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Sped-up and nightcore in the platform paradigm: genealogy, aesthetics and creative practices of fast-paced music

Sped-up y nightcore en el paradigma de las plataformas: genealogía, estética y prácticas creativas de la música acelerada

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Abstract:

This article analyses how the musical practices of acceleration that began circulating on production-oriented platforms have been co-opted and redefined by mainstream

consumption streaming platforms, social media, and multinational record companies. Through the systematisation of secondary sources, it examines how mainstream consumption platforms and the music industry adopt musical practices from accelerated music subcultures. Their aesthetic characteristics are analysed, and the leading actors who promote and exploit them are identified. The results reveal a feedback loop between the effects of platformisation and the musical practices of participatory culture. On the one hand, platform producer-oriented like SoundCloud serve as spaces that foster creativity and the dissemination of accelerated music from alternative subcultures such as nightcore and hyperpop, which challenge copyright laws protecting existing songs. On the other hand, the high engagement and viral spread of sped-up content on social media platforms like TikTok have influenced industry tactics, leading to the release of official accelerated versions. Meanwhile, mainstream streaming consumer-oriented services, such as Spotify and Apple Music, create playlists to attract mass audiences through opaque algorithms. This demonstrates the co-optation of cultural expressions by record companies and the mainstream platformisation geared towards consumption, which strips the cultural complexity of subcultures associated with accelerated music of its meaning.

Keywords: Sped-up, plataformisation, music industry, remixes, TikTok, Spotify, hyperpop, platforms.

Resumen:

Esta investigación analiza cómo las prácticas musicales de aceleración que comenzaron a circular por plataformas orientadas a la producción han sido cooptadas y resignificadas por plataformas de *streaming* orientadas al consumo *mainstream*, las redes sociales y las discográficas multinacionales. Mediante la sistematización de fuentes secundarias, se examina cómo las plataformas de consumo *mainstream* y la industria musical adoptan prácticas musicales de las subculturas de música acelerada. Se analizan sus características estéticas y se identifican los principales actores que las promueven y aprovechan. Los resultados revelan una retroalimentación entre los efectos de la *plataformización* y las prácticas musicales de la cultura participativa. Por un lado, plataformas como SoundCloud, enfocadas en la producción musical, funcionan como

espacios que fomentan la creatividad y la difusión de música acelerada de subculturas alternativas como el nightcore y el hyperpop, que desafían las leyes de derechos de autor que protegen las canciones existentes. Por otro lado, el elevado *engagement* y la viralización de *sped-up* en plataformas como TikTok han influido en las tácticas de la industria musical, que lanza versiones oficiales aceleradas. Por su parte, las plataformas de *streaming mainstream* orientadas al consumo, como Spotify y Apple Music, crean *playlists* para atraer audiencias masivas mediante algoritmos opacos. Esto evidencia la cooptación de las expresiones culturales por parte de las discográficas y de la *plataformización mainstream* orientada al consumo, que vacían de significado la complejidad cultural de las subculturas vinculadas a la música acelerada.

Palabras clave: Sped-up, plataformización, industria musical, remixes, TikTok, Spotify, nightcore, hyperpop, plataformas.

1. INTRODUCTION

The acceleration of pre-existing songs exemplifies the impact of platforms on the diversity of cultural expressions inherent to participatory culture. The sped-up (accelerated) songs, understood as remixes of pre-existing songs—and therefore protected by copyright—could be defined as a short, memetic audio and/or video format of high intensity and visibility, produced, circulated, and consumed within a digital ecosystem dominated by platforms. Acceleration functions as a central aesthetic principle in both creation and listening. It promotes the viral spread of countless sped-up versions that, by making it difficult to identify the original songs, are impossible to monetise under copyright on some platforms, especially TikTok.

If we consider McLuhan's theory that the media shape messages and our ways of communicating, we must begin with the idea that “the platform is the message.” However, the digital media ecosystem is much more complex, more closed, and opaque than the analog one. In this context, the platformisation of cultural industries reflects the central role of the technology sector in the circulation and production of culture

(Poell et al., 2022), thereby influencing and shaping the social and economic relationships of digital culture.

Therefore, platformisation constitutes, in this research, the framework within which musical expressions such as sped-up tracks are analysed. These emerge on production-oriented platforms like SoundCloud, Mixcloud, Audiomack, and Bandcamp, but are co-opted by multinational record companies, streaming platforms aimed at consumption such as Spotify, and social networks like TikTok. Consequently, this article focuses on musical practices as cultural expressions circulating within the platform paradigm, analysing how sped-up tracks interact both on platforms linked to the music industry (such as SoundCloud, Spotify, and Apple Music) and on those that, without being directly part of the industry, benefit from the circulation of music (TikTok, YouTube, among others). The specific objectives address three dimensions: the evolution and appropriation of sped-up tracks across different platforms and social networks, how these cultural expressions create an aesthetic of acceleration, and who is behind their production.

This research is justified by the fact that, in 2023, sped-up versions reached peak popularity as a musical trend on TikTok, dominating charts worldwide across various short videos (TikTok, 2023). In response to this surge in virality, the music industry began using sped-up tracks as a marketing tool, with artists such as SZA and Sabrina Carpenter releasing them. Platforms such as Spotify and Apple Music also curated playlists to leverage and monetize the trend. While these remixes increase the visibility of original songs, they also divert royalties away from rights holders, a key management challenge for the music industry (Mills, 2023).

Conversely, some producers have opted to sample songs from the past within their new work, updating their aesthetic to align with contemporary tastes. This trend typically involves accelerating the original track and increasing its pitch. Noteworthy examples include the use of the sampler from “The Logical Song” (Supertramp, 1979) in “When We Were Young” (David Guetta + Kim Petras, 2023), as well as the incorporation of “Thank You” (Dido, 2000) in “When Love Sucks” (Jason Derulo + Dido, 2023). These instances exemplify the successful application of this accelerating musical trend. Musical

acceleration illustrates that intensity remains a pivotal characteristic of the digital era. This intensified approach correlates with increased visibility, as algorithms on platforms such as TikTok (Cassidy, 2022) tend to promote videos featuring accelerated music due to the high engagement they attract within an environment saturated with content governed by the attention economy. Its dissemination relies heavily on memetics, whereby the capacity to replicate enhances shared cultural units, with users modifying and disseminating them across various platforms (Sánchez-Olmos & Viñuela, 2017). This process leverages the functionalities provided by applications, fostering a culture oriented toward virality (Sánchez-Olmos & Viñuela, 2020).

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: THE PLATFORM PARADIGM IN MUSIC

Platformization is defined as the penetration of digital platforms across the web and applications, driven by economic, governmental, and infrastructural growth that incorporates user data for monetization (van Dick et al. 2018; Poell et al., 2019). In the cultural sphere, this entails the reorganisation of production and distribution, making cultural goods contingent and vulnerable to modification and personalization based on individual preferences (Nieborg & Poell, 2018). In music, this means that creators rely on platforms such as TikTok, Spotify, and Apple Music to navigate algorithms, playlists, and business models, thereby ensuring their visibility and earnings (Morris, 2020). Notably, although Spotify is often seen as a neutral space, it has transformed the music industry through algorithms and playlists, acting as a form of technocracy: not all artists compete equally, especially independent ones (Pelly, 2025). While Spotify promotes its playlists as personalised syndication tools, the author argues that, in reality, they are controlled models managed by platform gatekeepers and algorithms that determine which songs are included or excluded to maximise profits. Playlists illustrate what Prey (2020) calls “curatorial power”: Spotify’s ability to advance its interests and influence others by organizing and selecting songs, often licensed directly from musicians to bypass record labels.

Digital platforms, according to Drott (2018), not only distribute music but also shape identities and behaviours through opaque algorithms that commercialise data and exploit the subjectivity of artists and listeners. In line with the political economy of

culture, concerns are raised about the risks of labour exploitation and surveillance exercised by these companies (Fuchs, 2017). Music becomes a commodity, and communities are subordinated to control dynamics that widen inequalities (van Dijck, Poell and de Waal, 2018; Nieborg and Poell, 2018). Thus, musicians—especially independents—must adapt their creativity to the logics of playlists, optimisation, and monetisation in services such as Spotify (Morris, 2020; Pelly, 2025).

In this research, we identify two categories of platforms: social networks and musical platforms. On one hand, social networks such as YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram, which, although not strictly musical services, rely on music to generate content, virality, and monetisation. On the other hand, there is a category of musical platforms that also function as social networks and can be divided into two types, according to Hesmondhalgh et al. (2019, p. 2). Firstly, the mainstream consumer-oriented streaming platforms, such as Spotify, Apple Music, and Tencent, which institutionalised the former peer-to-peer (P2P) platforms like Napster, labelled as “pirates” after legal battles. Currently, digital music consumption worldwide is predominantly concentrated on these platforms, whose operations depend on agreements with copyright holders, primarily large multinational record companies. Secondly, there are producer-oriented platforms, such as SoundCloud, Mixcloud, Audiomack, and Bandcamp, that facilitate the dissemination of independent music and enable producers and DJs to connect directly with their audiences without relying on record labels or publishers (Hesmondhalgh et al. 2019). Unlike Spotify, these platforms promote music production and serve as native spaces for the circulation of songs modified by DJs and producers (Mills, 2023), although they also attract listeners. Despite espousing certain ideals of digital democratisation, these platforms continue to reproduce the dynamics of platform capitalism, exploiting creative work and data from their profiles (Hesmondhalgh et al., 2019). However, the same authors note that production-focused platforms reflect some of the cultural democratisation aspirations of the 20th century and are currently the main spaces for alternative music, playing roles like those of independent labels.

In the musical realm, the evolution of digital infrastructures shows a significant transition from platforms demanded by record companies for infringing copyright, such

as Napster and BitTorrent, towards closed platforms controlled by technological oligopolies that dominate music streaming consumption, such as Spotify, Apple Music, or Deezer (Hesmondhalgh et al., 2023). The latter were created under the notion of “intellectual property”, which restricted free file sharing through digital rights management (DRM) systems. From a cultural studies perspective, Burgess (2021) argues that platforms, through metrics and algorithms, determine which content gains visibility and is monetised, and which is silenced, thereby forcing creators to adjust their practices to these opaque rules. However, the academic also recognises that platforms have been transformed by participatory culture, as many formats, functions (such as vlogs), and even conventions first emerged from users and were later adopted by platforms. This aligns with the dynamic that Negus (1999) attributes to multinational corporations. Despite controlling the production and distribution of music, they depend on artists and their communities, who generate the musical styles that record companies exploit commercially.

Similarly, Burgess et al. (2022) and Hesmondhalgh (2025) argue that critical views on the political economy of culture are essential. However, they note that on platforms for re-signification, creative practices involving negotiating meanings and building identities and subcultures are emerging, yet their subjectivities remain underexplored. In this context, phenomena like the sped-up can evolve into tools for aesthetic experimentation and foster cohesion within these groups. The so-called creator culture (Cunningham et al., 2021) describes participatory culture as a dynamic that shifts between economic and cultural dimensions, balancing creative independence with commercial interests within platform paradigms.

3. METODOLOGÍA

Drawing on a qualitative, interdisciplinary approach that links communication studies, platformisation, and popular music, this research aims to analyse the impact of platforms on the diversity of cultural expressions inherent to participatory culture. To achieve this, three dimensions are examined. Firstly, the role of platforms in the genealogy and evolution of sped-up as a creative and cultural practice; secondly, the dynamics of digital communication and cultural production that shape an aesthetic of

musical acceleration; and finally, several of the main profiles of creators who have generated the most significant impact in the media, to understand their influence on contemporary musical practices.

The methodology consists of a documentary review of secondary sources, including academic studies and a content analysis of articles from media outlets and reports addressing the phenomenon of sped-up music in digital platforms, primarily between 2019 and 2025. The analysed media include those specialised in music: *Billboard* (Leight, 2023) and *NME* (Campbel, 2023), as well as generalist outlets: *The New York Times* (Dandridge-Lemco, 2020; Cassidy, 2022; Winkie, 2020), *The Guardian* (Demopoulus, 2023), *Bloomberg* (Carman, 2023), *Forbes* (Murray, 2023), and *Eesti Rahvusringhääling* (Viilup, 2019), along with reports from PEX (Mills, 2023; 2024) — a company that monitors user-generated audio modifications (UGC) on digital platforms.

Based on this research, the aim is to construct a framework that systematises existing knowledge on the acceleration of music, considering its relationship with platformisation and the changes that have redefined music production, distribution, and consumption in the digital age. In this way, it seeks not only to understand the sped-up from an analytical perspective but also to approach them as a case study that elucidates the cultural and technological logics that characterise the platformisation of music, as well as the practices of its creators.

4. RESULTS

4.1. SPED-UP AND HYPERPOP: FROM PRODUCTION PLATFORMS TO CONSUMPTION ONES

The sped-up phenomenon emerged in the early 2000s with the Norwegian duo Nightcore, which popularised versions of electronic music by increasing the tempo by more than 25%, reaching between 160 and 180 bpm and modulating its pitch (Cassidy, 2022). Their remixes circulated, without Nightcore's knowledge, via P2P platforms such as LimeWire and, later, SoundCloud, and on social networks such as YouTube, featuring anime-style videos, until they went viral on TikTok in 2022. The nightcore scene, with a DIY spirit, is considered one of the first “virtual music scenes” (Cassidy, 2022). Over time,

it has been platformised, according to Pelly (2025), as TikTok and Spotify promote sped-up music through algorithms, which strip nightcore of its original meaning to attract mass audiences. In this way, the community maintains an ambivalent relationship with the music industry: on the one hand, it depends on it; on the other, it resists it by using copyrighted music (Winston, 2017) yet fears that massification will dilute its identity.

Although TikTok has received considerable media attention for the proliferation of accelerated versions, platforms dedicated to the production of mixtapes and DJ sets show the highest percentages of modified audio (Mills, 2024). The same study indicates that in the first quarter of 2023, approximately 70% of content on Audiomack and 64% on SoundCloud featured alterations, compared with 32% on TikTok. This demonstrates that TikTok is not the leading centre for the production of modified songs, as accelerated music is more common on platforms focused on production rather than consumption, such as Spotify, Apple Music, and social networks like TikTok.

However, on TikTok, acceleration has increased more than on other social networks. It has become content favoured by its algorithms, due to the engagement generated by sped-up playback and the app's affordances, which promote memetics and video remixes, thereby increasing circulation, especially in choreography videos. According to Pelly (2025), TikTok accelerated musical culture in 2022, when accelerated versions based on nightcore and hyperpop aesthetics began to proliferate, having grown over the past two decades.

This phenomenon exemplifies what Burgess and Green (2018) refer to as vernacular creativity: creative practices on social media that, by leveraging the tools and dynamics of platforms, produce new cultural meanings before being appropriated or formalised by the music industry. A clear example is the sped-up version of "Bloody Mary" (Lady Gaga, 2011), which went viral on TikTok in 2022 with a dance challenge featuring the choreography of the character Wednesday from the Netflix series of the same name: users replaced the synchronised song from the series ("Goo Goo Muck" by The Cramps) with a sped-up version of "Bloody Mary". Lady Gaga participated in the challenge, and her involvement was used to promote the series' second season. The virality of this

sped-up version led to the song entering the Billboard chart for the first time in January 2023, twelve years after its release (Murray, 2023), revitalising the artist's repertoire.

In response to the increasing circulation and popularity of user-generated sped-up versions, consumption-oriented platforms and record labels, such as Warner Music, have begun to incorporate sped-up tracks into their promotional and distribution strategies, creating Spotify playlists that in 2023 exceeded 16 million monthly listeners (Carman, 2023). Spotify and Apple Music have also launched their own editorial playlists of sped-up tracks, which have millions of followers and are used to monetise musical acceleration.

Meanwhile, record labels are implementing marketing strategies to capitalise on the sped-up trend. Warner Music Group and Universal Music Group have created on Spotify the playlists "sped up nightcore" and "x Speed Radio", which exclusively feature accelerated songs by artists from their own catalogues, but published under a profile that reproduces a nightcore aesthetic, to mimic the subculture. This aesthetic functions as a sign of authenticity that record labels and platforms imitate to approach a subculture that rejects music-industry productions, while also connecting with new audiences. In this way, the usual dynamic of youth subcultural practices since the sixties is reproduced: it is shaped through the reuse and re-signification of pre-existing elements, ultimately to be absorbed by mass culture and exploited economically by hegemonic media (Hebdige, 2004).

Furthermore, record labels license and release official versions of sped-up tracks to capitalise on them and avoid copyright conflicts; some of these versions are strategically planned at the launch of mainstream artists such as SZA, Steve Lacy, or Sabrina Carpenter. Cases such as "Bloody Mary" (2011) illustrate how sped-up tracks can help revitalise forgotten discographies. In both cases, it shows how sped-up versions have reconfigured release strategies within the music industry in the context of digital platforms (Campbell, 2023; Leight, 2023; Mills, 2024; Murray, 2023). For major labels, creating a sped-up version or licensing an accelerated version of a content creator is more cost-effective than commissioning a remix from a recognised DJ (Demopoulos, 2023).

The sped-up phenomenon is linked to hyperpop and currently encompasses practices such as nightcore, which share a strong imprint of electronic music: fast tempo, high frequencies, and voices processed with AutoTune. Both are connected to dance and EDM culture. Nightcore, which emerged as an amateur practice in the 2000s, is reconfigured in hyperpop as one of its early and popular expressions. Hyperpop, more than a musical genre, is a creative community that originated on platforms and was forged on SoundCloud and Twitter, starting with the independent label PC Music and the transgender artist SOPHIE, offering a more experimental approach than mainstream EDM culture, and incorporating influences from vaporwave, nightcore, chiptune, J-pop, Y2K pop, hip hop, and other dance music styles (Dandridge-Lemco, 2020; Pelly, 2025; Winston, 2017).

Although the term hyperpop already existed in the metadata of the nightcore subculture before Spotify created the eponymous editorial playlist in 2019, it was the streaming platform that defined and formalised the genre by identifying listening patterns susceptible to monetisation for broad audiences (Dandridge-Lemco, 2020). Spotify signed the experimental electronic duo 100 geecs, which had already gone viral on the platform, and commissioned them to curate the editorial playlist titled “Hyperpop” (Dandridge-Lemco, 2020). The duo created the Hyperpop playlist by selecting tracks from a community of artists whose music circulated rapidly on Discord and SoundCloud. This operation not only formalised hyperpop as a musical genre but also transformed it into a visible, classifiable, and profitable product within the music platform paradigm (Dandridge-Lemco, 2020; Pelly, 2025).

Until Spotify’s intervention, accelerated music circulated on production-oriented platforms, such as community-based playlists, i.e., created and curated by artists or fans of the accelerated scene. This reconfiguration not only established a particular aesthetic language but also increased the visibility of artists like osquinn and glaive, whose virality drew the attention of record labels. However, Spotify turned this trend into an algorithmic playlist (editorial + algorithmic and editorial), created by platform curators and enhanced by algorithms to increase monetisation and gather data and listening patterns. As a result, a virtual scene that was originally diverse, complex, and rich in

nuances has been transformed into a homogeneous musical genre, driven algorithmically and adapted to the classification, recommendation, and consumption logics of mainstream streaming music platformisation. When the head of the pioneering hyperpop label, PC Music, A.G. Cook, took over the curation of Spotify's Hyperpop playlist, songs from artists unrelated to the accelerated music scene began to appear, such as Kate Bush (Dandridge-Lemco, 2020), a 1980s pop artist who went viral on various platforms after her track "Running Up That Hill" was featured in the series *Stranger Things* in 2022.

This demonstrates that on Spotify, virality prevails over the characteristics and identity of hyperpop. As Pelly (2025) has noted, the evolution of hyperpop can be read as an accelerated version of the co-optation and commercialisation of grunge in the 1990s: a scene normalised within a single narrative, amplified by technocapitalist streaming platforms oriented towards mainstream consumption and social media. In the dynamics that currently define hyperpop, the logic of 1990s indie—reinterpreted through platformisation—resonates, when innovation and risk undertaken by independent labels were ultimately absorbed by large multinationals (Hesmondhalgh, 1999).

4.2. SPED-UP AND REMIX CULTURE IN THE AGE OF INTENSITY AND TRANSMEDIALITY

The genealogy and appropriation of platforms established in the previous section highlight the difficulties in delimiting the boundaries of this phenomenon; in fact, "music stands out for the speed with which it is reappropriated and for its effective way of hiding its origins" (López Cano, 2017, p. 77). Throughout history, many musical styles have emerged from remix practices (Hebdige, 1990), some even find a fundamental hallmark of their identity in remix and the use of samplers, as is the case with the wide range of styles that have arisen in the realm of hip hop and electronic music: boom bap, Miami bass, jungle, grime, etc. Acceleration is part of remix culture and has long been a common practice in the reinterpretation of pre-existing songs, which are generally protected by copyright. Although this suggests that the original author should hold a dominant position, in practice, it is not always the case. For Navas (2012), in today's digital environment, remix culture assumes a regenerative character: it is not limited to

recycling prior musical ideas. Still, it produces new listening experiences mediated by the logic of datification.

Nightcore can be interpreted as a micro-subculture that dialogues with vaporwave, according to Winston (2017), that slows down the song to generate an aesthetic similar to Muzak and thus denounce its omnipresence and corporate control. The same author, who in 2017 describes nightcore without referencing hyperpop, indicates that acceleration proposes a different way of reconfiguring listening in digital culture, revealing aesthetic affinities and critiques between both micro-subcultures: vaporwave and nightcore. According to Winston (2017), because high-pitched voices have traditionally been associated with femininity and appeal, a key aspect of nightcore is the feminisation of its vocals, regardless of the original performer's gender. By adopting femininity as an aesthetic norm —also evident in its pastel visuals and descriptions such as “kawaii” or “adorable” —nightcore subverts the dominant logic that positions masculinity as an unmarked value in popular and digital culture. For the author, it is also a subculture that embraces the marginalised queer community within the mainstream. Although prominent hyperpop artists —SOPHIE, Dorian Electra, and Laura de Les from 100 geecs— identify as trans women or non-binary people, there are still limits imposed by cultural reductionisms in virtual scenes like hyperpop (March 2022).

The practice of speeding up music is a consequence or an indicator of the intensification of the parameters of cultural creation and digital communication dominated by platforms. Since the beginning of the century, numerous researchers have employed the term “intensity” to describe the dynamics and aesthetics of the digital era. Thus, Bordwell (2002) referred to intensified continuity to explain the aesthetic particularities of digital cinema, and Vernallis (2023, p. 83) uses the term intensified audiovisuality to analyse music videos and other audiovisual content of the digital age.

In the field of musical and audiovisual production, there is a trend to intensify various patterns, such as rhythm, timbre, texture, colour, audiovisual gestures, sound design, and tempo, among others. Ultimately, the aesthetics of digital production dialogue with the creative practices of platform users and their technological affordances. This circumstance enables the formation of links between aesthetics and practices, in what

Bresnick calls intensified play, which “connects the intensification of contemporary cinematic techniques with the evolution of game characteristics on mobile devices” (2019, p. 2). This phenomenon is not only related to the use of video applications for content creation but also to common practices in everyday communication and consumption. Thus, in recent years, there has been a widespread trend to speed up both voice messages on WhatsApp and tutorials or other audiovisual content on YouTube.

One of the earliest viral sped-up videos was “Rockefeller Street” (2011), a song selected to represent Estonia at that year’s Eurovision Song Contest, which went viral in a nightcore version created by an Osu! user called Andrea. Paradoxically, an accelerated version of this track went viral on TikTok in 2018, generating up to 1.5 million videos on the platform (mainly by Asian users) (Viilup, 2019). In December of the same year, an official accelerated version of the song was published on Apple Music. This example constitutes one of the first success stories and illustrates the transmedia expansion that the sped-up phenomenon has experienced in recent years, adapting to various musical and audiovisual platforms.

However, it is also revealing to observe the transmedia expansion that these remix practices have undergone within different virtual communities of the digital era. Osu! is a free video game created for PC, iOS, Android, and Windows Phone in 2007; it involves collecting objects that appear on the screen following the patterns of a “beatmap,” which establishes the rhythmic sequences the player must execute. Users can generate and share beatmaps online with the virtual community of players, where there are beatmap contests and lists of “featured artists” with the highest ratings. This community remains active today; it has its website (osu!, n.d.) and is present on various social media platforms (Reddit, X, or TikTok), where thousands of videos share gameplay experiences with songs that are generally sped up.

In many cases, the sped-up viral videos correspond to an acceleration of an old song that revitalises catalogues, such as “Say It Right” (2006) by Nelly Furtado, “On the Floor” (2012) by Jennifer López, or “Summertime Sadness” (2012) by Lana Del Rey (Demopoulos, 2023). Thus, it is a “recycled” success, “updated” to contemporary aesthetic trends; an interpolation that, on the one hand, adapts the circulation of the

song to the context and the majority audiences of current social media, and on the other, appeals to our “affective archive” (Middleton, 2012), which facilitates engagement. By using these songs from the past, these sped-up versions acquire a nostalgic component of a playful nature, without falling into melancholy, which is neutralised through the intensification of their parameters: acceleration of tempo, pitch increase, modification of timbre, etc. The aesthetic of acceleration unfolds organically across multiple platforms, as transmedia content, generated and remixed by communities of users who conceive their digital creations not only as isolated pieces but also as part of a shared creative experience in continuous circulation.

4.3. WHO IS BEHIND THE CREATION OF THE SPED-UP?: A LOOK AT COPYRIGHT INFRINGEMENT

This acceleration of remix practices in the digital context manifests in two distinct areas: producers and DJs within remix culture and participatory culture on platforms like TikTok. Regarding producers and DJs whose music predominantly circulates on platforms such as SoundCloud, a virtual scene is observed—a highly online community—that considers the internet a key space for identity and visibility, although it is marked by competition, precariousness, and algorithmic control, which affect creativity and cultural circulation. According to Real Life (2018), “extremely online” is not a place but a cultural genre, comparable to identities like goth or punk; it is a specific way of inhabiting the world, communicating through memes, thinking in images, reading metrics, and living under the logic of screens.

Among the producers and DJs of the virtual nighcore scene, cases such as Imanbek Maratuly Zeikenov stand out—a Kazakh amateur DJ who released an unauthorised sped-up version of “Roses” by Saint Jhn, which went viral on TikTok and propelled the song to the top of the charts. Saint Jhn signed an agreement to license the sped-up version and turn it into an official remix to collect copyright royalties (Winkie, 2020).

Meanwhile, TikTok creator and DJ Tristan Olson (@xxTristanxo), one of the most successful in producing sped-ups, stated in an interview (Cassidy, 2022) that the process of creating an accelerated version is transformative, or regenerative in terms of Navas

(2012), as the aim is to create a new song from an existing one. From Spain, Esteve Corominas Rodríguez has created sped-up versions of popular songs such as “My Humps” by Black Eyed Peas, “Judas” by Lady Gaga, and “No” by Meghan Trainor. These versions have been included in Spotify’s sped-up playlist, managed by the French digital promotion agency Temps Plein Music (Demopoulos, 2023). Producer Oliver Tree, whose song “Miss You” is considered one of the first viral sped-ups, told Campbell (2023) of *NME* that these versions are a direct reflection of how younger generations consume music and media, which explains their affinity for accelerated music.

Nevertheless, these practices of creation and consumption clash with restrictive copyright policies, which are foreign to TikTok but cause concern for record labels. According to TikTok (Campbell, 2023), the platform allows anyone to remix sounds and actively participate in music creation, which explains the rise of sped-up or slowed-down versions driven by a massive participatory culture that synchronises sped-ups across all kinds of videos. Creative and remixing capabilities are not exclusive to TikTok; what the platform facilitates is the ability to bring the entire community —creators and followers— together in a shared space of interaction, resulting in a high level of engagement with the song that extends beyond nightcore producers and DJs. In this new paradigm, the possibilities for modification and appropriation that emerged with participatory culture (Jenkins et al., 2013) generate legal tensions, as many of these versions challenge copyright laws. For the music industry, the conflict lies in the fact that numerous sped-up versions lack licences, which diverts royalty attribution towards the creators of these versions rather than the original rights holders (Mills, 2024). Some record companies have obtained licences for the sped-up versions, incorporating them into their official catalogues, as in the case of Saint Jhn, or producing controlled variants of their releases. Many nightcore creators migrated to TikTok because its copyright policies are more flexible, as many of their content was being removed on YouTube. Additionally, the DIY ethic of nightcore aligns with TikTok’s culture, centred on user participation as content producers (Cassidy, 2022). However, this apparent creative freedom conceals the fact that TikTok benefits in various ways by capitalising on decentralised creative practices, managing visibility and cultural appropriation through opaque algorithms. It also monetises user attention, collects data to target advertising,

and seeks to consolidate its position as a key player in an environment where it does not produce original content but is “created” from songs generated by the music industry, which relies on intellectual property rights to protect authorship.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The sped-up versions demonstrate a new form of music capitalisation within the context of platformisation. The music industry manages and exploits data on fandom, influencing circulation and consumption practices through algorithms. The current business model not only focuses on producing hits but also on maximising the economic performance of a single song by circulating multiple official versions —sped-up, slowed-down, acoustic, instrumental— adapted to different consumption formats and algorithmic platforms. This strategy not only extends the content’s lifespan but also centralises income in the hands of record labels and platforms, displacing unauthorised versions created by users themselves and reinforcing control over listening flows in the streaming economy. This could indicate that, as Morris (2020) suggests, music within the context of platformisation is contingent: on the one hand, it depends on platform logics; on the other, it is an adaptable product personalised to the tastes of different audience segments.

The viral spread of unofficial sped-up versions circulating on production-oriented platforms has culminated in the co-optation of this trend by multinational record labels, social media networks such as TikTok, and platforms such as Spotify, all aimed at mass consumption. This paradox reveals how production-oriented platforms, which initially fostered community creativity, alternative music, and hopes of democratisation (P2P, SoundCloud, etc.), have been displaced by consumption-oriented platforms governed by algorithmic logics (TikTok, Spotify), which ultimately appropriated these cultural expressions to incorporate them into playlists, monetisation strategies, and control over music platforms (Morris, 2020; Pelly, 2025; Prey, 2020). The result is a dilution of the subculture’s subversive meaning and a homogenisation of the musical genre to appeal to mass audiences.

Record labels, such as Warner and Universal, while pursuing copyright infringements, also licence and produce accelerated remixes to monetise the original songs. They capitalise on the popularity of sped-up music circulating on production-focused platforms, such as SoundCloud and Audiomack, and transfer it to mainstream streaming platforms, such as Spotify and Apple Music, via playlists designed to attract large audiences. To do so, record labels adopt subcultural aesthetics, collaborate with DJs and producers associated with nightcore, and promote their own sped-up repertoires.

While production-oriented platforms foster creativity and free circulation of sped-up music, streaming-focused platforms capitalise on and monetise this trend. However, communities extremely online exist where practices such as sped-up remixes emerge, mainly on production platforms, functioning as forms of aesthetic experimentation and subcultural construction, revealing digital subjectivities that are still underexplored (Hesmondhalgh, 2025). These production platforms enable experimentation and the circulation of alternative musical proposals that challenge gender issues through vocal ambiguity. For the community dedicated to creation and production remix culture and the creation of accelerated versions are transformative processes, as Navas (2012) states, shaping how this online community consumes, experiences, and shares musical practices.

In this context, copyright conflicts persist, as record labels —some shareholders of platforms such as Spotify— must balance economic exploitation with legal disputes inherited from the digitalisation of music and the P2P platform era, a matter linked to debates on intellectual property and cultural diversity that have traditionally been maintained within the cultural industries.

In the current platform paradigm, visibility, speed, and multiplicity influence an attention economy characterised by intensity. The principle of visibility, for its part, is amplified on platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube, where sped-up versions acquire a viral dimension within the so-called social media attention economy, in which algorithms influence what is promoted and what is silenced. Finally, multiplicity is expressed in the coexistence of different versions of the same song (such as sped-up, slowed + reverb, mashups, or remixes), which reflects not only creative fragmentation

but also a memetic logic, where the sped-up is framed as a cultural unit susceptible to replication, modification, and sharing on digital platforms, mainly TikTok and video formats like challenges.

Given that TikTok has established itself as a crucial platform for music discovery and its algorithms tend to favour accelerated (sped-up) versions due to their capacity to capture attention in short timeframes, it is not surprising that record labels have begun to release official sped-up versions as a strategy to boost the viralisation and monetisation of songs. They have also observed that accelerating music is an optimal strategy for revitalising song catalogues that have fallen into obscurity.

The sped-up has been adapting transmedially across platforms that have set trends at different stages, from P2P environments to TikTok, including YouTube and SoundCloud. TikTok's permissiveness towards copyright infringement has fostered the rise of sped-up content on this social network and driven its viralisation, until it became mainstream.

Furthermore, while it has been shown that music acceleration was fundamental to the emergence of musical styles in the pre-digital era, this article demonstrates the relationship of this phenomenon with the dynamics of remix culture in the digital age across three dimensions: official production carried out by increasingly visible producers in the mainstream, DJs from mixtape platforms, and DJs involved in participatory practices on social media, who speed up audio and participate in viral challenges with sped-up versions. These practices do not arise in a vacuum but respond to widespread dynamics of intensification in digital communication, which characterise the aesthetics of musical and audiovisual productions of this century, facilitated by the affordances offered by platforms.

This article proposes an exploratory approach to the impact of platforms on cultural expressions such as accelerated music and constitutes an initial attempt to systematise existing documentation on this phenomenon, recognising the limitations inherent in this methodology. Future research should delve into variables such as the role of platforms in shaping virtual subcultures, as well as nightcore and its evolution towards hyperpop within the Spanish scene. Additionally, it is proposed to examine the formal and

aesthetic characteristics of sped-up to determine whether this trend aligns with a defined canon, and to conduct ethnographic research to reveal the voices of its protagonists.

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7. CONTRIBUTIONS

	Firmante 1	Firmante 2
Conceptualización	X	X
Tratamiento de datos	X	X
Analysis	X	X
Investigation	X	X
Methodology	X	X
Supervision	X	X
Validation	X	X
Visualisation	X	X
Writing	X	X
Redaction (revision and edition)	X	X

8. CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The undersigned declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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