



From Physical Records to Playlists: Who Controls Access Today?

DIGITAL RIGHTS AWARENESS MODULE 3

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The Digital Revolution

- The internet dematerialised music: songs became files shared freely across networks.

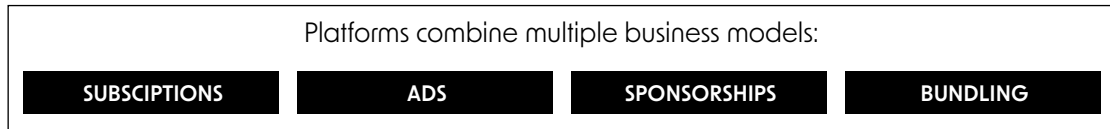
Access replaced ownership;
abundance replaced scarcity.

iTunes (2003) reintroduced
monetisation — 99 cents
per song — marking a shift
from labels to **platforms** as
gatekeepers.

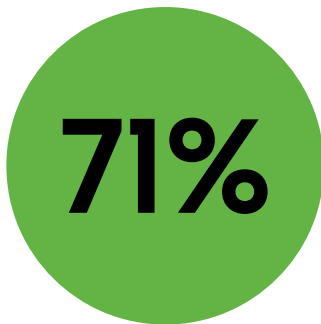
Power moved from
record companies to **tech
ecosystems** like Apple.

From Downloads to Streaming

- From iTunes to Spotify, music became **instant and limitless**. We no longer collect albums; we curate playlists.



- Algorithms now **shape listening** — deciding who gets heard.



of Spotify's catalogue comes from majors and Merlin — algorithmic gatekeeping dominates.

Major Industry Players' Adaptations

MAJORS (UNIVERSAL, WARNER, SONY)	A MULTI-INDUSTRY ASSET
Lost control of distribution, but maintain power via platform deals and visibility.	Expand into e-commerce, brand partnerships, data analytics — music as a multi-industry asset.
INDIE LABELS	AGGREGATORS (DISTROKID, DITTO, BANDCAMP)
Fairer splits (e.g. 50/50) but limited reach; rely on Merlin for collective negotiation.	Empower DIY artists to self-release and manage royalties.



The Metadata Battlefield

Each recording carries ISRC (recording) and ISWC (composition) codes.

Missing or mismatched codes = lost royalties

Collecting societies (PRS, GEMA, SACEM, etc.) investing in real-time data tools.

Yet, metadata errors persist, causing digital invisibility for creators.

Social Media and the New Stage of Virality

- YouTube, TikTok, Instagram change how we discover music.
- Platforms earn from ads, licensing, and sponsorships — becoming both broadcasters and data brokers.
- TikTok turns sound into social currency; SoundOn lets artists keep 100% royalties in-app.
- YouTube's Content ID automates rights but favours major labels.

Exposure replaces remuneration

VISIBILITY → INCOME



The Discoverability Problem

Streaming = abundance,
but **attention is scarce**.

Fair MusE found: streaming
offers more choice than radio,
yet listening remains **highly
concentrated**.

Algorithms reward **popularity
loops** — “rich get richer.”

Platforms rarely reveal
**user-choice vs algorithmic
plays** — only Apple Music
discloses this.

A decorative vertical bar on the left side of the slide, composed of various geometric shapes including circles, triangles, and semi-circles in colors like green, orange, pink, and grey, some with patterns like stripes or zig-zags.

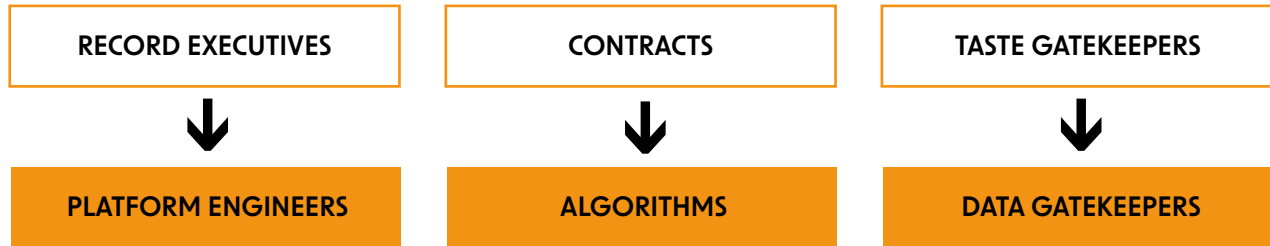
The Structural Blind Spot

- Lack of transparency + fragmented metadata hides inequalities.
- Missing data (gender, origin, label) = impossible to assess diversity.
- Fair MusE calls this a “structural blind spot” in music’s data ecosystem.
- Algorithms **democratise access but centralise attention.**

Without transparent metadata and auditable systems,
diversity becomes an illusion.

Who Controls Access Today?

Power shifted — not vanished, going from:



The future of music depends on **algorithmic accountability**:
fairness indicators, audit tools, and transparent standards.



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