its quality varies. The Producer thinks the output audio quality of Suno is still not good enough as it has too low resolution, especially when using stem splitting to separate instruments from mixed audio. Patrik explains how he went from being skeptical towards AI when he first encountered it, to now using AI as an "assistant in everything I do." However, he implies that a complete automation of the creative process would rob him of the experience of creating. Thus, for him the end goal is not just a good song, but a gratifying experience in creating it. Still, Patrik believes that good output quality is dependent on skillful prompting and thus requires human skill.

From another perspective, the Producer feels unease with how close AI is to producing "fast food music"—a term he also uses to describe some of his own work in popular music production and songwriting. He describes it as "music that you don't have to listen to, in the sense that you focus on the music. It's more like you can have it on the radio or the TV. It's a commercial, it's sound." But there are also downsides to AI becoming too good. The Producer discusses various AI voice models he is using to produce demos. With lalals.com

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one can make a vocal track imitating the voices of famous singers. However, some of his customers (labels and organizations) do not accept such "solutions anymore with celebrities because their artists can never live up to their expectations of sounding like Ariana Grande." He suggests it is better to use the voice of a demo vocalist as a "bad guide," so the artist can make an improved and personal version of the song.

The expectations from some of our informants are at times high in terms of what they think an AI model should be able to do, and these expectations are not always met. Yet, as some of our informants discuss, they think AI models are tools which should be used with a certain amount of human effort and care and should not eliminate the human user altogether. As such, AI creation at the level of a human is not sought after. Therefore, we understand that complete AI automation of creative processes is not the end goal for any of the informants, regardless of the output quality of AI music platforms.

Ethical Considerations None of our informants perceive AI as free from ethical dilemmas or problematic aspects, and several of them express some critique against the development of AI. Phivos, Brett, and Karl-Johan all reflect on the aspect of commercial AI music platforms being trained on large amounts of human-made music. Brett expresses concern regarding the use of copyright-protected material to train AI music models but believes it is "[creating] something new … an interesting way of describing our society and our collective musical consciousness." He mentions that he is pushed away from using commercial platforms for his work since he sees a lack of proper respect paid by them to the artists whose data they use. This lack of respect is also a big issue for Dave, who discusses how using Boomy relieves him from concerns about stealing because it offers him material for creating music that has not been trained on other people's music.[44] He also draws a parallel to sample-based music and reflects on how he intentionally uses copyright-free samples in his own music.

Some of the informants reflect on how the issue of training data and rights is transferable to the content they create on these platforms. Dave and John both mention Boomy's ownership of the rights to their music makes it a less attractive platform for them. The Producer mentions a fear of using a platform that ultimately copies an existing melody that he does not know. Karl-Johan, however, understands the "stealing" aspect of AI as an extension of a process that exists in his audiovisual production profession. From his perspective, people are inspired and take content or ideas from each other all the time, and AI is a part of this process. At the same time, he believes "we will go back after a while to the authentic and real stuff," as people will get tired of AI content. For the future, he wishes technology to be used to enhance human-made content and points out that AI can be a great tool in other fields such as cancer research.

Because it is so easy to generate content with AI, one type of misuse could be to generate and release as much music as possible. Karl-Johan raises a critique against this type of scaling of AI content creation, saying that users should not produce stuff just because they can. Even in his profession, he realizes that AI can write hundreds of articles for his company website but sees no purpose in doing so. In a similar way, he says releasing 50 songs a day fulfills no purpose either, as he still wants to be proud of his creations.

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Individualization

We see three emerging aspects of individualization in the use of commercial AI music platforms related to the individual user and their social circle. First, there are individualized processes, i.e., users working on their own, and the avoidance of, or struggle to, engage with communities. Second, we see the creation of individualized content, i.e., AI music tailored for themselves, family, or friends. Finally, we see individualized experiences, i.e., embodied and emotional experiences, where the music creation process itself causes responses in the individual users.

Processes The first aspect of individualization regards how AI music creators are working with a web-based application designed around the individual. The user interfaces of AI music platforms center on user-platform interaction, where a single user with a personal account creates music. Some platforms make music created by their users publicly available for listening, such as Suno's "Trending" playlist—although, as seen below, our informants rarely take part in this type of interaction. Alpaca Rhythm comments on this absence of human interaction in his creative processes. He feels a lack of human validation of his creative work, where AI does not provide help with sound engineering, releasing music, or critiquing his work. Some informants speak about not being bothered by the lack of broad engagement with the music they create. Patrik admits that "I don't get that many views [of my videos/music], and that doesn't really bother me because I'm not doing this to get famous. I'm doing it for fun." Karl-Johan says that "it's not that important for me to have other people listen to my music ... The main purpose of why I do it [is] basically the satisfaction of creating stuff that I like and [that] I can share with a few people." As such, some informants seem to create for their own sake, and for the sake of the process of creating, rather than with the goal of reaching out to a wider audience with their music.

While several of our informants are not bothered by a lack of engagement from others with their music, some mention being affected by critical or, in their opinion, unwarranted attacks on their music or membership in online communities. The difficulties in engaging with online AI music communities intensify this mode of individualization. Some of our informants who wish to take part in online communities describe how hard it can be to establish long-term interaction in these spaces. For instance, John describes experiencing some negativity around the Suno and Udio Discord servers, with competitiveness and "petty social politics" dominating the platform, often permitted and sometimes amplified by server moderators. Alpaca Rhythm also describes his struggles to gain recognition from online communities and the companies running the platforms he is working with, feeling judged for not being from a particular background or having experience with releasing music, and being banned from discussion forums over misunderstandings that he feels are out of his control. RVDION further shares his impression of and participation in AI music communities, saying that other users do not seem to be interested in interacting with one another. He finds the online communities rather, in his words, "anti-social" and believes that these AI platforms keep people separated from one another.

At the same time, our informants demonstrate exceptions to this individualized mode imposed by the AI music platforms. John seeks collaboration with other AI practitioners

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and releases works with them. RVDION similarly creates AI art together with his partner. The Producer, although having a rich network of professional musicians around him, only turns to Suno for ideas as a last resort when there is a need to produce a song quickly and no one is around for the moment. He states that working together with other people is when he feels the most inspired.

Content Several of our informants describe how they create AI songs that directly relate to their friends and family, or the creation of content for themselves to consume. For example, Brett first learned about Udio from a friend who showed how it can create a highly personal song that would never make sense outside of the context of their conversation. Patrik similarly enjoys creating AI songs for his family members and colleagues, both to impress people with the quality of AI music, and to comment on everyday situations, such as cheering up a friend. Some songs Patrik has made have "turned into family songs that you sing … in the car." The Producer states that "hopefully [AI is] only something that people use mainly to have a fun song about their friends."

Brett explains how he has exchanged a few songs with his musician friends but is not interested in other people's AI music. In a similar direction, Karl-Johan reflects on the Suno community and the activity around sharing and liking other users' songs, stating that he never participates in this pursuit: "I never listen to them because I'm not interested in listening to their music. I want to listen to my music." He describes this approach as ending up in one's own bubble, where the only meaningful music practice becomes one's own. He continues to reflect on how this lack of participation isolates people from one another, as users tend to create "custom-made things that [they] love," and as soon as someone realizes they can tailor content to their own preferences they are no longer in need of listening to other people's music—"it's the stuff that you make that is the best in your opinion." Karl-Johan sees this customization as a loss of common art references. He offers another analogy, suggesting that in three years, we might all be able to generate a personalized season of a favorite TV series, and when we tell our friends to look at it, they will not be interested as they have generated their own personalized season of the same show. Still, there are exceptions to this mode of individualization. Patrik describes how a song he made has a thousand streams, and it seems to be appreciated by its listeners judging by the comments they have made on the song. He wishes his music creates some kind of emotional response among his listeners, to counteract the view that AI is just "a kind of dead tool."

Experiences Several of our informants describe embodied and emotional experiences of creating music with AI. We understand this involvement as a third aspect of individualization, as the AI music practice becomes a matter of individual momentary experience, rather than a practice aimed at being shared and experienced with others. This aspect is related to the ones discussed above in that our informants rarely listen to or take part in other users' AI music.

Patrik discusses how his use of Suno can be likened with a "gamification process," where "you press the button, and it turns red or green. Every time it turns green, you're happy. It's a little bit [like an] adrenaline junkie or gambling thing around that." Built into this process

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is also the expectations of the AI platform's capability to create what a user wants. However, this gamification process does not fully satisfy his use of these platforms. For example, Patrik explains how he turned to making AI videos for his music when creating AI music became "too easy," which indicates that a practitioner like him still wants to experience challenge in the creative process rather than just getting instant gratification from a platform.

Brett explains a similar experience of his use of Udio, which he only used for a few weeks because he realized he became too invested in using it and was afraid it would affect his personal relationships. Brett describes Udio as a "party drug" because it gives him a high that made the platform somewhat irresistible to use. Like Patrik, Brett likes the surprise effect of instant creation. On the one hand, the surprise effect lies in the possibility to make odd combinations of genres and styles, and on the other hand in the capability of the AI platform to produce songs even "better than what you hear on mainstream radio … because the mainstream radio is, I think, more limited in expression." This experience of personally tailored AI content also extends beyond some informants' work in music. For example, Alpaca Rhythm says that when making his own chatbots, "the way that my experiences and stories and narratives influenced the AI, I feel like it's a very interesting self-reflection of me."

DISCUSSION

We now discuss the results of our thematic analysis and some prominent aspects of the people and practices of AI music examined in our work. We consider how our informants' accounts of their uses and experiences align with broader perspectives on the platformization of creative practice along with its inherent captivation and inbuilt traps, and reflect on AI music in terms of the algorithmic sublime and claims of "democratization."

Before we relate to these wider perspectives, we wish to reflect on the limitations and strengths of our work. The nine informants we interviewed represent a limited group of male and English-speaking individuals from the Global North who are avid users of various kinds of music technologies, while our observations of the Suno and Udio Discords indicate users from around the world. At the same time, the informants demonstrate a variety of ages and socio-economic, educational, and professional backgrounds. They also exhibit a range of musical styles, although several of them work in the domain of popular music. For example, Phivos combines academic research with compositional practice and critically reflects on the impacts of AI in his musical works. Karl-Johan and Patrik are both motivated to use AI because they want to make music they like to consume, i.e., popular or "hit" music. Using AI to generate their own novel music tailored to their preferences can be viewed as an extension of an already established music consumer practice. The Producer reaches for AI music platforms as one type of music technological tool among many other production tools and plugins, although not without scruples about how the generated content relates to existing copyright-protected work. All nine informants demonstrate a tech-situatedness in their interest and use of various kinds of digital technologies, even prior to using AI music platforms. Some enter AI music platforms via using tools for music production, and others via their use of AI applications outside of music.

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Another limitation of our work is the need to take the words of our informants at face value. We assume their accounts reliably reflect their perspectives and actions—an aspect for which all qualitative research needs to account. Drawing on Clifford Geertz, our approach is to understand statements as data to be interpreted and seen as meaningful in the context in which they appear, rather than as facts.[45] By triangulating our interview data with observations and engagement in some AI music platforms and connected discussion forums, we attempt to validate our informants' statements. With our in-person interviews, we overcome the anonymity barrier often experienced in digital ethnographic research.[46] Yet even online video conversations have their limitations as some vocal inflections and body language are lost. Furthermore, our study complements previous work on AI practitioners as discussed in the Introduction (e.g., Herington et al. 2025) in that the perspectives of our informants come at a time after significant disruption from AI technology in music and media whereas theirs encapsulates a time from before.[47] Also, only a few of our informants overlap with the group interviewed by Herington et al., as we expand beyond professional musicians.

Platformization and Captivating Traps

We now frame AI music within a broader music-technological context and raise some concerns. We understand AI music platforms as technologies built to fit into an existing digital infrastructure based on the platformization of music consumption and distribution, and increasingly its creation.[48] Boomy's business model is founded upon the distribution of users' tracks to digital service providers so that users might make money from streams, while Boomy holds ownership of the copyright. As discussed above, Dave sees the distribution aspect as a motivation to use Boomy while being displeased with the copyright aspect. Although being a loyal user of Boomy, RVDION describes frustration when seeing other users earning revenue from their Boomy tracks seemingly created without effort. The Suno platform combines music generation with streaming, where users are recommended Suno tracks and can browse playlists organized around themes, musical styles, or other creators. We also see how users like Karl-Johan take their Suno creations to other platforms such as Spotify to reach listeners and earn revenue. Social platforms like Discord further play a part in the experience of our informants' work in AI music, where interacting with other users and dealing with moderators can impact their practice. The platform-centered practice is, however, experienced as rather lonely as several informants indicate an absence of interaction on such platforms, or challenges in interacting with others in these spaces. Collaboration in the creative process is not built into the user interfaces of AI music platforms. Therefore, a kind of discrepancy can be seen between a user's wish to belong to a broader music community, and the shortcomings of AI music platforms and their related social platforms to properly provide that experience.

The digital infrastructure of music platformization—centered on revenue and streaming metrics—also facilitates an upscaling of AI-generated content, which is criticized by some informants. Several of our informants describe using multiple platforms interconnectedly in their creative process, yet not without costs such as expensive subscriptions and mental tolls caused by online interaction, or ethical concerns around ownership and stealing.

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As such, users are not only bound by individual affordances of these platforms but are also dependent on the infrastructure connecting the platforms together. While we see some users generate materials with AI platforms to use outside of the platforms, they still turn to other platforms for distributing their music.

Nick Seaver investigates how recommender systems for online culture consumption are intentionally built as traps that "hook" users, ensuring long-term use and paid subscriptions to the platforms—keeping the user captivated.[49] Seaver discusses, for instance, how companies trace user interactions to elicit even more interaction with the platform. Long-time users get a more personalized experience, while newcomers are subjected to more generic yet captivating content. The AI music platforms used by our informants demonstrate a similar behavior and function. Patrik notes that Suno "gamifies" music creation, as he feels happy when it gives him green lights, pushing him to interact more. In fact, Suno CEO Mikey Shulman compares the vision for his company with that of video gaming.[50] He argues that while gaming is interactive, "too much music are [sic] just passive consumption," and that music could be just as financially successful as the gaming industry if only it was more "engaging." Both Suno and Udio generate two outputs for each user prompt, and a user can give a "thumbs up" to the output they like the best. Not only does this interaction give the user a sense of control over the process, but it likely also helps tune the models to produce more attractive results to specific users, like Seaver's observation of recommendation system algorithms.[51] Enticing users with competitions offering prizes like money and free subscriptions further incentivize sustained platform use and interaction. Alpaca Rhythm was motivated to join a GrimesAI competition with the chance, according to the competition description, to create something that the artist would listen to.

Even the AI music itself incentivizes individualized experiences, as each user can tailor their own preferred content with no need to take part in or share that content with others. The ease with which one can create music with AI platforms, and the gratifying experiences of this practice described by some of our informants, also shows that these practices can be more centered on platform use than the final product. Few of our informants even listen to their own or other users' AI music creations more than a few times, yet some of them describe concern with the number of streams and other metrics related to their music. Suno, for instance, displays the number of listens to each track generated with the platform. Such metrics not only matter as an economic value to the users but can also become a marker of cultural recognition. It can thus be argued that the platformization of AI music extends Seaver's captivating traps from that of recommendation algorithms for content consumption to enticing user rewards for content creation.

The Algorithmic Sublime and Claims of "Democratization"

Several informants describe emotional responses to working with AI technologies. Brett's "party drug" use of Udio comes from a fascination for the content the platform can produce in terms of audio quality, unexpected combinations of musical styles and lyrics, and the possibility of individualized content framed around personal situations. Brett, Karl-Johan, and Patrik relate being captivated by the capabilities of AI and using it in social situations to impress other people. Alpaca Rhythm and RVDION both describe how the

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use of AI in their work fits with and enhances their mystical experiences. Both Brett and Phivos reflect on how they think models like Udio represent "our collective musical consciousness" or a "collective subconscious or memory." These fascinations for the capabilities of technologies to enhance, mystify, and affect human experiences have been described by scholars as the "algorithmic sublime" or "digital sublime."[52] The sublime experience is not so much grounded in the real affordances of technologies as in the myths and beliefs of technological capacities, and the sensations of both awe and terror that such capacities may bring.[53] As a technology, AI poignantly speaks to the algorithmic sublime, as the opaque "black box effect"—the lack of transparency in how generative AI produces its results—mystifies and glorifies the technology's abilities to be creative. This ideology is of course magnified by the proprietary nature of the commercial platforms with which our informants engage. The sublimity of AI and commercial application—in combination with enabling what we have termed individualized processes, content, and experiences—can explain why some users become captivated by AI music platforms.

The algorithmic sublime can also help illustrate the drive of developers of AI music platforms to "democratize" music practice. For example, Shulman said in May 2024 after the company raised USD 125 million in funding: "Our mission at Suno is to democratize music creation and unlock the musical creativity within everyone."[54] In place of the term "democratization" we believe "access" is the more appropriate term. The ideology behind access is commonly expressed in both academia and commercial sectors of creative AI.[55] The belief is that technology can make accessible those practices that have before been limited to privileged groups. It is argued that automated processes relieve people of the burdens of, in this case, musical labor, such as learning and practicing an instrument for a sustained period. While the techno-optimist trope of democratization is particularly pervasive in the domain of AI, it has been discussed at least since the "digital turn" when more and more of music practice became digitalized.[56] However, the individualized creation and self-expression enabled by digitalization—which we see intensified with AI—collides with the fact that the platforms giving rise to these practices are developed and mediated by privileged companies with financial incentives.[57]

We see aspects of access described by our informants for why they turn to AI in their music practices: Dave explains his lack of interest in learning to play an instrument; Alpaca Rhythm says he is unable to own equipment due to moving frequently; and RVDION describes difficulties finding consistent band members. Several of our informants discuss how the use of AI enables and enhances their creative practice, but as we have mentioned, this practice does not come without costs to the user. Several of our informants describe paying for multiple subscriptions monthly or yearly, for some adding up to hundreds of dollars. This financial possibility is not accessible to everyone. Phivos notes that he thinks subscriptions should be free, since the AI music platforms reuse human-made content—which we interpret as a moral reflection of paying back to human creators. This aspect does not, however, seem to be included under the banner of "democratization" claimed by the AI music platform developers. Furthermore, some informants do not want AI to become "too good," as that might deprive them of a sense of having created something themselves. While having easy access to the creation of music via these platforms, users are bound by

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them and are reliant on both platform maintenance and digital infrastructure for their creative practices to be sustained. In line with what has been termed the "attention economy," users are paying not only (often expensive) subscriptions for advanced plans but also with their attention and sustained use of the platform.[58]

Users are also reliant on digital service providers to allow for their music to be shared and streamed, and some of our informants describe a difficulty in reaching audiences. As AI music is flooding online music providers, some companies are taking action to limit AI content on their platforms. In early 2026, Bandcamp announced that they will ban all music "generated wholly or in substantial part by AI" from their platform.[59] Spotify allows for AI music on their platform, but announced in September 2025 that they had removed 75 million AI songs in the past year—a number competing with their catalogue of 100 million tracks.[60] The question is therefore not only what a democratized music practice really entails, and who has access to it, but also how democratic it is when companies decide which music they should offer. As such, we understand that while AI music platforms allow for an individualized music practice, that practice is bound by a centralized market mediated by companies and platformization, both in terms of AI music creation and distribution.

CONCLUSION

Through semi-structured interviews, online observation, and music listening, we have studied commercial AI music platform users to understand their motivations for and processes of using AI platforms in their practice, and their experiences of this domain. As the proliferation of AI music is expanding, we consider it crucial to understand the mechanisms behind it and how the music is finding its way into streaming platforms and social media. These mechanisms include not only the technology itself, but also the people creating the content and the infrastructures enabling the content to be distributed and consumed. From our interviews, we unveil some of those mechanisms to understand how individual uses of AI relate to broader technological and socio-cultural structures. As our informants' uses and experiences demonstrate, the motivations to use AI music platforms vary. There can be many reasons and decisions behind typing a prompt or pressing a button to generate music with AI. Some users do it for fun, while others wish to reach out to an audience with their music or develop their musical skills. We have also seen that the processes are different among our informants. Although one can with ease make music with AI, each informant describes a unique modus operandi. We also identified some ethical concerns of AI expressed by some of our informants, such as scaling, and ownership and copyright.

Since we started this work in 2023, we have seen not only a rapid rise and commercialization of generative AI, with AI music platforms such as Suno touting their generation of millions of new tracks, but also the formation of a grassroots backlash against generative AI.[61] Warnings abound about "AI psychosis," various forms of "slop," "botshit," "second-wave Eugenics," and AI contributing to "the new aesthetics of fascism."[62] People are being "shamed" when suspected of using AI, which has been recognized as a type of "boundary work" in the knowledge economy.[63] Some major online music content providers are now visibly acting antagonistically to anything they deem as being AI.[64] With this

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unfolding shift, we agree with Rachel McNealis' claim that critique against AI should primarily be directed towards developers and infrastructures of these technologies, rather than the users of the systems.[65] The users we interview, for instance, show a broad and meaningful engagement with the music they create using AI music platforms, but also a lack of engagement with the music others create with the same platforms. It would thus be interesting to return to our informants in this new atmosphere and have them reflect on their perspectives from a time that was more positive around what they were doing. It could also be interesting to interview users who seek merely to tap into music streaming revenue using AI music technology.[66] Engaging with a more heterogeneous user population could help reveal the impacts of AI on different demographics.

Through this work, we have seen the need to engage with current discourses of AI and technology, such as traps and the algorithmic sublime, to understand how these AI music practices emerge from and are tightly connected to broader value systems and ideologies. Such ideologies will likely shift in this fast-moving domain, yet they continue shaping how and why people engage with these technologies, as well as how their resulting content is received. We therefore suggest a continued theorization of individualized music practices emerging especially with AI platforms, and how the platformization of these practices comes into conflict with claims of democratization—aspects we consider central to our findings. We hope this work inspires future research by musicologists, ethnographers, and other scholars interested in the diverse ways people engage with technologies in their music practices. Specifically, we hope it encourages further investigation into how the proliferation of AI music platforms alters the creation and conceptualization of music. ■

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APPENDIX A

Our semi-structured interviews used this list of questions as a starting point. Due to the nature of the semi-structured interview format, some discussions with informants deviated somewhat from this list, and we came up with various follow-up questions for each informant.

- Describe your music identity/role. Who are you as [artist name/online pseudonym]?
- Do you have any background as a music practitioner at amateur or professional level?
- Do you have any background in tech?
- Describe your overall musical style. (What are you making?)
- Why do you engage with these tools?
- How do you go about creating a track with this AI music platform?
- Describe a piece that you have made. (Process, content, idea, etc.)
- How much music content of a final track do you add to what the platform provides?
- How do you use the music you create? (In social media content, music videos, streaming.)
- How does the platform/s give you access to something that you did not have access to before? (Music composition, creativity, outreach.)
- Who else in the community do you like?
- What is the place or community/ies of AI music?
- Discuss tensions of use that you have had. Or is it always a straightforward creative process?
- Do you think that in the AI music community there are stereotypes around certain AI music platforms, for example that Suno users are just making songs for a laugh?
- Where do you see yourself headed in your future music life/career?
- What are you working on right now?

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