

Music Industry Sales:
How streaming services such as
Spotify, Apple Music and TIDAL affect album sales

A Senior Project
presented to
The Faculty of the Journalism Department
California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Bachelor of Science in Journalism

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March 2017

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Statement of the problem

This study focuses on the growth of the music streaming services Spotify, Apple Music and TIDAL and how the three services relate to music industry sales. After the Napster era — a peer-to-peer file sharing Internet service that allowed digital sharing of audio files — music industry sales suffered, resulting in a decrease in overall album sales. However, in 2015 albums saw an increase in sales. According to Nielsen's 2015 Year-End Music Report, album sales increased 15.2 percent from 2014 to 2015. In conjunction, IFPI reported that 2015 was the first year in which digital revenue was the primary revenue for recorded music. "The IFPI Global Music Report 2016 found that digital music revenues rose to \$6.7 billion in 2015 ... which helped offset a decline in downloads and sales of physical CDs and albums" (Weiss, 2016).

For years, the music industry's sales suffered because of peer-to-peer sharing of audio files. With streaming services that provide users with a vast library of music, a decline in peer-to-peer sharing ensued. By offering free and paid options, streaming services are opening a new stream of sales for the music industry.

Background of the problem

The existing literature regarding streaming services' affect on music industry sales shows that there has been an increase in on-demand audio streams in the past four years. However, recently streaming services have claimed exclusivity on albums by certain artists. For Apple Music, artists like Frank Ocean and Drake are exclusively releasing music through its services. For TIDAL, Beyoncé's album "Lemonade" is still only available exclusively on that specific streaming service. This entices users to subscribe to certain streaming services in order to listen to the albums as soon as possible.

According to an article by Forbes, exclusivity of artists' music "alienates fans and only further intensifies the streaming wars." Since artists are exclusively releasing music to one specific streaming service, users are forced to choose between which service they want to listen to, as not many people will pay for more than one streaming service. This in turn limits the audience to only those subscribing to the service, and can diminish the sales of a particular album.

Purpose of the study

According to the current trends in the music industry, the influence of streaming services is leading to a push for a digital music era and receiving more sales from on-demand streams than album sales.

One way artists are bringing in more streaming sales is releasing albums exclusively to a specific streaming service. At the same time, artists must consider that not all fans hold subscriptions to both Apple Music and Tidal. By investigating the tactics in which artists release their music, and their consideration of reaching the widest possible audience, it will benefit music industry sales.

Setting for the study

The study will be done as part of the data collection for a senior project at California Polytechnic State University located in San Luis Obispo, California.

Research questions

1. How has the number of music streaming service users grown in the past 10 years?
2. How many users subscribe to Apple Music? Spotify? TIDAL?
3. What streaming service do consumers opt to use?
4. What royalties do artists receive from streaming services?
5. How do streaming sales compare to album sales of an artist's album?
6. How does exclusive streaming affect album sales?

Definition of terms

The following terms are defined to clarify several of the terms on the topic and assist the reader and provide context to the remainder of the study.

Album sales: Includes CD, cassette, vinyl and digital albums (Nielsen, 2014)

Apple Music: Apple, Inc.'s subscription-based streaming service

Exclusivity: Releasing music solely to a label or streaming service

Nielsen: A global information, data and measurement company that releases an annual music report

On-demand audio streams: Spotify, YouTube, Apple, Google Play, Amazon, Rhapsody Song, Tidal, Soundcloud, Xbox Music, Slacker, Tidal Video, Medianet, AOL Radio and Disciple (Nielsen, 2014)

On-demand music streams: Spotify, YouTube, Apple, Google Play, Amazon, Rhapsody Song, Tidal, Soundcloud, Xbox Music, Slacker, Tidal Video, Medianet, AOL Radio and Disciple (Nielsen, 2014)

On-demand video streams: Spotify, YouTube, Apple, Google Play, Amazon, Xbox Music, Slacker, Tidal Video, Medianet and Disciple (Nielsen, 2014)

Royalties: The money artists receive in return for having music on a streaming service

Song sales: Digital track sales, excluding streams (Nielsen, 2014)

Spotify: A music, podcast and video streaming service

Streaming equivalent albums (SEA): Ratio of 1,500 streams to one album (Nielsen, 2014)

Subscribers: Users who pay for a streaming service or use the free version

Track equivalent albums (TEA): Ratio of 10 tracks to one album (Nielsen, 2014)

TIDAL: Subscription-based music streaming service

Total consumption: The number of album sales, track equivalent sales and stream equivalent sales (excluding 2013 when streaming was not factored into Nielsen's report) (Nielsen, 2014)

Organization of study

Chapter 1 included the background of the problem, purpose of the study and a definition of terms. Chapter 2 will identify the trends regarding the growth of streaming services and its contribution to music industry revenue. Chapter 3 will present the methodology of the study. In Chapter 4, the findings will be presented and organized based on the original research questions. The data will then be analyzed compared to the current literature on the topic. Lastly, Chapter 5 will include a summary of the study and recommendations for professionals in the music industry to optimize the revenue for music releases.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

The review of literature focuses on the existing literature on streaming services and music industry sales, including the growth of streaming services, royalties that artists receive and digital sales.

Growth of streaming services

According to IFPI, “an estimated 68 million people paid for music subscription services in 2015, more than eight times the level of eight million people in 2010.” While this statistic provides a global look into the industry, a report distributed by the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) shows that streaming subscriptions within just the United States also increased.

Paid subscriptions in the United States grew by 101 percent in just the first half of 2016. In the first half of 2014, subscriptions were at 7.9 million. In the first half of 2015, 9.1 million Americans paid for subscriptions. The first half of 2016 saw 18.3 million paid subscriptions (Friedlander, 2016, p.1).

Apple Music

With its launch on June 30, 2015, Apple Music was able to retain 6.5 million paid users (Fedde, 2015). The service offers a three-month trial, with fees after the trial being \$9.99 per month. As of September 2015, after the initial three-month trial ended, Apple Music had a total of 15 million users, with 6.5 million paying for the service (Fedde, 2015). At the end of 2016, Apple Music reported it had 20 million paid subscribers, more than triple the amount of users than the year before (Dent, 2016).

Spotify

Spotify was released in 2008, by founders Daniel Ek and Martin Lorentzon. The company started out with a higher number of free users than paid users, with free users in 2010 being 15 times higher than paid users. Since then, “... the ratio steadily decreased to seven in 2011, to five in 2012 and to three in 2014.” The beginning of 2016 saw 30 million users subscribed to Spotify Premium and more than 70 million free users, with the largest number of subscription users from the United States or United Kingdom (Voigt, Buliga and Michl, 2017).

TIDAL

In an attempt to disrupt the streaming industry by putting artists first, Jay-Z released TIDAL — an Oslo-based streaming service — in early 2015. Recently, there has been some dispute as to whether Jay-Z and

his TIDAL employees have been inflating the number of TIDAL users. However, according to Dagens Naeringsliv, the company has 1.2 million users paying for its service (Greenburg, 2017).

Consumer streaming service preferences

According to music industry professional Tom Silverman, “97 percent of the world never buys music — not even Adele.” He goes on to say the trend is more common in 18-24 year olds (Hampp 2013). A commonality between consumers is the want for a free streaming service that has minimal to no ads and is available on mobile devices. A survey conducted in a college town with 237 respondents fitting the aforementioned age group shows that 55 percent of respondents use Spotify on a daily or weekly basis, (Swanson, 2013, p. 10). “While Apple Music has made some serious strides, for our money, Spotify still reigns supreme” (Digital Trends, 2016, p. 8).

Spotify

Spotify, as of October 2016, had a “paid user base surpassing 40 million subscribers — not to mention an astronomical 55 million additional listeners on its free, ad-based service” (Digital Trends, 2016). Spotify offers two tiers of its streaming service — a free version where users have to listen to advertisements, and an ad-free paid version that costs \$9.99 per month (Porter and Langely, 2016). Users are entitled to a seven-day trial of Spotify premium before they are charged a fee. The streaming service also offers discounts for certain groups. Students can receive a 50 percent discount, which is applicable and appealing to the 18-24 age group that most commonly uses streaming services.

However, “Spotify’s weakest area is its exclusives, and is more commonly in the news for artists abandoning its service rather than securing exclusives.” Artists such as Radiohead, Beyoncé, Kanye West and Prince have withheld certain albums from Spotify due to the low royalty rates. The streaming service does attempt to redeem itself by offering features such as “Discover Weekly” — a playlist compiled of similar music a user has listened to. This feature provides a new playlist to users each week, specific to each users’ preferences. It offers users a variety of new artists or songs to listen to that attempts to make up for the lack of some of the biggest albums of recent years (Porter and Langley, 2016).

Apple Music

Apple Music proves to be Spotify's largest competitor, with 20 million paid subscribers at the end of 2016 (Dent, 2016). Apple Music has half the number of paid subscribers than Spotify, but "it's impressive when you consider that Apple Music went live in June of 2015, nine years after Spotify's founding" (Digital Trends, 2016). Apple Music differs from Spotify in that it requires users to pay \$9.99 per month for its services, however it does offer a three-month trial period, the longest free trial of the three streaming services. There is no option for an ad-based free option with Apple Music. Apple Music redeems itself by offering, much like Spotify, a student discount of \$4.99 (Digital Trends, 2016).

Apple Music's upper hand to Spotify is its wider range of music with 40 million songs. Apple Music has also secured more exclusives than Spotify. The company has artists sign exclusivity deals with artists, which may restrict Spotify from gaining access to certain albums and singles (Digital Trends, 2016). Apple Music also integrates a user's iTunes library with the streaming service. "This means Apple Music subscribers have the option to freely browse their own music alongside Apple's standard catalog" (Digital Trends, 2016).

TIDAL

As of March 2016, TIDAL claimed to have passed three million paid subscribers globally, significantly lower than that of Apple Music and Spotify (Rys, 2016). Similar to the two aforementioned streaming services, TIDAL charges its users \$9.99 per month, half the price of its original release price of \$19.99. TIDAL's free trial period, similar to Spotify's, only lasts seven days (Rivington, 2016).

One thing that TIDAL prides itself on is its high-quality music. As opposed to just offering MP3s and OGGs like its competitors, "TIDAL offers music at CD quality" (Rivington, 2016). Additionally, some albums are released exclusively on TIDAL. For example, Beyoncé, Kanye West, Rihanna and Radiohead released albums on TIDAL first. "All, except Beyoncé's 'Lemonade,' eventually found their way onto Spotify and Apple Music, however it took weeks, sometimes months..." (Blanco, 2016).

Artists' royalties from streaming services

Spotify

"A number of influential artists — for example, Grizzly Bear, The Black Keys and Galaxie 500 — have

expressed dissatisfaction with Spotify due to low royalties and perceived declines in album sales” (Swanson, 2013, p. 8). According to the Wall Street Journal, Spotify revealed the royalties paid to rights holders each time a user listens to a song. Rights holders are paid 0.6 cents (\$0.006) and 0.84 cents (\$0.0084). “Over the course of 2013, the company said, it will have paid \$500 million in royalties...” (Grundberg, 2013). This compares to when consumers would buy songs from iTunes. A 99-cent song would pay a 7 to 10 cent royalty to the artist (Sisario, 2013).

Apple Music

Apple Music first decided not to pay artists royalties during its three-month free trial for users. “...many small artists live essentially paycheck to paycheck, and they can’t stomach a quarter of reduced payouts” (Bjarin, 2015). Apple Music received a lot of backlash, including a blog post from Taylor Swift that received a lot of publicity. In her post, Swift wrote:

“I’m sure you are aware that Apple Music will be offering a free 3 month trial to anyone who signs up for the service. I’m not sure you know that Apple Music will not be paying writers, producers, or artists for those three months. I find it to be shocking, disappointing, and completely unlike this historically progressive and generous company.”

In response, Apple decided to pay artists a reduced royalty during the free trial. “Apple had proposed raising its royalty slights for paid streams — to 71.5 percent from 70 percent — to make up for the loss of royalties during the trial period” (Sisario, 2015).

TIDAL

According to its website, “TIDAL has the commitment of artist owners that believe in creating a more sustainable model for the music industry.” TIDAL was created with “the mission of bringing fans and artists closer together...” One way TIDAL is staying true to its mission is providing artists with almost double the amount of royalties they would receive from Spotify. “TIDAL’s average payout to the label was about 1.2 cents (\$0.012)” (Kaye, 2015). TIDAL earns an average of 1.4 cents (0.014) per stream prior to the company taking its cut (Kaye, 2015).

According to TIDAL’s website, the company has a formula for its payment to an artist. The formula is as



CHART 1 | TIDAL/COURTESY

follows:

The aforementioned payout of 1.2 cents (\$0.012) was given to an indie band, claiming that an artist with more following and more streams may result in a higher royalty. This would thereby follow the formula above for an artists' payout.

The affect on artists' revenue

“After a post-Napster malaise going on nearly two decades, labels finally increased revenue this year, by 8.1 percent, according to the Recording Industry Association of America” (Knopper, 2016). According to IFPI, 2015 was the first year digital revenue was the primary revenue for recorded music. “The IFPI Global Music Report 2016 found that digital music revenues rose to \$6.7 billion in 2015 ... which helped offset a decline in downloads and sales of physical CDs and albums” (Weiss, 2016).

Online streaming bought in the most of digital revenue in 2015, with 34.3 percent of the income. Digital downloads were second with 34 percent of the revenue. The two were followed by physical sales (28.8 percent) and synching (2.8 percent), according to statistics provided by RIAA (Palenchar, 2016, p. 10).

The issue of exclusivity

Recently, certain artists have given exclusivity to either Apple Music or TIDAL, meaning that users would have to “subscribe to not one but two streaming services” (Knopper, 2016). The most notable issue with exclusivity was Frank Ocean’s album debut in 2016. The singer “delivered a video album, ‘Endless,’ to fulfill the terms of his contract with Def Jam/Universal, then gave a superior album, ‘Blonde,’ to Apple as part of an exclusive deal” (Knopper, 2016). This act caused Universal to ban its artists from making exclusive deals. Other artists spoke out about the issue of exclusivity, including Lady Gaga. In an interview with Apple’s Beats 1 Radio, Gaga said “I told my label that if they signed those contracts with Apple Music and Tidal, I’d leak all my own new music” (Knopper, 2016).

“There have been calls from those in the music industry for the major streaming services to stop buying out one star after another, as it alienates fans and only further intensifies the streaming wars” (McIntyre,

2016). The two streaming services that claim exclusivity are Apple Music and TIDAL. “Apple has take steps to secure more exclusives than the competition” (Digital Trends, 2016).

Despite people in the industry claiming that exclusivity is problematic for the music industry, Apple CEO Tim Cook told Digital Music News that “Apple Music is the premiere destination for new artists and existing artists to launch their exclusive music” (Resnikoff, 2016). However, Universal Music Group chairman Lucian Grainge retaliated stating that “beyond heavy piracy and in-fighting among streaming services, exclusives serve to punish the music fan for paying” (Resnikoff, 2016). This then creates a “huge disincentive to pay for music” (Resnikoff, 2016).

Chapter 3

Methodology

This chapter presents the methods used to collect data for the study, including the data sources, collection and presentation of the data, the limitations and the delimitations.

Data sources

For this study, I will be collecting and evaluating data of top U.S. album sales from various artists. I will look at the artists included in the top 10 charts for album sales, streaming revenue and digital track revenue to compare how the revenue is coming in and how availability is affecting revenue.

I will also collect data on music consumption. I will compare album sales to album sales that include track equivalent albums. I will also compare album sales to on-demand streaming usage. This data will allow me to draw conclusions on how consumers today are absorbing music.

Data collection

Data was collected for this study from Nielsen, a global information, data and measurement company. Nielsen releases a year-end music report that provides figures and charts for the music industry. The reports provide statistics on music consumption, distribution and trends from the timeframe that I am focusing on. I included data from 2013 to 2016. I started with 2013 as Nielsen neglected to include streaming data in album sales prior to that year. The first year that Nielsen provided data on streams per album was 2014, but 2013 acts as an outlier.

Data presentation

The data collected from Nielsen was formatted in a PDF report. I transcribed the data into an excel spreadsheet to have one cohesive document laying out the data. Data was then transformed into graphs and infographics to show the breakdown of album sales and music consumption. This method of presentation ensures that the data can be easily read, as opposed to listing the numerical values in a table.

Limitations and delimitations

This study was conducted to gain insight into artist exclusivity to a streaming service and its effect on music industry revenue. However, there are limitations and delimitations to this study based on the type of data collected.

The main limitation of this study is time. The study was conducted over a 10-week quarter at Cal Poly, limiting the amount of research that can be collected and reported.

Delimitations include the access to Nielsen SoundScan data. Nielsen SoundScan provides information to record companies and individuals breaking down all of the sales and streams on specific albums, songs and artists. While the company provides a year-end report, it focuses on the popular artists, not looking into those up and coming artists. However, access to this data is limited to those employed in the music industry. This delimitation forced a change in my comparison of data. Instead of choosing one artist and comparing album sales over the years, I compared the top 10 albums as chosen by Nielsen each year. I was still able to compare consumption throughout the years.

Chapter 4 *Data Analysis*

Chapter 4 will provide breakdowns of the top 10 albums sales over the past four years in the United States. Since the data was collected from reports by Nielsen, it will be presented in the form of graphs and infographics. The graphs will then be analyzed and compared to the original research questions and the existing literature on streaming service users reviewed in Chapter 2.

Integrating streams

Nielsen releases a year-end music report every year. The report provides a breakdown of music consumption throughout the year, including mediums used and top album/single/artist sales. Each report includes a chart with the top 10 album sales of the year. In 2014, Nielsen decided to add streaming revenue into the total consumption of an album. “Beginning with the album chart that will be published Dec. 3 (covering sales for the week ending Nov. 30, which climaxes with retail’s Black Friday), music streams from services like Spotify and Beats Music will be tabulated as part of the data employed to rank the nation’s most popular albums” (Variety). Nielsen now includes stream equivalent albums, which equates 1,500 streams as one album sale, in addition to its track equivalent albums, which equates 10 digital track downloads to one album sale.

2013

Top 10 albums

This year excludes streaming data, making it an outlier in the other top 10 album data provided. The top sold album in 2013 was Justin Timberlake’s “20/20 Experience.” This album had a total consumption of 3.1 million sales, which includes all albums and track equivalent albums.

The 2013 Nielsen displayed two charts for top selling albums. The first chart included track equivalent albums. The second chart only included CD, digital and vinyl album sales. This difference in sales accounted for different albums included in each list — not all of the albums in the top 10 selling albums with TEA are included in the top 10 selling albums. Therefore, the data omits album sales for Macklemore and Ryan Lewis’ “The Heist,” Katy Perry’s “Prism” and P!NK’s “Truth About Love.” In this situation, it does not drastically affect the results concluded from the data as on-demand audio streaming sales are the most crucial to the conclusions.

TOP 10 ALBUMS 2013

(based on U.S. album sales; track equivalent albums)

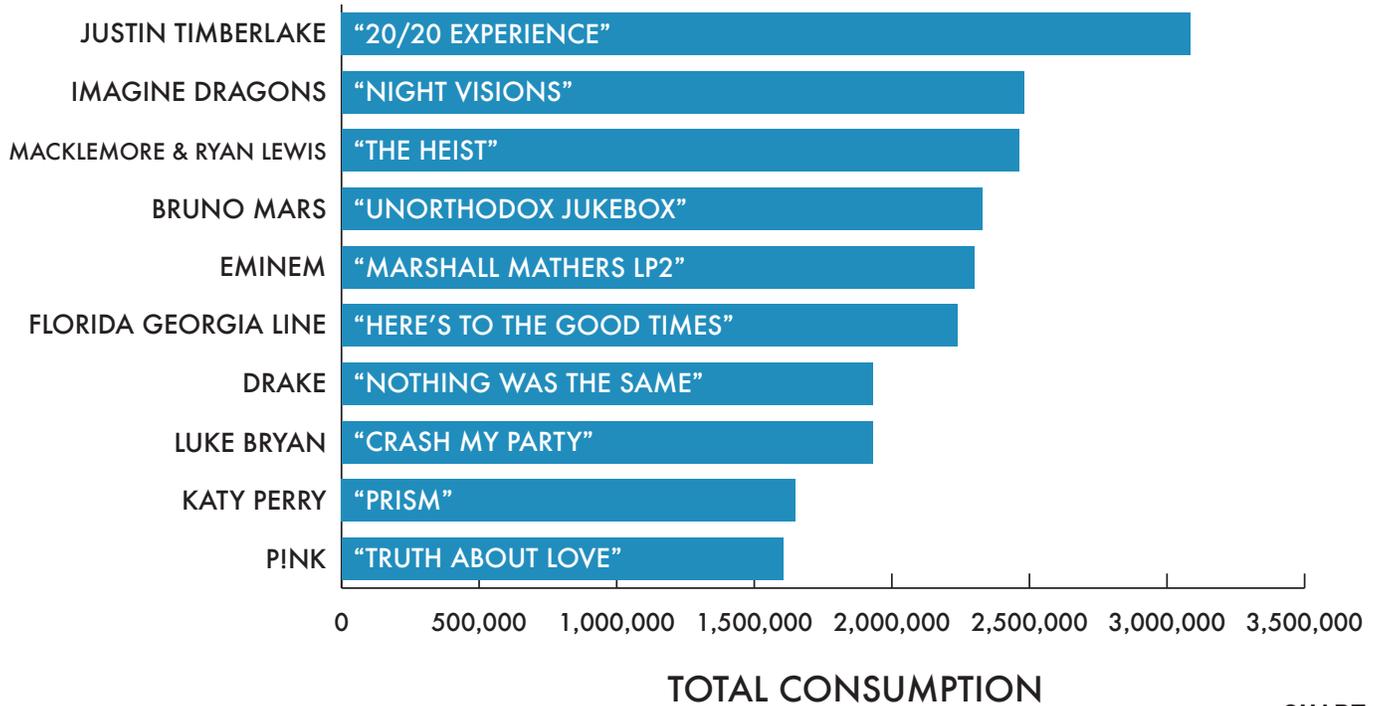


CHART 2

Of the total 3.1 million total sales of “20/20 Experience,” 2.4 million were album sales. The omitted 700,000 sales come from song sales and on-demand audio streams, but that breakdown is not available in the Nielsen 2013 year-end report. Looking at “Night Vision,” the second most consumed album, 2.5 million total sales were recorded, 1.4 million of those provided from album sales. This means that up to 900,000 sales could come from on-demand audio streams and song sales combined. This data shows physical sales of albums were more prominent in 2013, especially in deciding the top sold album of the year. This data is not reflected in music sales of more recent years.

Consumption

Nielsen provides data on the way music is consumed by listeners in the U.S. In 2013, 118.1 billion users streamed music from online platforms. Online streaming saw a 32 percent increase from 2012 to 2013. Total album sales — including CD, digital and vinyl sales — saw an eight percent decrease from 2012 to 2013. In 2012, 316 million albums were sold across the three platforms, where as 289.4 million were sold in 2013. CDs saw the greatest decrease within total album sales, decreasing 14 percent. On the contrary, LPs increased by 33 percent within total album sales, with 4.6 million sales in 2012 and 6.1 million in 2013.

Digital track sales decreased by six percent in 2013. In 2012, 1,336 million digital tracks were sold, compared to 1,259 million units sold in 2013. However, sales of digital albums increased 3.5 percent from 2012 to 2013, from 60 million sales to 62.3 million sales.

Overall, music sales in 2013 decreased by 6.3 percent. Overall music sales include albums, singles, music videos and digital tracks. In 2012, 1,661 million units were sold, and in 2013 that number decreased to 1,556 million

MUSIC CONSUMPTION 2013

OVERALL MUSIC SALES

(TRANSACTIONS: ALBUMS, SINGLES, MUSIC VIDEO, DIGITAL TRACKS)

 **6.3%**

2012	2013
1,661 MILLION	1,556 MILLION

OVERALL ALBUM SALES (WITH TEA)

 **7.7%**

2012	2013
450 MILLION	415.3 MILLION

TOTAL ALBUM SALES

 **8%**

2012		
193 MILLION	118 MILLION	4.6 MILLION
CD	DIGITAL	LP/VINYL
2013		
168 MILLION	118 MILLION	6.1 MILLION
CD	DIGITAL	LP/VINYL

OVERALL MUSIC STREAMS

 **32%**

2013
118.1 BILLION

CHART 3

2014

Top 10 albums

TOP 10 ALBUMS 2014

(based on U.S. album sales; track equivalent albums; stream equivalent albums)

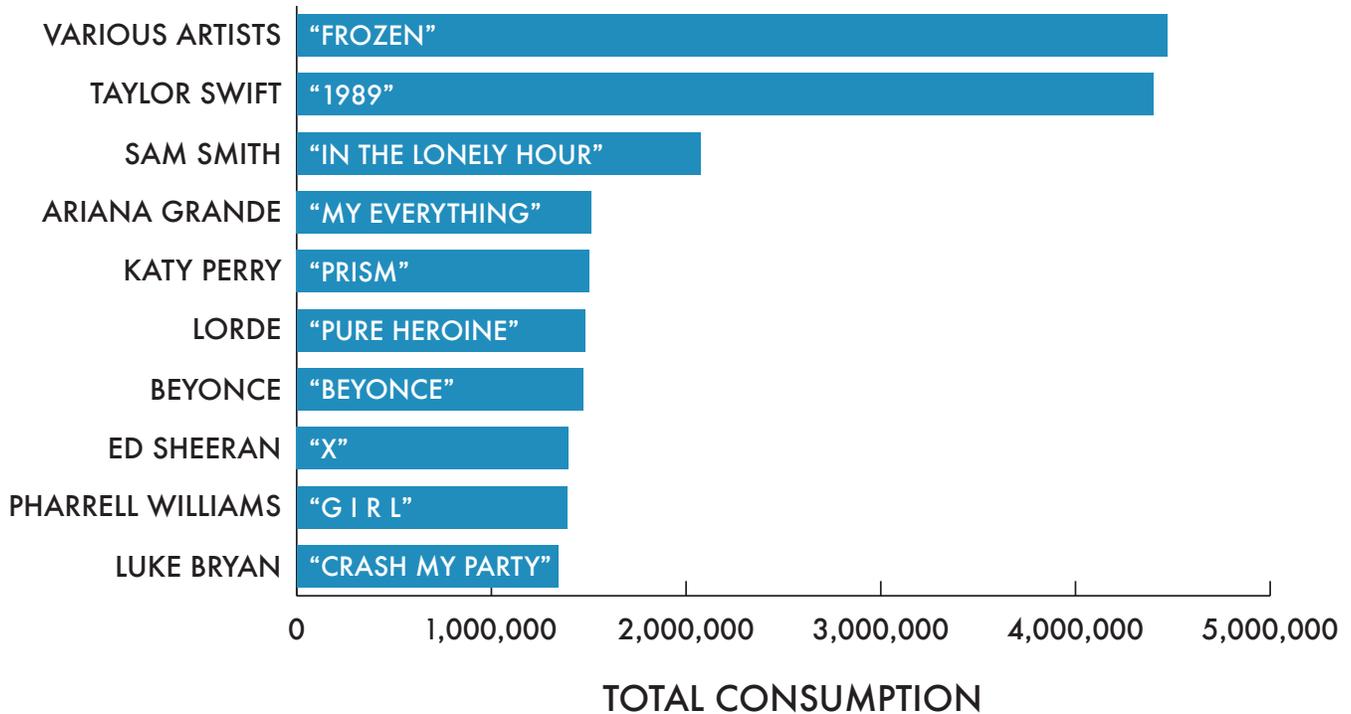


CHART 4

2014 marks the first year that online streams were included in total consumption of albums, and it had an effect on the number one consumed album of the year. While Taylor Swift's "1989" received more album sales — she sold approximately 3.6 million albums — the soundtrack "Frozen" was named the top album of 2014, despite it selling more than 100,000 less albums. "Frozen" beat out Swift's "1989" because it received more than eight times the number of on-demand audio streams, with approximately 218 million streams compared to approximately 26.1 million, respectively. Swift's album is currently unavailable on Spotify and TIDAL, but can be found on Apple Music. "Frozen" on the other hand is available on all three streaming services. Swift exclusively streaming her album on Apple Music affected her on-demand audio streams, which in turn affected her total album consumption. Having the album readily available on different streaming platforms would have given Swift the opportunity to gain more on-demand audio streams, which could have

given her a lead in top album of 2014.

The album with the most on-demand audio streams in 2014 was Sam Smith's "In the Lonely Hour," which received 285 million on-demand audio streams. Though this album received approximately 70 million more on-demand audio streams than "Frozen," its album sales fell short, placing it third overall. Having approximately 2.3 million less album sales than "Frozen" and 2.4 million less than "1989" affected its placement, despite exceeding the albums in on-demand audio streams. Ariana Grande's "My Everything" placed fourth with 509,000 album sales and 260 million streams. Katy Perry's "Prism," which sold 75,000 more albums than "My Everything," had 50 million less streams than Grande's album. The higher number of streams for Grande's album had more weight than album sales when comparing "My Everything" to "Prism," placing them fourth and fifth respectively.

Consumption

Streaming continued to grow in 2014, increasing 54.5 percent, with a total of 164 billion streams. Album sales decreased 11 percent with CD sales once again being its weakness, with a decline of approximately 15 percent. Despite the decline in CD and digital album sales, LP/vinyl sales increased 51.8 percent.

Digital track sales decreased 12.5 percent in 2014, with a similar decrease reflected in digital album sales. In 2013, 62.3 million digital albums were sold. That number decreased in 2014 15 percent, with 52.9 million digital albums sold. However, total digital music consumption increased 3.7 percent. Total album consumption for the year decreased slightly by 2 percent. In 2013, 481.1 million albums were sold, including all albums, track equivalent albums and streaming equivalent albums. This number dropped in 2014 to 476.5 million albums sold.

MUSIC CONSUMPTION

2014

OVERALL ALBUM SALES

(INCLUDES ALL ALBUMS, TEA AND SEA)

↓ 2%

2013
486.1
MILLION

2014
476.5
MILLION

TOTAL ALBUM SALES

↓ 11.2%

2013			2014		
CD	DIGITAL	LP/VINYL	CD	DIGITAL	LP/VINYL
165.4 MILLION	117.6 MILLION	6.1 MILLION	140.8 MILLION	106.5 MILLION	9.2 MILLION

OVERALL MUSIC STREAMS

↑ 54.5%

2013	2014
106.1 BILLION	163.9 BILLION

CHART 5

2015

Top 10 albums

The top consumed album in 2015 was Adele's "25," with a total consumption of eight million. "25" brought in approximately 7.5 million album sales and had approximately 135 million on-demand audio streams. It highly surpassed the second album in the top 10, Taylor Swift's "1989." Swift's album brought in approximately 2 million album sales, but only 83 million on-demand streams. Swift's album is the only one in the top 10 to not have on-demand streams reach the hundred million mark. This is due to Swift making her album available exclusively on Apple Music, excluding consumers on Spotify and TIDAL from streaming "1989." Swift's music is available on on Apple Music, but she removed her albums from Spotify because of the low royalties given to artists. Swift claims streaming, much like piracy and file sharing, have shrunk paid

album sales drastically, which in turn decreases the value of an album. While album sales have continued to drop, streaming services allow a wider audience to listen to music that artists release. Swift neglecting to put her music on Spotify and TIDAL, however, did not affect the total consumption of her album. (Linshi, 2014).

The album with the most on-demand audio streams was The Weeknd’s “Beauty Behind the Madness.” His album received approximately 850 million on-demand streams, the highest an album in the top 10 has received since 2013. However, despite his high number of streams, his album sales fell short, selling only 862,000 albums — this placed him fifth in the top 10 chart. While streams have started to have an effect on what is placed in the top 10 chart, it is still crucial to note that 1,500 streams are equivalent to one album sale. Therefore, a high number of streams is needed in order for an album to have a significantly low number of album sales and still place high in the top 10 chart. Looking back at 2014, Swift’s “1989” had approximately 71,000 less sales than “Frozen,” despite the latter album having eight times the number of on-demand streams.

TOP 10 ALBUMS 2015

(based on U.S. album sales; track equivalent albums; stream equivalent albums)

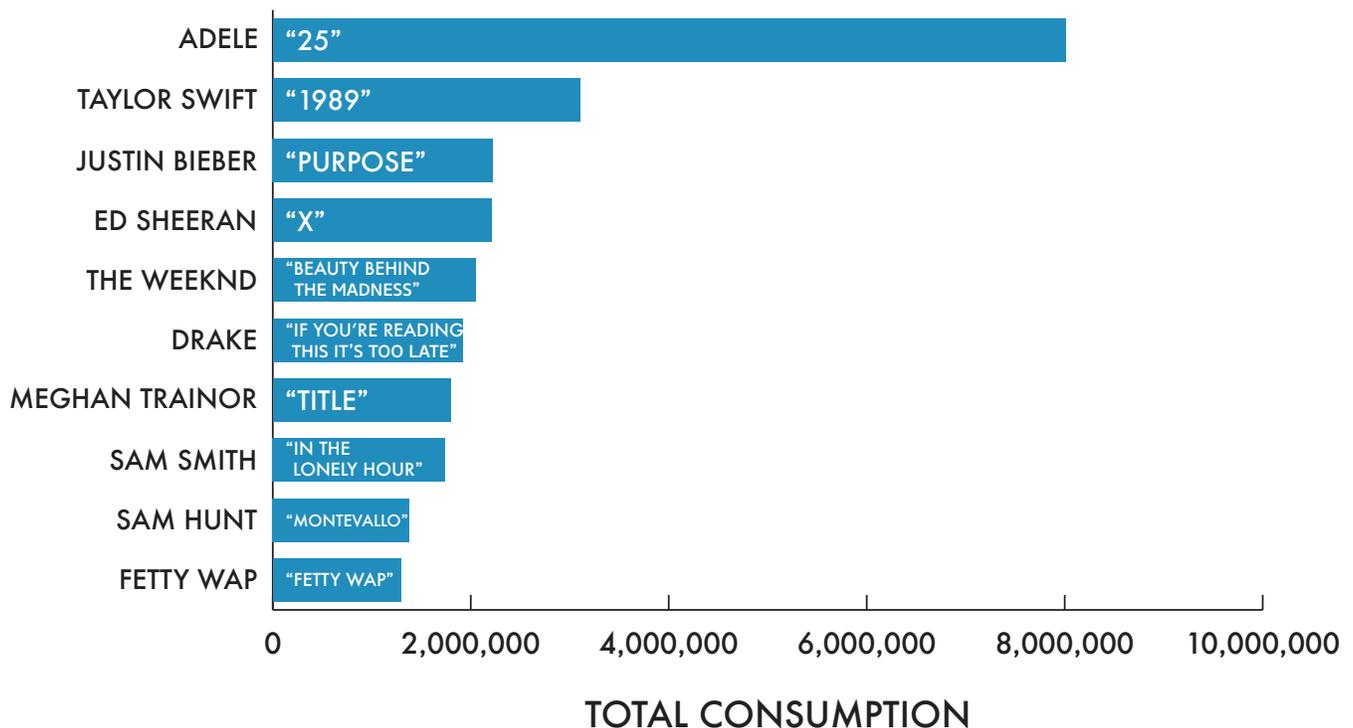


CHART 6

Consumption

Streaming continued to grow with on-demand audio streaming and on-demand video streaming both increasing dramatically. On-demand audio streaming increased by 83 percent compared to last year, and video streaming increased by approximately 102 percent. On-demand streams in general increased by 92.8 percent. Streaming equivalent albums, where 1,500 streams is equivalent to one album, comprised 38.5 percent of the total industry consumption.

Despite overall album sales decreasing by 6.1 percent, LP/vinyl sales continued to grow — increasing 29.8 percent. CD and digital album sales decreased contributing to the decline in overall album sale, with a 10.8 percent CD sale decrease and 2.9 percent digital sale decrease. Digital track sales saw a decrease of 12.5 percent.

In contrast to overall album and digital sales decreasing, overall album consumption of albums with TEA and SEA included increased in 2015 15.2 percent. In 2014, 476.9 million albums were consumed through album, TEA and SEA sales, where as 549.4 percent were consumed in 2015. Total digital music consumption, which includes digital albums, track equivalent albums and streaming albums, also increased. From 2014 to 2015, total digital music consumption increased 26 percent. In 2014, 326.4 million digital albums were consumed, a number that increased to 411.3 million in 2015.

In 2015, Nielsen gathered data on important factors consumers deliberate when choosing a streaming service. The top three reasons for selecting a streaming service were cost, ease of use and song library. Cost and ease of use were almost tied in influencing a users' decision to utilize a streaming service, with votes of 83 percent and 82 percent respectively. The top three reasons users are not likely to subscribe to a streaming service is high cost, ability to stream music for free and not using the streaming service enough to warrant a paid subscription. Nine percent of consumers stated that they would be “very/somewhat likely” to pay for a streaming service in the next six months, 13 percent voted “neither likely nor unlikely” and 78 percent voted “somewhat/very likely.” In the United States alone, 44 percent of music consumers listen to music on a smartphone in a typical week where as 75 percent listen to music online. The smartphone consumers are an ideal market for streaming services as smartphone apps are typically adopted by streaming services.

MUSIC CONSUMPTION

2015

OVERALL ALBUM SALES

(INCLUDES ALL ALBUMS, TEA AND SEA)

 15.2%

2014
476.9
MILLION

2015
549.4
MILLION

TOTAL ALBUM SALES

 6.1%

2014			2015		
CD	DIGITAL	LP/VINYL	CD	DIGITAL	LP/VINYL
140.8 MILLION	106.5 MILLION	9.2 MILLION	125.6 MILLION	103.3 MILLION	11.9 MILLION

OVERALL MUSIC STREAMS

 92.8%

2014	2015
164.5 BILLION	317.2 BILLION

CHART 7

2016

Top 10 albums

The top sold album in 2016 was Drake’s “Views.” His album had a total consumption of 4.1 million sales, with approximately 3 billion on-demand audio streams contributing to the total consumption. “Views” was released exclusively on Apple Music, and was available on the streaming service only for the first two weeks of its release. However, the album was then made available on Spotify and TIDAL. The exclusive release was meant to entice listeners to purchase Apple Music subscriptions, but wasn’t intended to narrow the audience by neglecting those who do not have subscriptions to Apple Music. “Views” received 1.6 million album sales, less than Adele’s “25” — the second album in the top 10 — which received 1.7 million album sales. “Views” is the second album to place first in the top 10 with streams outweighing album sales, “Frozen” being the first.

The on-demand streams “Views” received far surpassed those of any album in 2016. “Views” received

TOP 10 ALBUMS 2016

(based on U.S. album sales; track equivalent albums; stream equivalent albums)

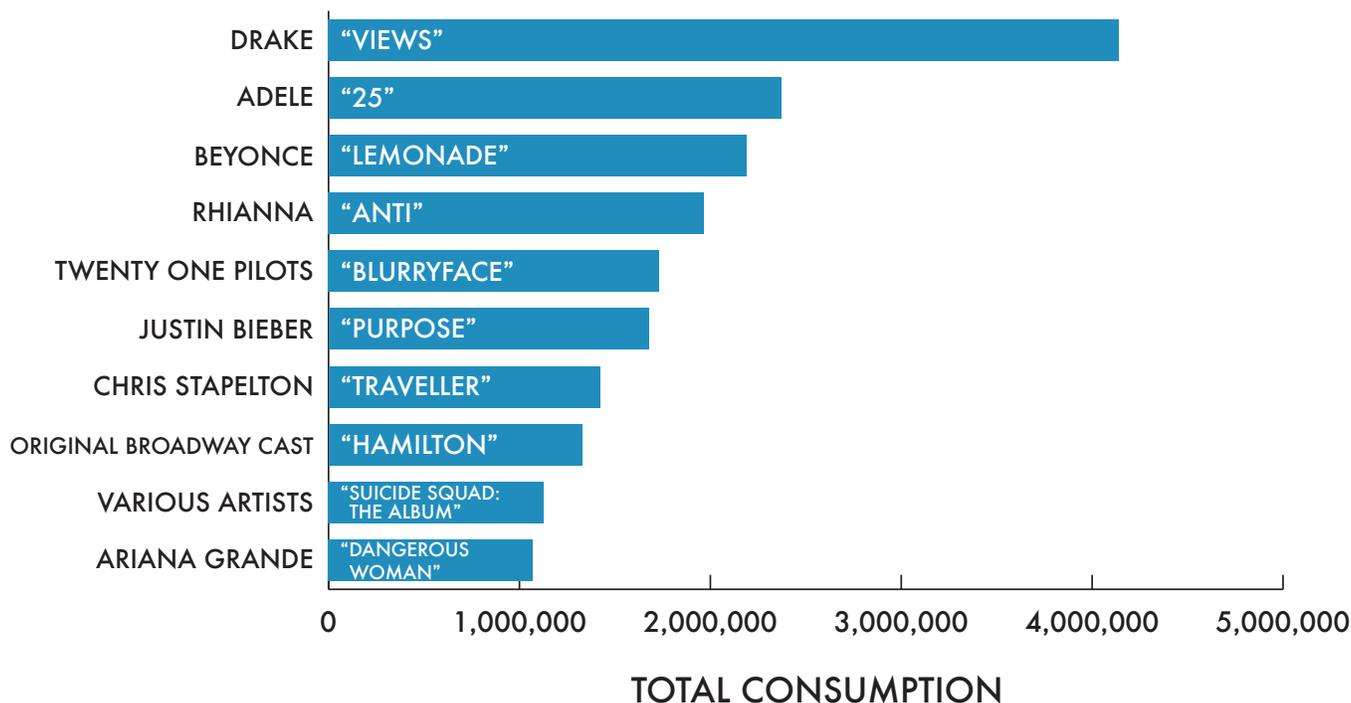


CHART 8

approximately 3 billion streams, doubling the album with the second highest number of on-demand streams — Rihanna’s “Anti.” With Drake doubling on-demand streams, it is no surprise that the total sales of his album doubled Adele’s “25,” the album holding second in Nielsen’s top 10 albums chart.

Rihanna’s “Anti” was ranked fourth overall, but had the second highest number of on-demand audio streams with approximately 1.5 billion streams. Similar to Drake, Rihanna chose to exclusively stream her music on one streaming service — TIDAL. For the first week, the album was available for a free download only through TIDAL. After the exclusive deal, Rihanna released “Anti” on other streaming services, and also as a physical and digital album. This exclusive TIDAL release was meant to entice fans to subscribe to the streaming service, a marketing opportunity for TIDAL to compete against other streaming services. According to an article by Forbes, they foresaw that Rihanna exclusively releasing her album on TIDAL for the first week could affect her overall sales. Seeing as she ranked fourth overall and only had 603,000 album sales, that prediction was correct. However, she still managed to bring in approximately 1.5 billion on-demand audio streams.

Beyoncé’s “Lemonade”, the third sold album in 2016, was close in total consumption to Adele’s “25.” How-

ever, its streaming exclusivity to TIDAL affected its on-demand audio streams. The album only raked in 295 million streams. Drake and Beyoncé's popularity can be classified as fairly even, especially looking at their Grammy nominations for 2017. Beyoncé earned nine nominations for tracks off of "Lemonade," solidifying her title for most nominations. Drake and Rihanna both received eight nominations. Looking at the album sales from "Lemonade," it received approximately 100,000 less than "Views." However, its streams were approximately 700 million less than Drake's. With Beyoncé receiving the most number of nominations, it can be inferred that her album was one that people enjoyed. However, the album lacked ease of accessibility to consumers. It has already been noted that album sales are decreasing and online streams are branching out to wider audiences. Beyoncé exclusively releasing "Lemonade" on TIDAL hindered other consumers who do not have a TIDAL subscription from listening to her album. If she had followed Drake's process of exclusively releasing the album to Apple Music subscribers, then releasing it on all other streaming services, she could have raked in more streams.

Consumption

The industry saw a decline in sales of all types, including digital. However, streaming continued to grow, off-setting the declines. On-demand streaming surpassed total digital sales for the first time in 2016. Digital album sales this year decreased by 20.1 percent, while CD sales followed suit with a 16.3 percent drop. Total album sales in general decreased 16.7 percent. The only album sale increase seen was LP/vinyl sales, which increased 10 percent.

Despite the decrease in total album sales, total digital music consumption is on the rise. Digital music consumption increased 8.9 percent, with 442.4 million albums consumed digitally. An increase was also seen in overall album consumption in 2016. Factoring in album, track equivalent album and stream equivalent album sales, 560.7 million albums were consumed in 2016. This is a 3.1 percent increase from 2015, which saw an overall album consumption of 543.8 million.

Streaming continued to increase in 2016. Total on-demand music streams increased 39.2 percent, with 431.7 billion streams compared to 310.1 in 2015. On-demand audio streaming saw a significantly higher increase than on-demand video streaming. Audio increased 6.4 percent, where video only saw a 7.5 percent

increase. In 2015, 142.8 billion audio streams were recorded; 2016 saw 251.9 billion recorded.

MUSIC CONSUMPTION

2016

OVERALL ALBUM SALES

(INCLUDES ALL ALBUMS, TEA AND SEA)

 **3.1%**

2015
543.8
MILLION

2016
560.7
MILLION

TOTAL ALBUM SALES

 **16.7%**

2015			2016		
CD	DIGITAL	LP/VINYL	CD	DIGITAL	LP/VINYL
125.3 MILLION	102.9 MILLION	11.9 MILLION	140.8 MILLION	82.2 MILLION	13.1 MILLION

OVERALL MUSIC STREAMS

 **39.2%**

2015	2016
310.1 BILLION	431.7 BILLION

CHART 9

Chapter 5

Discussions and Recommendations

Summary

This study was performed in response to recent interest in why artists are exclusively releasing music and how this affects the sales of their albums. In the past year, artists have removed their music from certain streaming services and released music exclusively to one streaming company. Some artists are refusing to sign to a specific label and publish their music exclusively on different streaming services.

To find more information on how streaming services affect music industry sales, data from the top 10 albums each year since streaming was factored into the calculations was collected from Nielsen's year-end music reports. The reports were transformed into graphs of total album consumption for the top 10 albums of the year and infographics depicting consumption of music.

Discussion

By analyzing the data collected from Chapter 4 and the existing literature found in Chapter 2, it is possible to make conclusions regarding the following original research questions.

Research question 1: How has the number of music streaming services users grown in the past 10 years?

The data from Nielsen shows that total streams increased each year from 2013 to 2016. Nielsen's data focuses more on number of streams as opposed to specific users. However, the data shows an increase in stream usage.

EVOLUTION OF STREAMING

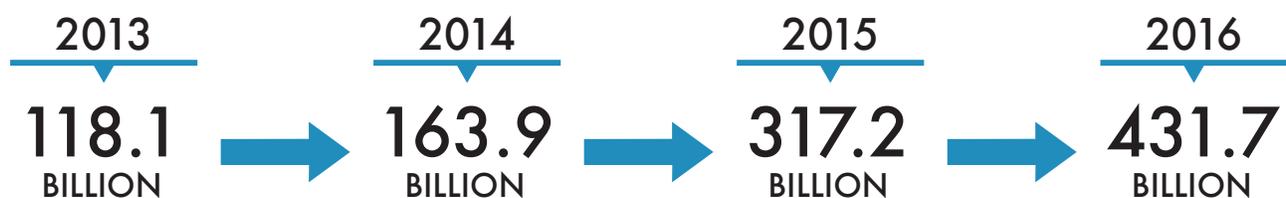


CHART 10

In 2013, 118.1 billion users streamed music, resulting in a 32 percent increase from 2012. A total of approximately 164 billion streams saw a 54.5 percent streaming increase in 2014. The following year saw the largest on-demand streaming increase, as well as an increase in streaming services offered. With a 92.8 percent increase, on-demand streams reached 310.1 billion in 2015. 2016 saw a decline in sales of all types, but streaming continued to increase 39.2 percent. In 2016, it was recorded that 431.7 billion people were stream-

ing music. Nielsen collected data on streams in 2013, but did not factor it into its total album consumption until 2014. Therefore, data prior to 2013 would not be an accurate reflection on the affect streaming services have on album sales.

The literature reflects a similar pattern in the growth of streaming services users. However, it focused more on those paying for subscriptions rather than a general overview of users streaming songs. Paid subscriptions in the U.S. grew 101 percent just in the first half of 2016. In the first half of 2014, subscriptions were at 7.9 million and increased to 9.1 million in 2015. The first half of 2016 saw 18.3 million paid subscriptions. (Friedlander, 2016, p. 1).

Overall, the number of users that choose to stream songs has grown exponentially in the past four years. The increase in songs streamed has grown so much to be factored in the Nielsen numbers for total album consumption. On-demand streaming continues to grow while other industry sales are on a slight decline.

Research question 2: How many users subscribe to Apple Music? Spotify? TIDAL?

The data from Nielsen failed to show specific data on the number of users subscribing to a paid or free streaming service, but the literature spoke about this topic.

According to the literature, Apple Music was the last of the three streaming services to launch its program. With its June 30, 2015 launch, Apple Music was able to retain a decent amount of paid subscribers to compete with Spotify and TIDAL. As of September 2015, after the initial three-month trial ended, Apple Music had a total of 15 million users, with 6.5 million paying for the service (Fedde, 2015). At the end of 2016, Apple Music reported it had 20 million paid subscribers, more than triple the amount of users than the year before (Dent, 2016).

Spotify was released in 2008 and is the only one of the three services analyzed to provide an unlimited free version of its service. Due to this option, the company started out with a higher number of free users than subscriptions users, with free users in 2010 being 15 times higher than paying users. Since then, "... the ratio steadily decreased to seven in 2011, to five in 2012 and to three in 2014." The beginning of 2016 recorded 30 million users paying for Spotify, with 70 million free users. (Voigt, Buliga and Michl, 2017).

TIDAL released its service in early 2015, prior to Apple Music. There has been some dispute as to if Jay-Z

and his TIDAL employees have been inflating the number of users. However, according to Dagens Naerign-ly, the company has 1.2 million users paying for its service (Greenburg, 2017).

Overall, the literature shows that Spotify has acquired the largest amount of followers since its launch. While Apple Music is quickly gaining on Spotify in its number of paid users, the lack of a free version affects its number of users from equating Spotify's. Spotify's free version along with features such as personalized weekly playlists appeals to users of streaming services, making it the consumer favorite.

Research question 3: What streaming service do consumers opt to use?

The data from Nielsen neglected to show specifics on users of streaming services, but provided information on qualities users look for in a streaming service. The top three reasons for selecting a streaming service were cost, ease of use and song library, according to Nielsen's 2015 year-end report. The top three reasons users are not likely to subscribe to a streaming service is high cost, ability to stream music for free and not using the streaming service enough to warrant a paid subscription.

The literature showed that as of October 2016, Spotify had a "paid user base surpassing 40 million subscribers — not to mention an astronomical 55 million additional listeners on its free, ad-based service" (Digital Trends, 2016). This number of total users far surpasses Apple Music and TIDAL, who attain 20 million and 1.2 million subscribers respectively.

From this data, it can be concluded that TIDAL is not the primary streaming service that users are drawn to. This could be partial to the cost per month or the seven-day free trial compared to Apple Music, which allows a three-month trial before paying for the service. According to music industry professional Tom Silverman, "97 percent of the world never buys music — not even Adele," and that trend is most common in millennials aged 18 to 34 (Hampp, 2013). A survey conducted in a college town with 237 respondents fitting the aforementioned age group shows that 55 percent of respondents use Spotify on a daily or weekly basis, showing it being the favorable streaming service among millennials.

Overall, the literature shows that Spotify attains the largest amount of users, but Apple Music proves to be its biggest competition. With only having launched its streaming service June 30, 2015, Apple Music has already gained half the number of paid users as Spotify. If the service continues to grow at this high rate, it

could over take Spotify's lead. However, Spotify has the upper hand by allowing users to use the free, ad-based version of their service.

The only issue Spotify could run in to is the second factor that people seek in a streaming service — song library. “Spotify's weakest area is its exclusives, and is more commonly in the news for artists abandoning its service rather than securing exclusives.” Artists such as Radiohead, Beyoncé, Kanye West and Prince have withheld certain albums from Spotify due to the low royalty rates. The streaming service does attempt to redeem itself by offering features such as “Discover Weekly” — a playlist compiled of similar music a user has listened to. This feature provides a new playlist to users each week, specific to each users' preferences. It offers users a variety of new artists or songs to listen to that attempts to make up for the lack of some of the biggest albums of recent years (Porter and Langley, 2016).

Research question 4: What royalties do artists receive from streaming services?

The literature depicted the royalties artists receive from streaming services, with different amounts earned between Apple Music, Spotify and TIDAL. Some artists expressed frustration with Spotify's revenue per stream. Song rights holders are paid 0.6 cents (\$0.0006) and 0.84 cents (\$0.0084) each time a user listens to a song (Grundberg, 2013). In comparison, when consumers purchase songs from iTunes, a 99-cent song would pay a 7 to 10 cent royalty to the artist (Sisario, 2013). Many artists have expressed frustration with Spotify's low royalties to artists and have in turn removed their music from Spotify. Some of the more notable artists to pull their music from the most popular streaming service to consumers are Taylor Swift, Garth Brooks, The Beatles (excluding remastered albums that are available on Spotify) and Tool. “A number of influential artists — for example, Grizzle Bear, The Black Keys and Galaxie 500 — have expressed dissatisfaction with Spotify due to low royalties and perceived declines in album sales” (Swanson, 2013, p. 8).

Apple Music initially withheld artists' royalties during the three-month free trial for users, meaning artists' music was being streamed for free. The streaming service received a lot of backlash, including a blog post from Taylor Swift that received a lot of publicity. In response, Apple decided to pay artists a reduced royalty during the free trial “Apple had proposed raising its royalty slightly for paid streams — to 71.5 percent from 70 percent — to make up for the loss of royalties during the trial period” (Sisario, 2015). For each song that

is streamed free, Apple will pay 0.2 cents (\$0.0002). Apple pays an average of 0.6 cents (\$0.0006) per stream in the United States, equal with Spotify (Resnikoff, 2016).

TIDAL adopts a formula for its payment, seen in Chart 1 (below). In an effort to stay true to its mission statement, TIDAL provides artists with almost double the amount of royalties they would received from Spotify. “TIDAL’s average payout to the label was about 1.2 cents (\$0.012)” (Kaye, 2015).



The aforementioned pay of 1.2 cents (\$0.012) was given to an indie band claiming that an artist with more following and more streams may result in a higher royalty. This would thereby follow the formula above for an artists’ payout.

Overall, the literature shows that not much money is given back to the artists for streams. More common than not, an artist receives less than a penny per stream. TIDAL is the outlier, paying more than its competitors because of its mission statement. According to its website, “TIDAL has the commitment of artist owners that believe in creating a more sustainable model for the music industry.” TIDAL was created with “the mission of bringing fans and artists closer together...” TIDAL proves this statement with providing the highest amount of royalties to its artists. However, the number of subscribers to TIDAL is significantly lower than subscribers to Spotify and Apple Music, meaning that the number of TIDAL streams is most likely lower than those on from the other streaming services. One can conclude that even with the higher royalty rate, TIDAL’s overall revenue given to artists would equate that of Spotify and Apple Music, if not be lower due to its small number of subscribers.

Research question 5: How do streaming sales compare to album sales of an artist’s album?

Nielsen’s year-end reports showed streaming sales have continued to increase over the past four years while album sales have been on a steady decline. The data shows that online streaming saw a 32 percent increase from 2012 to 2013, where album sales decreased eight percent. Streaming continued to grow in 2014, increasing 54.5 percent. In turn, album sales decreased 11 percent. 2015 saw the largest increase in stream

ALBUM SALES VS STREAMING SALES



CHART 11

ing yet, with a 92.8 percent increase. Album sales continued to fall, with a 6.1 percent decrease in 2015. The following year saw a decline in sales of all types, including digital albums. However, streaming off-set the decline by increasing 39.2 percent. Total albums sales decreased 16.7 percent.

Overall, data from Nielsen showed that streaming continues to increase while album sales decline. The affect of streaming on total album consumption was also seen in Nielsen’s top 10 albums of the year. While some albums proved to sell more albums, they were out beaten by albums that attained more on-demand streams, factoring in more SEA numbers into the total consumption.

Research question 6: How does exclusive streaming affect album sales?

Data from Nielsen showed that while some albums received a greater number of album sales, their on-demand audio streams fell short due to lack of reach. Albums such as Taylor Swift’s “1989” and Beyoncé’s “Lemonade” were some of the most talked about albums of their respective years. However, neither album held the top spot in Nielsen’s charts. Taylor Swift opted out of having her music on Spotify because of issues with royalties per stream. She originally called out Apple Music for a similar issue, but then chose to partner with their streaming service to exclusively release her album. Apple Music is still the only streaming service that has Taylor Swift’s full album available to stream. Swift’s choice to have the album only streamed through Apple Music affected her total consumption. The album had more sales than “Frozen,” the top ranked album

of 2014, but failed to meet its streaming quota.

Beyoncé's "Lemonade" suffered a similar blow. "Lemonade" received the same number of Grammy nominations as Drake's "Views" — Nielsen's top ranked album of 2016 — but was ranked third. "Lemonade" was streamed approximately 700 million times less than "Views." As its popularity is not a factor considering its Grammy nominations, the discrepancy of low streams comes from its exclusive availability on TIDAL. Drake's "Views" was an equally popular album in 2016. He used a unique tactic in releasing his album exclusively. For the first two weeks of its release, "Views" was available exclusively on Apple Music, then was released on Spotify, TIDAL and other streaming services. Drake's exclusive release was meant to entice users to subscribe to Apple Music in order to be exposed to music sooner, but wasn't intentionally punishing those who do not have an Apple Music subscription from listening to the music. In the end, "Views" received more than 3 billion streams, the most-streamed album to date, according to Nielsen's top 10 charts for 2016.

Overall, artists exclusively releasing music can be beneficial, such is the case with Drake's "Views." However, Drake used his exclusive release as an enticement to consumers instead of narrowing his audience. The exclusive release to Apple Music made those who did not have a subscription more intrigued in listening to the album. Beyoncé and Taylor Swift failed to extend their albums to consumers, narrowing their streaming reach.

Recommendations for practice

After completion of the study, substantial data has been collected and analyzed on the topic of streaming services and exclusive releases. Given the information, it is important to highlight the most eye-opening content and present it for future album releases and music industry trends. Some recommendations for practice include capitalizing on exclusive releases, reducing number of physical albums produced and a yearly payment discount.

Capitalizing on exclusive releases

People like to be in the loop. Whether that is being in on a secret between friends or being able to listen to an album first, they enjoy the feeling of inclusion. Artists can use this characteristic in their favor. By claiming loyalty to a certain streaming service, whether it be Apple Music or TIDAL, artists can do an exclusive

release. The exclusive release will mean anyone who has a subscription to the streaming service would have access to the album. After a week of being released on one streaming service, the artist can release the physical and digital albums and extend the album to other streaming services. Capitalizing on Apple Music and TIDAL is more beneficial than Spotify as the former streaming services require a paid subscription or trial period. Being able to access the album for free through Spotify lacks the exclusive factor as there is no incentive to consumers.

Drake profited from this method when releasing “Views” in 2016. Drake originally released the album exclusively on Apple Music. After two weeks of Apple Music users being the only ones to stream it, he extended the album to both Spotify and TIDAL and released physical and digital copies. As a result, his album gained more than 3 million streams. His album also sold more than one million copies, proving that his capitalizing on exclusivity made the album higher in demand to music consumers.

Reducing number of physical albums

The data from Nielsen shows that album sales have dropped in the past four years. More notably, CD sales have been the biggest decrease in the three categories that make up album sales: CD, digital and LP/vinyl sales.

As CD sales are on a steady decline, artists can choose to create less physical albums to save money. In 2016, digital album sales saw a decrease higher than that of CDs. This shows that consumers have an alternate way of receiving their music. Instead of purchasing the digital version, they would rather stream for free or an inexpensive monthly fee. The fee would cost less than a CD or digital album, and consumers would have access to a larger library of music rather than one, 16-track album. With a consumer mindset of getting the most out your dollar, it is important for artists to focus on an outlet that will benefit their overall album sales — on-demand music streams.

One discrepancy is the slight increase in LP/vinyl sales. As this seems to be the only album sale that is increasing, excluding streaming, it makes sense for artists to not forego this method and continue to release LP/vinyl copies of their albums. However, it is important for artists not to mass produce vinyl copies, as the stigma around vinyl copies is it is difficult to locate and only available to the select few.

Yearly payment discount

One thing that consumers consider most when using a streaming service is cost. Consumers are not willing to spend upward of \$9.99 per month for a streaming service, and getting the aforementioned payment can sometimes be difficult. One thing that consumers respond well to is discounts. Spotify and Apple Music both offer student discounts. Students can pay \$4.99 per month to access Spotify premium and Apple Music, while nonstudents must pay the full price.

Another deal that streaming services can offer is an annual discounted fee. Currently, all streaming services require a monthly fee. However, an annual fee could be enticing if it meant paying once for the entire year as opposed to every month. The annual fee could even be discounted, averaging out to \$6.99 per month — not quite as expensive as the regular price, but not as discounted as the student discount. This annual fee could just be another way to entice consumers to purchase a subscription.

Study conclusion

In conclusion, given the general findings of the study, there should be quantitative research done regularly on the topic of album exclusivity and album sales. Routine data collection should be conducted based on the sales of albums exclusively released to one streaming service, those released to all streaming services and those released to one for a limited period of time before becoming available to the public. Overall, the study presented the collective data of the past four years of music industry sales and a review of literature on the topic. However, technology is constantly changing. Therefore, the study and overall recommendation can only be applied while streaming services prove to be the go-to music consuming platform. The study does, however, serve as an educational tool for data comparison of the music consumption among consumers. It provides a visual breakdown of album sales and comparison of music consumption across different platforms. Anyone interested in looking more at the album sales of a specific artist prior to streaming services to present day may want to use this project as initial insight into the music industry and how consumers are listening to music.

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