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Let's talk about money, data, and platform-dependent cultural production

Hablemos de dinero, datos y producción cultural dependiente de plataformas

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Abstract:

This essay investigates the political economy of platform-dependent cultural production, focusing on music streaming, mobile games, and short-form video. While platforms still present themselves as democratizing tools, access to the means of production is decoupled from equitable opportunities for distribution, marketing, and monetization. The essay walks through studies that discuss this dynamic such as researchers counting songs on Spotify playlists, app store revenues, or using large-scale datasets of views on TikTok. The old blockbuster logic is alive and well, whether in 30-second TikTok clips or mobile games that rake in millions. To conceptualize these examples, the essay advances the heuristic of ‘platform dependency.’ By situating these patterns within longer histories of digitization, the essay underscores continuities alongside novel platform-specific asymmetries. It ends with a call for renewed scholarly attention to the flow of money and data across geographies and media industry sectors.

Resumen:

Este ensayo analiza la economía política de la producción cultural dependiente de plataformas, centrándose en el *streaming* musical, los videojuegos para móviles y el vídeo de formato corto. Aunque las plataformas aún se presentan a sí mismas como herramientas democratizadoras, el acceso a los medios de producción no implica oportunidades equitativas para la distribución, el *marketing* y la monetización. De esta manera, el ensayo revisa estudios que profundizan en esta dinámica así como los trabajos de investigadores que contabilizan canciones en listas de reproducción de Spotify, ingresos en tiendas de aplicaciones o el uso de grandes conjuntos de datos sobre visualizaciones en TikTok. La vieja lógica del *blockbuster* sigue vigente, ya sea en clips de 30 segundos en TikTok o en videojuegos móviles que recaudan millones. Para conceptualizar estos ejemplos, el ensayo propone la heurística de la ‘dependencia de plataformas’. Al situar estos patrones en contextos más amplios de digitalización, el texto destaca las continuidades y las nuevas asimetrías propias de las plataformas y concluye con una invitación a renovar el interés académico por el flujo de dinero y datos entre distintas geografías y sectores de la industria mediática.

1. SPOTIFY’S SUMMER

This essay makes an argument about following the money and the data in the media industries with a specific focus on platform-dependent instances of cultural production. I review media industry scholarship broadly conceived that deploys a variety of digital and financial methods. These studies draw on different kinds of corpora or datasets; some are qualitative in nature when they manually count and code artists on Spotify playlists (Paisana et al., 2024), while others got their hands on large financial datasets (Zendle et al, 2023). As such, this contribution serves as a personal playlist of sorts, a curated list of books and articles that have helped me to grasp the political economy of platforms. In my mind, a political economic perspective remains more relevant than ever for those who study questions surrounding cultural labor, creativity, and ultimately, democracy. In my selection of papers to discuss, I have done my best to geographically widen my point of view beyond North America, from which historically the most influential industry voices emerged from. Speaking about geography, let me start by telling you where I am coming from.

It's the summer of 2025 and across the city of Amsterdam there are posters that feature the Spotify logo together with a waveform QR code. What is striking about the minimalist poster are four words in yellow letters: “Ik kan alles maken” (I can make everything). If you use the Spotify app and use your camera, the waveform code will lead you to the two-minute song aimed at students, who at that moment are flooding the city as the new academic year is ramping up. Featuring generic poppy beats, the song is perfectly forgettable. After biking past the poster dozens of times the four words stuck with me. In the Dutch, *ik kan alles maken*, has a double meaning. On the one hand, it means that you can do whatever you want. Since the lyrics muse about partying, this seems to be what the artist is hinting at. The singer is not wrong; in Amsterdam you can do a lot. One the other hand, the sentence also means that you can *create* everything. The poster, the artist, and Spotify are right. In today’s media environment, you can make everything. An Amsterdam-based student can record a party song and have Spotify put up posters around town promoting it.

Why am I bringing this poster up? Because streaming platforms are indeed accessible, yet deceivingly so. In the platform economy it is relatively straightforward to create and distribute culture, such as a new song, yet it is much more challenging to attract attention, let alone generate some income (Gallego, 2021).

When I talk to my students about the days when I was into creating music, they find it hard to relate. To record our songs, we had to rent an expensive studio. There was physical tape involved at some point. There were also CDs that needed to be ‘burned’ with expensive CD-ROM drives. Most amateur musicians over forty, like myself, must be familiar with my experiences. The eyes of my students, on the other hand, start glazing over when I bring up tapes, CDs, and studios. Yet, making music – or drawing cartoons, recording videos, or livestreaming comedy – is so effortless. At least in countries such as the Netherlands, Canada, or Spain, where there is ample bandwidth, everyone has a phone in their pocket, and people have the time and energy to make original audiovisual content.

2. YOU CAN MAKE EVERYTHING (BUT MONEY)

Admittedly, I was somewhat annoyed when I read Spotify's slogan "I can make everything." Are tech companies still doing this? Is this still a trope streaming companies use? It reminded me of the early and mid-2000s, when social media platforms and distribution platforms such as Myspace, Facebook, and YouTube emerged. Famously, YouTube used the slogan "broadcast yourself," as an appeal that drew on the persistent frame of the supposed 'democratization' of cultural production. In her landmark book *Culture of Connectivity*, in which media scholar José van Dijck (2013, p. 110) provides a critical history of social media, she explains how YouTube positioned itself as a "platform for sharing self-made amateur videos, an 'alternative' to watching television." She went on to argue that "it is remarkable how often the participatory ideal of connectedness is invoked to warrant the need for commercial exploitation of connectivity" (ibid, p. 130). Rereading van Dijck's analysis a decade later, this observation remains relevant.

At the time, in the mid-2000s scholars spilled some serious ink critiquing the political economy of digital (media) production (Benkler, 2006), as well as the assumptions behind the claims that everybody could make everything (Johns, 2016). Yet, the story of "co-creation" and "Wikinomics" has consistently been one-sided (van Dijck & Nieborg, 2009). Platform companies still are quite keen to emphasize that creating, co-creating, producing, or "produsing" (Bruns, 2008) culture (i.e., the democratization argument) is part of their appeal. Yet, what is missing from such narratives are acknowledging the bottlenecks in distribution and monetization asymmetries. You may be able to *make* everything, as Spotify tells us, there are definitely types of cultural products that you are not allowed to distribute. Likewise, you certainly cannot *make money* off everything, particularly if you reside outside of the well-known club of countries that for decades have dominated the tech and music industries (Hroch & Szczepanik, 2025).

Even the new kid on the block, the short form video platform TikTok, follows the economic logic of broadcasting more so than one may think. Not only does “technical accessibility … not automatically translate into meaningful participation or influence,” on TikTok the distribution of attention (and thus the distribution of revenue) is highly uneven (Pilati et al., 2025, p. 2). Sure, media economies always have had a hit-driven dynamic (Elberse, 2013). Blockbusters, whether in the form of a hit movies or a TikTok clip, are not at all dead yet. Deploying computational analysis and drawing on an impressive dataset of 24,992,678 TikTok videos created by 6,973,120 unique users, researchers found that the platform “does not cause fundamental changes in the patterns of digital content creation” because it has a relatively small or “elite” group of content creators that services a large pool of “passive users” (Pilati et al., 2025, p. 8). One could call this, like Pilati and his colleagues do, broadcasting. TikTok also has blockbusters, even if they are 30 seconds long.

The kind of computational scholarship in the TikTok study, together with van Dijck's observation on how platform companies feed “the need for commercial exploitation” serve as the impetus behind this essay. My message is aimed at those interested in platform economics and the media industries. Over the last decade, media industry scholarship has been as vibrant as ever (Herbert et al., 2020). As a (sub)field it may not be the biggest tent in media and communication studies, nor will its scholars fill the biggest ballrooms at international conferences, but the quality of scholarship is high. There are prolific sub-fields, such as game production studies (Sotamaa & Švelch, 2021), podcast studies (Sullivan, 2024), or the newest kind on the block, “creator studies” (Craig, 2022). Just last year, a pre-conference on this topic seemed to attract more attention and attendees than the main conference itself. That said, most of the contributions in the areas of study are on labor. Think of what it means to work for a game publisher. Or, how authenticity and “aspirational labor” help us understand what it takes to become ‘TikTok famous’ (Duffy, 2017). This work helps us understand the nuances of what it means to work with, for, and against platforms and apps such as TikTok (Kaye et al., 2022), but also Instagram (Leaver et al., 2020), and so many others.

I do not want to take anything away from the scholarship on creative labor, but I do think it behooves media scholars to more consistently account for the economic and infrastructural circumstances that shape the everyday practices of media workers. In other words, what I would like to see more of are conversations and investigations that are slightly more mindful of the flow of money and data. Not necessarily to get too in the weeds with specific numbers—I'll leave that to my colleagues at the business schools and in economic departments. But what I find missing in many debates are the economic principles and corporate strategies that drive specific media industry segments and shape and impact industry relationships. I would like to see answers to questions such as: who is making money in the platform economy, how is revenue distributed? What do we know about *how* money is made? I would also argue that we need to have better answers to questions like: Where is money being made? In which countries, regions, or cities? And if, despite the presence of platforms in a country, no value is captured locally, where is it going?

To begin to answer these questions, this essay breaks down into two parts. First, I will reintroduce some of the past scholarship on “platform capitalism” (Srnicek, 2017), including the work we have done ourselves on “platform-dependent cultural production” (Poell et al., 2021). Second, I will point to empirical studies that do engage with money matters, either directly by talking about revenue (or ‘value’ or ‘capital’), or indirectly by looking at proxies such as the distribution of downloads, plays, or views. I will focus on two segments of the media industries: the game app economy, and briefly on the video streaming economy. I’ll end by returning to where we started, Spotify and music streaming. When reviewing extant scholarship in the media industries, my question is: what can individual studies – such as the study on TikTok by Pilati and his colleagues – tell us about the broader direction of the platform economy? As you will notice, I will not talk at all about the emergence of generative AI and how it is impacting cultural production. The reason for that is that we are in a moment of diffusion, adoption, and negotiations. It is too early, at least for me, to say anything meaningful about this latest moment of disruption.

3. PLATFORM-DEPENDENT CULTURAL PRODUCTION

One fun question to ask a room full of media industry and platform scholars is: so how do you define platforms? Having read and cited papers from the fields of strategic management, economic and labor sociology, information law, and economic geography, it is striking how each field leaves a different imprint on how the concept of platforms is deployed. In his review of 'platform' as both a metaphor and a keyword, Cristofari (2004) comes to a similar conclusion:

> *Scholars from different fields construct very different metaphors: management scholars highlight the market-like and transactional aspect of platforms; political economists the elements of extraction and exploitation and the asymmetry of power inside the platform; economic sociologists the new hybrid means of economic coordination of platform infrastructures; software studies scholars the importance of recombinatory technical standards* (p. 7).

For us, the way out of this has been to account for these differences in order to provide a functional, upfront definition that sits at the intersection of management science, political economy, and software studies, and define platforms as "re-programmable digital infrastructures that facilitate and shape personalized interactions among end-users and complementors" (Poell et al., 2019, p. 2). We have tweaked this definition somewhat in the context of cultural production (Poell et al., 2021), but the intent is the same. Platform companies either facilitate transactions, allow for complementary products to be built on top of a stable infrastructural core, or both. This approach is not shy in building on the work of management scholars, such as Gawer (2022), but differs in the sense that we, as critical media scholars, have different politics that question the "exacerbation of unacceptable capitalist practices" (Cristofari, 2024, p. 7).

One of the key analytics in our work (Poell et al., 2021) is the question: what happens if cultural production becomes 'platform-dependent'? Platform dependency is not at all a given, nor is it a top-down dictate. On the contrary, if you are a game developer, a journalist, or a content creator, it is up to you (or corporate leadership) to decide if you want to integrate your own infrastructure with those of a platform company, thereby getting valuable data on your potential customers. Same for aligning your business models with those of platform companies. If you partner with a platform you will have to, but there are ample ways of alternative monetization as well.

One way to add granularity to our understanding of platformization is to consider the different stages of cultural production. Here we distinguish among creation, distribution, marketing, and monetization. In the stage of creation, cultural producers are not necessarily platform-dependent. In journalism, for example, you can create news or write up copy or record an interview without relying on a specific platform. This is different in the stage of distribution where platform dependency is arguably more ubiquitous; it's increasingly challenging to distribute culture without relying on platform companies. We see more of a mixed bag when it comes to marketing and monetization. If you want to make money in the platform economy via streaming, for example, then you most likely will become platform-dependent. But you can still market (i.e., advertise) your product and services in physical places, for example, via posters, like Spotify did. All this is to say that the heuristic of platform dependency should help us to create a more nuanced picture of when cultural producers become platform dependent—i.e., at which stage of cultural production. To summarize: how we understand platformization is as a process of becoming platform-dependent (or not).

Another can of conceptual worms that we have encountered in our work is how to define cultural production. Our approach is to again provide a functionalist and pragmatic definition: we have purposely bracketed our object of study by focusing on "actors and organizations engaged in the creation, distribution, marketing, and monetization of symbolic artefacts" (Poell et al., 2021, p. 9). This includes both media companies and individual creators who are understood by platform companies as those who seek to generate revenue. Those who seek monetization tend to be hailed differently by platforms, through dedicated access to data, support programs, and monetization schemes. Thus, in our work we purposely exclude end-users, hobbyists, and amateurs. Not because end-users are unimportant, they are, if only because they also generate tremendous economic and cultural value. We exclude them because by including them our analysis would immediately lose precision and become muddy. For distribution platforms such as app stores or dedicated game devices (e.g., a PlayStation or Switch), the distinctions between cultural producer and end-users are not at all vague. On TikTok, on the other hand, the lines are much blurrier because it is easy to switch roles between being a content producer and end-user. Then again, in practice, professional creators are rarely just self-employed individuals who randomly create culture and just get money in their bank accounts. Rather, they employ specialized, dedicated staff and intermediaries to create videos, market them effectively, and assist in the drudgery of navigating consumer codes, labor and tax laws, or the ever-shifting governance frameworks of platforms. In short, they become platform-dependent cultural producers.

4. DIGITIZATION DOES NOT EQUAL PLATFORMIZATION

Next to the wrestling with foundational definitions such as ‘platform’ and ‘cultural production,’ another point of criticism we consistently encounter is the focus in and by itself. Does a focus on platform capitalism run the risk of platform determinism? Not necessarily. As argued above, cultural producers can be platform-independent

Our more elaborate answer to this potential pitfall is to say that: “There are also companies in the cultural sector that display characteristics of platforms and have been referred to as such by scholars and journalists” but “they should be categorized differently. It is worth bearing in mind that *digitization does not equal platformization”* (Poell et al., 2021, p. 6). Thinking through what digitization does to cultural production is helpful. It acknowledges the historical continuities and shifts that transcend platforms. This is the argument made by two of our interlocutors, media industry scholars Amanda Lotz and Timothy Havens (2024), who in their recent book make a distinction between digital distribution and advertising-funded media, as well as between internet distribution and consumer-funded media.

Let me dig a bit deeper into their argument. They make clear that some of the fundamental legal, and economic principles underlying for-profit cultural production have not changed with the advent of digitization or platformization. For example, nobody *still* knows anything – i.e., making money in the media industries is inherently unpredictable and uncertain. Likewise, as I indicated before, if there is a handful of hits, these will be offset by an ever-larger number of failures. Such hits, if they emerge, are still folded into content portfolios. Game publishers still acquire successful studios, successful creators partner with creator talent agencies, and musicians sign with a label. Another enduring economic principle is that of the 'first copy.' Whether it's a song, movie, or television show, the first copy involves relatively high sunk costs (Lotz & Havens, 2024). And then there is the corporate tendency to seek efficiencies in terms of scope and scale. Record labels and movie studios not only benefit from diverse content portfolios, but they also benefit from distribution across the globe. This has been the case both for incumbent transnational media corporations (Mirrlees, 2013) and newly emerging competitors such as the India-based Jio (Mukherjee, 2019) or the Chinese tech powerhouse Tencent (Jia et al., 2022). All these corporations can be understood as conglomerates that operate separate divisions and local offices. Then there are all kinds of other continuities in terms of corporate structures, content strategies, or business models. Next, I will focus on the latter category and reflect on the fundamental shifts because of platform-dependent business models and what recent scholarship can teach us about this topic.

5. MAKING MONEY IN… THE GAME APP ECONOMY

If it is up to management scholars and mainstream economists, platform markets are theorized as 'multi-sided' markets. Mobile app stores serve as prototypical examples of this specific market configuration, bringing together end-users (i.e. players) on one side, and game developers on the other. As such, app stores both facilitate transactions with end-users buying apps, and facilitate complementary innovations by providing app developers with tools for app development (cf. Gawer, 2022). For the game industry, the mass diffusion of mobile devices – both phone and tablets – radically changed its trajectory. It gave billions of players access to platforms to play on, but also by introducing a novel business model: freemium or free-to-play games that monetize play either through advertising and/or optional in-app-purchases (Nieborg, 2015). App stores, then, have become the primary venues to acquire mobile games. One historical particularity about the app ecosystem as it exists today is that in European countries there are essentially only two app store operators: Google and Apple, who operate the

Play Store and the App Store, respectively. While the advent of mobile devices made game development much more affordable and the addressable consumer base reaching into the billions, the locus of industry control remains the point of distribution. For decades, game publishers were subject to the whims of Nintendo, Sony, and Microsoft when they wanted to distribute their non-PC games. Apple and Google did not fundamentally alter that dynamic.

One way to better understand the logic of app stores is through the lens of subsidization. Because platform markets are multi-sided, there are at least two sources of revenue: both sides of the market can be charged a price. Yet, many platform operators charge only one side in the market, thereby subsidizing the other. In the case of the two dominant app stores this means that for end-users access to the app store is free of charge, rather than, for example, charging a subscription fee for daily or monthly access. Apple recoups its investments in other ways. First, it charges a significant premium for its hardware. Second, it generates revenue by charging game app developers a mandatory 30% commission (or tax if you will) for every app or in-app transaction. One of the main takeaways from this setup is that platform markets, like so many other markets, are designed and therefore prone to disruption and regulation. For example, the 30% fee is not only completely arbitrary, but also a flat fee, which disadvantages smaller developers or those with no access to capital, therefore making it essentially a regressive system.

What do recent studies then say about the App Store? First, the research by Rietveld et al. (2020) shows that platform markets, such as the app economy, are constantly evolving in terms of the business models and governance frameworks. When the App Store was first launched (and this goes for the launch of other platforms as well), more favorable conditions were provided to cultural producers. For example, they got access to specific data or they get more visibility on the platform, which often directly translates into more revenue. This study reminds us that platform markets are not static, but that they can also be redesigned. Platform companies may oscillate between favoring certain kinds of superstar developers or may want to attract specific kinds of users who may pay more money. Also, this study demonstrates that this evolutionary dynamic is not only specific to the App Store but also to many other platform types.

6. THE PROBLEM OF MATCHING

A second set of studies are those that benefited from access to financial or transaction data to paint a more precise picture of money flows in the app economy. There is an insightful paper by American economists Bresnahan and colleagues (2014). They reflect on one of the core services that app stores (should) provide: The ability for end-users to find relevant or meaningful content, or from the perspective of cultural producers, to put an app in front of audiences that may find your app meaningful. Yet even though their work is a decade old, their conclusions still ring true, frustratingly so. They observed that: "The design of a market institution for matching appears to be very difficult. New apps are introduced at a very high rate, and the problem of categorizing apps is largely unsolved" (Bresnahan et al., 2014, p. 239). Halfway through the history of Apple's App Store, it did away with top lists, which was the main principle of content categorization. These days, the App Store is much more of a curated affair where faceless editors (we don't exactly know where they reside and who they are) make decisions that impact hundreds of thousands of app developers. For consumers, this may provide a streamlined way to enter the app economy. For cultural producers, on the other hand, it is much harder to navigate this opaque system of store curation.

Apart from categorization, there is also a lack of personalization in the App Store. There are regional store instances; the App Store is not the same in every country. But one of the hallmarks of the platform economy is a level of personalization where past consumption may influence what you get to see next. While this algorithmic approach to operating a platform market is not without its flaws, Apple still is fully committed to the other extreme where it has a firm grip on who gets to see which apps when they open Apple's storefront, thereby giving Apple an outsized influence on the app economy. It is not my job as an academic to fix this challenge, but I think we can safely say that if one cares about diverse cultural content, Apple has by no means solved the matching issue. Especially when it comes to matching regional content to local users, Apple falls incredibly flat.

It is quite hard for a local game developer to find a local audience in a way that would be much easier on, let's say, a video streaming platform, or even on TikTok, which uses IP addresses as signals to algorithmically curate its feed. We know this because of the work that we did ourselves on the distribution of value and attention in the Canadian app economy (Nieborg et al., 2020). What we found in our financial analysis are two economic principles.

First, is the familiar winner-take-all effect, which is confirmed in two other studies using financial app transaction data (Bresnahan et al., 2015; Zendle et al., 2023). A very small percentage of apps, often we're talking about 20-50 game apps per app store, capture the vast majority of revenue. This can be up to 90% of all revenue, as I mentioned in the introduction. This is the blockbuster principle, which has not disappeared in the digital economy. However, the App Store, perhaps more so than any other digital distribution channel, has an opportunity to do away with (or at least dampen) the impact of blockbuster dynamics or the star system. Apple can easily decide to put more effort into highlighting local content. This may not solve the issue of risk-averse audiences, who tend to gravitate towards hits and stars, but at least it gives smaller developers more reach and may increase content diversity in a meaningful way.

Second, in our focus on the Canadian game app economy, we noticed that only a handful of Canadian apps were able to generate meaningful revenue. This stands out because Canada has a very large game industry with thousands of workers. Yet, Canadian game studios have been unable to gain a foothold in the local app store, and even if they do, those studios end up being owned by either US- or China-based publishers (Joseph et al., 2023). Any money that is made flows outside of Canada's borders. As far as I know, the App Store doesn't have content requirements or thresholds. There is no mandate that forces Apple to highlight, let's say, Canadian content in the Canadian App Store, or promote Canada’s two official languages. I will forever be in favor of such mechanisms because, in our studies of the game app economy, we have seen how hard it is for local developers to get a local app in front of a local audience.

Taking a comparative view, the economic principles underlying video streaming, such as on YouTube (Bärtl, 2018), but also streaming platforms that provide webcamming services for adult audiences (Jokubauskaitė & Peeters, 2025), show a similar pattern in terms of the distribution of attention and revenue. Audience or content niches exist, but the distribution of attention and revenue remains asymmetrical.

7. BACK TO SPOTIFY

Let's go back to where this essay started: Spotify and music streaming. There are two articles that have helped me to gain a more nuanced understanding of the distribution of value in the music industry. First, there is an important paper by one of the giants in music industry studies, David Hesmondhalgh (2021), who asks a simple but important question: Is music streaming bad for musicians? He argues that there are problems with both "argument and evidence" when considering the economics of streaming. For example: critics may not take the wider ecosystem into account; artists may be able to generate revenue beyond streaming platforms; or there is just simply limited evidence to provide profound statements about the music streaming economy. He concludes that "more musicians, rather than fewer," might be able to earn money than in the age of physical distribution (2021, p. 3610). I think his observations are worth considering in light of my previous argument. Some of the questions raised by Hesmondhalgh are particular to the music industry, but his point remains valid. Yes, revenue distributions are asymmetric and lopsided; however, such money streams also provide thousands, if not hundreds of thousands, of new creators with an avenue to create and generate revenue that they might not have access to before.

Lastly, there is the question of regions and global perspectives (Poell et al., 2025). How do platforms impact local cultures of production and regional industry sectors? This is one of the defining questions for the next decade of media industry scholarship, which brings me to a second study on music streaming which discussed the interaction between intermediaries and content visibility for East-Central European cultural producers on Spotify (Hroch & Szczepanik, 2025). In their study, they explore how platformization is related to an "asymmetrical geography," and how peripheral regions, such as Poland and Czech, are more "consumption markets" than "cultural centers." The authors suggest the notion of "spatial gatekeeping." They similarly observe asymmetries in consumption, not so much in terms of revenue, but how in global rankings, countries like Poland account for only one or two percent of the artists and less than one percent of all listeners.

The focus in this study is on Spotify playlists and Hroch & Szczepanik note how rare it is to find artists from so-called peripheral or semi-peripheral hubs, like the East-Central European countries, in playlists outside of their domestic markets. The reach of playlists thus has strong regional limitations, and they point to the operations of Spotify's geographic segmentation, making a clear distinction between 'core markets,' 'emerging markets,' and so-called 'scale markets.' For each of these, Spotify has corporate strategies on how they engage with partnerships, marketing, and pricing. Who knew! Local intermediaries have all kinds of ways to negotiate access, to ignore these playlists and their under-representation, or even double down on their peripheral position.

Is there anything to be done about this by local stakeholders? It does not seem like it. Spotify's policy is to shield playlist editors from interactions with local intermediaries and artists. This is very much the same in the app economy where Apple absolutely does not want its App Store editors to talk to app developers directly, either for reasons of liability or to avoid any modicum of accountability. The author's conclusion will also be the conclusion of this essay, namely that "platforms prioritize core markets while positioning peripheral regions as sites of user growth and low-cost cultural labor. Peripheral artists are urged to aspire to global reach but must navigate structures favoring established players" (Hroch & Szczepanik, 2025, p. 17). This also brings us back to the story of the Amsterdam-based student. Whether you are in Poland, Czech, the Netherlands, or Spain, at the end of the day platforms seem to consider all of these countries as peripheral. To understand the impact of this corporate approach on platform-dependent cultural production, we have to follow in the footsteps of the authors listed in this essay. This means gaining access to historical platform data, interviewing local intermediaries, and digging up financial data and disclosures in order to provide a comparative perspective on platform-dependent cultural production.

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