

Assessing YouTube's Impact on the Music Industry: A Scoping Review

Erin Duvall†

Belmont University, Nashville, Tennessee, United States of America

Abstract

Music video streaming has become a central force in the U.S. music industry since YouTube's launch in 2005 as the first ad-supported platform to offer royalty payments. This scoping review examines the impact of music video streaming on the industry, with a particular focus on YouTube, which dominates both scholarship and practice. Of the 22 peer-reviewed studies analyzed, 21 focused on YouTube and only one addressed YouTube Music, with no substantial coverage of Apple Music, Spotify, or Amazon Music. Three primary themes emerged from the literature: music discovery, monetization, and data. The most distinctive finding is the pivotal role of user-generated content (UGC), which sets YouTube apart from other digital service providers by enabling fans and artists alike to create and distribute music-related content. UGC has altered pathways for music discovery, reshaped fan engagement, complicated copyright enforcement, and introduced new models of monetization. In addition, YouTube has made data analytics on audiences and music consumption a routine part of industry practice. These findings underscore YouTube's unique position as both a streaming service and social media network, while also highlighting gaps in the literature on other music video streaming platforms. Future research should address the impacts of music video streaming services beyond YouTube, the intersection of live music and streaming, and the implications of artificial intelligence for music production, distribution, and revenue.

Keywords

YouTube • YouTube Music, VEVO • music video streaming • music industry • music business • music video

Introduction

The digitization of music distribution has had a profound impact on the music industry over the past thirty years. Nowhere is this more evident than in recorded music revenues. In 1999, the United States saw the highest recorded music revenues in history, earning \$27.5 billion (adjusted for inflation in 2024 dollars), with 87.9% of that coming from compact disc (CD) sales (RIAA Music Revenue Database 2025). After years of recession and dwindling CD sales, bottoming out in 2015 with overall revenue plummeting to \$8.9 billion and CD sales accounting for 21% of that total, recorded music revenue began to rebound in 2016. Since then, streaming (music and video) has been the primary source of recorded music revenue in the U.S., peaking in 2024 with 84.2% of the overall \$17.7 billion coming from streaming (RIAA Music Revenue Database 2025).

Bourreau et al. (2022) define the digital age of recorded music in the U.S. in four segments marked by the technology

that represented the era. While the term "digital" can have numerous meanings in the music industry, digital distribution began with the launch of Napster in 1999, which made music freely available via peer-to-peer file sharing. Next came iTunes, which debuted in 2001 and introduced digital downloads to the mass market, valuing songs at \$0.99 apiece. Music video streaming emerged as the third segment in 2005, with YouTube as the first primary music video streaming platform using an ad-supported payment model. Lastly, Spotify entered the U.S. market in 2011, offering an extensive catalog of music for either an ad-supported option or a paid subscription. All four of these companies would become known as digital service providers (DSPs), offering relatively similar user experiences. iTunes later expanded to include music and official music video (OMVs) streaming as Apple Music (O'Brien 2015; Apple n.d.) and Napster's full 2003 overhaul from a file-sharing site to a legitimate music streaming service (Viksnins 2003).

† Corresponding author: Erin Duvall

E-mail: erin.duvall@belmont.edu

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Today, Apple Music, Amazon Music, Pandora, Spotify, and YouTube are considered the five major DSPs in the U.S. (Routley 2023), with each offering nearly identical recorded music catalogs. In 2020, Amazon Music expanded to include music video streaming, specifically OMVs, but in this case, the videos were only available to paid subscribers (Welch 2020). Music video streaming on the platform was short-lived, however, with Amazon (2023) posting on an internal forum that OMVs would no longer be accessible after March 1, 2023. In 2024, Spotify announced the inclusion of OMVs in its platform (Spotify 2024), expanding music video streaming to three of the five major U.S. DSPs. In addition to Amazon Music, Pandora remains an audio-only service.

While it is no longer the only music video streaming platform, YouTube is the only DSP that also serves as a social media network. The site earns this distinction by allowing users to create and upload their own content, known as user-generated content (UGC), as well as comment and vote on officially distributed content (Choi 2017). UGC sets YouTube apart from all other music video and music streaming platforms by allowing the distribution of unreleased music, unlicensed covers, remixes, and fan-made music videos. The opposite of UGC would be OMVs, which are produced by artists and their representatives and delivered to DSPs through music distributors. YouTube is the exception, as it accepts OMVs through distributors but also allows artists to upload natively to the site, and both methods result in music videos appearing on an artist's Official Artist Channel (OAC). In 2018, YouTube expanded to include a separate application and website branded as YouTube Music, aiming to provide listeners with an audio-based experience (Rahimi and Park 2020). Interestingly, though, the audio heard on YouTube Music is played from the music videos housed on YouTube, making those UGC pieces available on both platforms (Welch 2020; Google n.d.-a).

VEVO, which launched in 2009 (McIntosh 2016), has been the only service to compete with YouTube in the music video streaming space. VEVO began as a platform to house OMVs for artists signed to Universal Music Group and Sony Music Entertainment. Concurrently, VEVO appeared as a multi-channel network (MCN) on YouTube, syndicating those OMVs on VEVO-branded YouTube channels. In 2013, YouTube's parent company, Google, invested between \$40 and \$50 million in VEVO for a 7% stake (Pham 2013). In 2018, VEVO ceased operations of its own platform, and VEVO-distributed OMVs became accessible online exclusively via YouTube (Wang 2018). Therefore, the history and impact of VEVO are closely intertwined with those of YouTube.

YouTube is also distinct from other music video streaming platforms for the types of music videos uploaded to the site. While fans have limitless production options with UGC, artists and their representatives participate in the creation of company-

generated content (CGC). Artists often create multiple videos for a single track in the form of lyric videos, visualizers (videos that have limited movement in the background while music plays), acoustic videos, live performance videos, and OMVs. Apple Music, Spotify, and (during its time) Amazon Music only provide their users with OMVs. Since moving videos off VEVO.com, VEVO has begun delivering more video types to YouTube than OMVs.

In the complex and ever-evolving landscape of music video streaming, this scoping review aims to determine the impact of the rise of music video streaming on the U.S. music industry. As of this writing, there are no systematic or scoping reviews that focus on music video streaming (or music streaming generally). YouTube, in particular, has the lowest barrier to entry for artists engaging in digital spaces, as it does not require the use of a distributor. Therefore, there is the potential for underrepresented and unsigned artists to break into the industry via music video streaming. An assessment of the current state of literature and exploration of research gaps could be useful to artists and scholars alike.

Methods

As this approach is designed to both gauge the scope and identify gaps within the literature on music video streaming, a scoping review was deemed most appropriate (Munn et al. 2018). The execution of this method and reporting of findings were guided by the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses extension for Scoping Reviews (PRISMA-ScR) guidelines (Moher et al. 2009).

Search Strategy

This scoping review intends to assess the current state of the literature on the impact of music video streaming, as reported in peer-reviewed journals and conference papers from 2005 to the present. The study was limited to this period as YouTube, the first significant music video streaming platform, was launched in 2005. A systematic search of electronic databases using keywords relating to the study's main concepts (music video streaming and music video) as well as the two DSPs that focus entirely on video streaming (YouTube and VEVO) and the target industry (music industry/business) was executed on February 27, 2025 in three databases: Scopus, Web of Science, and Répertoire International de Littérature Musicale. Search terms involving the geographic limitation of the United States in the research question were excluded to allow global studies. The term "digital" was excluded from the search after preliminary searches revealed that it expanded the results to include social media networks (such as Facebook and

Instagram). Additionally, the term “digital service provider” was also excluded, as it is a common term used to describe internet service providers, TV cable services, and other similar entities. Grey literature was also intentionally excluded to assess coverage of the topic specifically in scholarly works. The search query appeared as follows: “music industry” or “music business” or “record* industry” AND “video streaming” or YouTube or VEVO or “music video.”

Study Selection and Screening

The first stage of study selection and screening focused on studies limited to English-language articles and conference papers that assessed the impact of music video streaming on the music industry, and were peer-reviewed and published in the final form. Studies focusing on territories other than the United States and the audio-only impacts of music streaming were excluded.

After running the query in the databases, 596 articles were retrieved. These results were downloaded in RIS format and loaded to Covidence to remove duplicate search results. Figure 1 reproduces the PRISMA-ScR diagram that captures the screening process. Covidence automatically identified 65 duplicates, while an additional three were manually identified, resulting in 528 studies. The second stage of study selection and screening focused on reviewing the titles, abstracts, and keywords of papers in Covidence, excluding studies that did not include the United States or focus on music video streaming or its impacts on the music industry. This examination resulted in a shortlist of 95 articles deemed eligible for study.

Shortlisted papers were downloaded for full-text review. The quality assessment criteria applied to these studies considered the following elements: (1) the study was not published in a predatory journal; (2) the study was in English; (3) the study included a methodology explaining how the impact was conceptualized; and (4) the study focused on the impact of music video streaming on the music industry. This third stage eliminated 73 studies that were not in English, did not cover the desired topic, or did not meet the publication requirements. The final stage of the study selection and screening process, which included one level of backward snowballing, was completed on the remaining 17 studies. This resulted in the inclusion of five more studies. A total of 22 studies were included in the scoping review.

Approach to Data Selection and Synthesis

Data extraction from each article was done manually and organized using Google Sheets. The metadata extracted included:

- Platform (i.e., YouTube, VEVO, Apple Music, etc.) covered
- Area of the music industry impacted
- How the platform impacted the area
- Recorded music vs. live music
- Geographical coverage

Qualitative synthesis and thematic analysis were employed to summarize, analyze, and assess the data extracted using a partially ordered meta-matrix (Miles et al. 2020). A partially ordered meta-matrix allowed the researcher to condense results from various cases, employing In Vivo coding, to identify patterns in areas of impact on the music industry (Manning 2017). Once completed, axial coding was used to condense these topics into three main themes and eight subcategories.

Limitations

There are several possible limitations to a study of this nature. First, only one reviewer participated in the screening of all sources, which introduces a potential for personal bias. Additionally, by excluding non-English papers, relevant information published in other languages was likely overlooked. The exclusion of scholarly books could also have limited the results, as several that appeared to address the research question were excluded during the screening process. Lastly, several databases that may have contained additional relevant work were excluded because they do not allow for mass search query extraction, which is necessary for the scoping review process. Among the databases were Music Periodicals Database (IIMP) and Gale OneFile: Fine Arts.

Results

Study Characteristics

The scoping review encompassed 22 studies, which covered three platforms: YouTube, YouTube Music, and VEVO. There were no studies that addressed video streaming on Apple Music, Amazon Music, or any other platform. Only one study included YouTube Music, while a second only mentioned its existence. Five studies included VEVO, but the impact addressed in each was essentially equivalent to that of YouTube. One study highlighted the music video capabilities of Apple Music and Spotify, stating, “We should not forget the increasing attention paid to audiovisual content by music streaming services,” but did not investigate the audiovisual aspects of each platform (Viñuela 2020). The lack of literature on music video streaming is why this review primarily focuses on YouTube, despite the review’s attempt to cover all music video streaming.

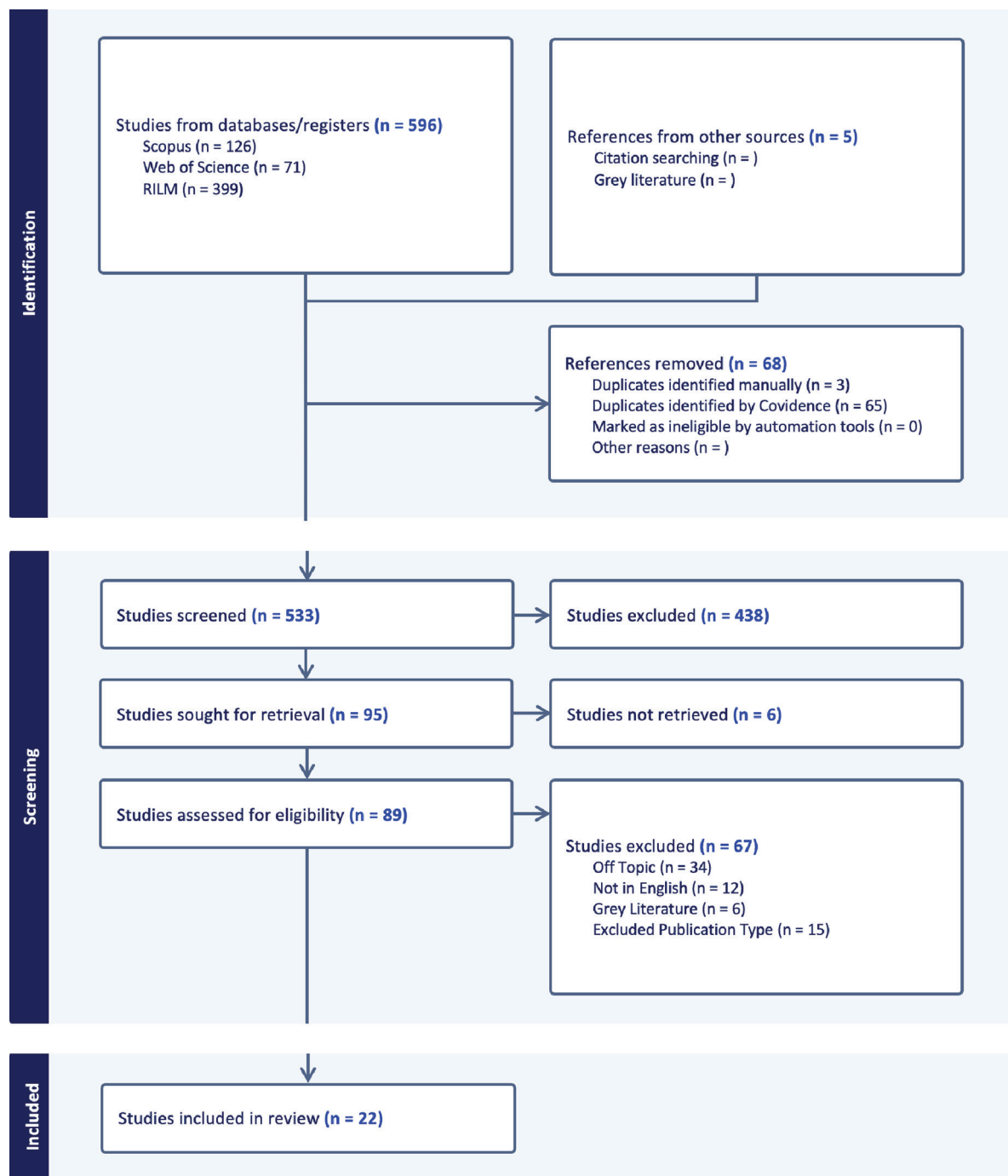


Figure 1. PRISMA-ScR Diagram.

Out of the 22 studies, all but two focused on the global impact of YouTube. The two remaining studies focused on the impact in both the U.S. and the United Kingdom. Additionally, all 22 studies covered the impact on recorded music, with three of the 22 also acknowledging the impact on live music being distributed by a DSP. As shown in Figure 2, three main themes

emerged in the discussion of impact areas: music discovery, monetization, and data.

Music Discovery

Out of the 22 studies examined, most focused on a single area of impact on the music industry, while nine studies focused

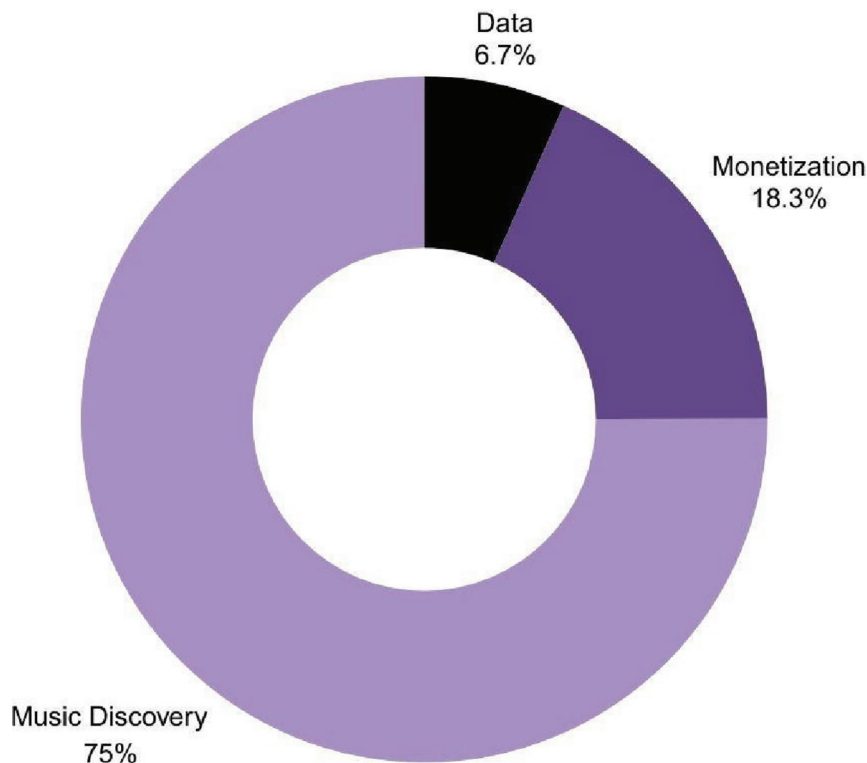


Figure 2. Distribution of papers in established themes.

on multiple areas. Overall, impact areas were addressed 34 times throughout the 22 studies. The most researched area of impact was music discovery (75%), specifically how listeners find and consume music, which appeared 16 times throughout the scoping review. This theme includes four subcategories: content production (appearing eight times), fan engagement (six times), homogenization of music (once), and songwriting (once). Table 1 describes each subcategory and shows the corresponding papers.

Monetization

The second most frequently covered theme was monetization (18.3%), specifically how music generates revenue, with 13 occurrences in two separate subcategories: royalties (appearing nine times) and copyright infringement (four times). Table 2 defines these subcategories and shows the corresponding articles.

Data

The least covered theme was data (6.7%), which was only addressed in five studies. Two separate types of data were addressed in the studies: music as data (appearing four times) and consumer data (appearing once). Table 3 defines each subcategory and lists the corresponding papers.

Discussion

According to the literature, YouTube's most significant contribution to music discovery is user-generated content (UGC). Unlike the other major DSPs, which only ingest music from distributors, YouTube allows any user to upload unreleased music, unlicensed music, and derivative works (Galloway 2020; Harper 2020; Oh and Lee 2013; Choi 2017; Holt 2011). Oh and Lee (2013, 40) argue that as long as YouTube allows free uploading of UGC, "global audiences, who can express their preferences and opinions by clicking the 'like' button or leaving comments in the message box, are the sole gatekeepers in cyberspace." In other words, YouTube enables artists to bypass traditional gatekeepers, including record labels, radio programmers, and promoters.

The unbarred entry to the music market on YouTube has been credited with the rise of niche markets in the global music economy. Oh and Lee (2013) focus on the rise of K-pop on the platform, pointing to UGC as a way to bypass traditional music distribution channels, allowing the genre to achieve global exposure in exchange for low profit margins from royalty fees. Their study asserts that YouTube's lower profit margin deterred American pop distributors from embracing the technology, leaving an opening for niche creators. While

Table 1. Music discovery impact areas.

Impact Area	Description
Content production	How music videos are made, including but not limited to the technology and devices used to create them, including AI. Also known as content creation (Choi 2017; Galuszka 2024; Harper 2020; Holt 2011; Negus 2019; O'Hara 2022; Viñuela 2020; Vizcaino-Verdú et al. 2021).
Fan engagement	How fans interact with artists or their social media accounts. Also known as user engagement or fan community (Galloway 2020; Liikkanen and Salovaara 2015; Negus 2019; Park et al. 2018; Viñuela 2020).
Homogenization of music	A lack of diversity in "danceability, speechiness, valence, liveness, acousticness, energy, instrumentation, loudness, tempo, duration" in music (Bourreau et al. 2022, 428).
Songwriting	The art of writing a song (Carter 2024).

Table 2. Monetization impact areas.

Impact Area	Description
Royalties	How music makes money through mandated payments from DSPs in exchange for the privilege of allowing access to their users and the resulting value gap established after the digitization of music (Carter 2024; Darias de las Heras 2018; Heuguet 2019; Holt 2011; McIntosh 2016; Negus 2019; Park et al. 2018; Rahimi and Park 2020; Renard et al. 2013).
Copyright infringement	The unauthorized use of copyrighted material as well as YouTube's internal system (Content ID) for cataloging copyrighted material uploaded by users and allowing copyright owners to either monetize, track, or block it (Darias de las Heras 2018; Galuszka 2024; Heuguet 2019; Liikkanen and Salovaara 2015).

Table 3. Data impact areas.

Impact Area	Description
Music as data	With the integration of big tech into the music industry, the music itself has become reduced to data by way of video views, streams, etc. (Airoldi et al. 2016; Carter 2024; Negus 2019; Oh and Choeh 2022).
Consumer data	Unlike in a medium such as radio or TV, artists can collect specific data about their fans using platforms such as YouTube (Oh and Lee 2013).

the American music industry was slow to embrace YouTube, seeing its UGC policy as blatant copyright infringement, attitudes have shifted, and all major and independent American music distributors now release music to the platform. It would be interesting to revisit this study, more than a decade later, to find out if YouTube is still the music industry's wild west, offering opportunity to all who seek it.

However, this open market philosophy doesn't take into account how the YouTube algorithm can be manipulated by promoting videos with paid advertising or any biases that may lie within YouTube's recommendation system. Several studies investigated the relationship between YouTube recommendations, finding that fan-made music videos, covers, and remixes boost an artist's music video in "the YouTube ecosystem through individual and linked networks of the platform's vernacular tastemakers" (Harper 2020, 227). Liikkanen and Salovaara (2015, 109) call this the "halo effect" when "a popular video may share its audience collaterally with similar contents because they appear next to it in search results and suggested content, thereby increasing their views." Harper (2020) credits the implementation of YouTube's "Recommended Videos" feature a few months before the release of Rebecca Black's "Friday" in 2011 as a contributing factor to the megahit's virality. This reciprocal

relationship with UGC still benefits the artist, as Liikkanen and Salovaara (2015) cite a 2014 International Federation of the Phonographic Industry report that found UGC produces more revenue for artists than their original videos.

On YouTube, a music video's success—whether recommended or not—is determined by the engagement of the platform's users. In the music industry, users are commonly referred to as fans. A key element to any artist's career is fan engagement but in the digital age, that term takes on new meaning to include clicks, views, "likes," and comments (Viñuela 2020). "Internet platforms such as YouTube promote interactive listening and intimacy with other fans on the other side of the screen" (Galloway 2020, 257). Park et al. (2018, 6) found that fans trust UGC more than content made by the artist (CGC—"company-generated content") "as it is created by consumers." The study found that fans are more likely to purchase music when other fans have engaged more with UGC than CGC early on. Additionally, Liikkanen and Salovaara (2015, 123) found that "traditional videos receive more views but derivative videos invite more active viewer participation through commenting and voting."

The rise of UGC can be attributed to the digital technologies that have revolutionized and simplified content production over the past twenty years. "Because uploading a video on

YouTube is relatively simple, people can participate in video production without sophisticated software" (Choi 2017, 477). Vizcaíno-Verdú et al. (2021, 527) found that artists engaging on YouTube "believed themselves extremely transmedia and technically qualified to create, appropriate and disseminate online content, taking into account copyright." Holt (2011) noted that "music production now more commonly includes video production" as artists are expected to run their own social media accounts. This accessibility of content production also impacts the art itself, with Vizcaíno-Verdú et al. (2021, 515) asserting that artists engaging on YouTube "represent the most powerful impact on the media industry due to their originality and creativity." By removing the impediment of high-cost content production, these studies contend that minorities (Choi 2017), non-major label artists (Holt 2011), and niche musicians (Oh and Lee 2013) can find unfettered opportunities on YouTube.

We have yet to see that success propel underrepresented YouTube artists into the mainstream music industry, though. As of this writing, there are no studies that show minorities, non-major label artists or niche artists appearing more in the industry's standard for success: the *Billboard* charts. The charts are compiled by combining an artist's streaming data (which includes music video views) with radio airplay from across all formats, and sales data. Watson, who studies the *Billboard* Hot Country Songs chart meticulously, has noted in her research of the chart's methodology that "regardless of how the data are examined, the number of songs by white male artists exceeds the number of songs by all other artists and collaborations," (Watson 2023, 61).

As noted in the Results, only one study in this review (Galuszka 2024) addressed artificial intelligence, focusing on AI-generated covers and fan reception. In the article, the author notes the popularity of AI-created covers particularly using the voices of deceased singers. Owing to the affordances of YouTube's UGC policy, Galuszka focuses on the platform's distribution of said covers and uses its analytics (views and comments) to measure popularity: "The real value of AI technology from the point of view of the music industries lies not in the fact that AI will compose better hits than professional songwriters, but in the fact that it can be used to extend the life of the most valuable brands in popular music," Galuszka (2024, 610). The article does touch on the current absence of copyright law regulating AI-generated content but leaves a wide range of industry issues open for further research. The author concludes by urging the music industry to embrace user-generated, AI-produced content.

As a result of safe harbor provisions included in legislation such as the Digital Millennium Copyright Act of 1998 in the U.S., YouTube is able to offer UGC to its users. Such measures protect "intermediaries from, among other things, copyright violations committed by users of their services,"

(Darias de las Heras 2018, 112). In short, YouTube is not responsible if a user infringes someone else's copyright by uploading a video they do not own, as long as YouTube allows the rights holder to remove the content. However, rights holders are not typically inclined to license their music to a company that actively exploits their copyrights. In 2007, YouTube introduced Content ID, a "technological compromise" (Heuguet 2019, 3) that allows rights holders to claim UGC using their copyright and either monetize, track, or block it. If a rights holder chooses to monetize (and the video is eligible for monetization), 40% of the video's revenue goes to the owner of the sound recording; 15% goes to the owner of the musical work (publisher/songwriter); 5-10% goes to the video creator and YouTube retains the remaining 35-40% (Darias de las Heras 2018). Content ID does favor rights holders, as videos are typically blocked preemptively with no public register of blocked works (Heuguet 2019). Fair use, which allows the unauthorized use of copyrighted material under specific circumstances such as parody, comment, news reporting, teaching, and research (U.S. Copyright Office n.d.), is not taken into consideration by Content ID (Heuguet 2019). Therefore, Content ID does not distinguish between parodies and generally unaccepted forms of copyright infringement. In examining the distribution of AI-produced materials, Galuszka (2024, 608) states "if a work can claim fair use (e.g., in the case of parody), the creator is immune to immediate legal issues." It should be noted, though, that fair use is not a right given in U.S. copyright law but a defense against copyright infringement claims (U.S. Copyright Office n.d.). Fair use must be proven and is decided by judges on a case-by-case basis. Music distributors are generally the ones administering copyrights on YouTube, as the Content ID system requires the distribution of a track to protect it (Darias de las Heras 2018). In the 22 studies examined for this scoping review, how music is distributed to YouTube seemed to be generally misunderstood or overlooked, in particular with Heuguet (2019) misciting McIntosh (2016) and attributing the distribution of music from the three major labels (Universal Music Group, Sony Music Entertainment, and Warner Music Group) to YouTube's partnership with VEVO.

In fact, music distributors license music directly to YouTube and deliver audio files, along with the corresponding artwork, via a secure DDEX feed (Google n.d.). As a result, an "Art Track Video" (ATV) is created with the track's artwork appearing as the music plays. This ATV then appears on the specified artist's auto-generated Topic Channel. In addition to video files, as noted by Darias de las Heras (2018), these audio files are also subject to Content ID (Google, n.d.-a). It should also be noted that Warner Music Group was famously the holdout on delivering music videos through VEVO (McIntosh 2016), opting instead to create its own MCN (multi-channel network) (Churchill and Bottomley 2014). This confusion may

stem from the lack of scholarly work on digital distribution in general. Scholarship tends to focus on what happens after a song gets delivered to a DSP rather than how.

YouTube's Official Artist Channels (OACs) were also underdeveloped in the literature, with no acknowledgment of what they entail—these OACs are like a blue checkmark on Instagram—they tell the user that the videos being posted on this channel are coming directly from the artist (or their representatives). OACs are deceptive, though, as they can be up to three individual channels appearing as one. Anyone with a Google account can log in to YouTube and create an Owned and Operated Channel (O&O), then begin uploading videos containing music or any other content. When artists request and qualify for an OAC, YouTube merges the O&O and the Topic Channel. If the artist has a VEVO channel, it can also be merged into the OAC (Google n.d.-b). It is possible to discern which channel hosts the OAC video since VEVO videos all have the VEVO watermark, and ATVs all note they are auto-generated by YouTube in the description. In a 2022 study, Oh and Choeh examined the effectiveness of official videos on OACs but did not note if channel distinction was considered or included in their study. To date, there is no academic research that compares the performance of the three channels.

Shifting the focus back to UGC, Negus (2019) noted that musicians and their representatives credit UGC and the safe harbor protection as a way for YouTube to evade financial responsibility. While Napster was the digital precipice for the devaluation of recorded music, the music industry sees YouTube as continuing the value gap by supporting “an unfair imbalance between profits made and revenues passed on to musicians and music companies,” (Negus 2019, 373). YouTube finds itself in a different category than music streaming companies like Spotify, which earn the majority of their revenue from subscriptions. As Rahimi and Park (2020) detail, YouTube's ad-based model can be more effective at attracting new users but is less profitable than the subscription model. The one study in this scoping review that covered YouTube Music contends the new application was an attempt to advance in the subscription market, considering it launched with a \$10/month subscription and the intention to replace the Google Play Music streaming service (Rahimi and Park 2020). In the years since its launch, YouTube has boasted growing subscribers and revenue, but has not chosen to release YouTube Music-only numbers, opting instead to pair it with YouTube Premium offerings. In line with the Spotify model, YouTube Premium allows subscribers ad-free access to both YouTube Music and YouTube videos.

Recorded music itself, though, is being increasingly consumed not as a product but as data. Today, “more recorded music is being produced and consumed than at any other point in history” (Carter 2024, 354). “Digital conglomerates

exploit recorded music as a part of the production, analysis, packaging, and selling of data, and in the management of data for third parties (labels, publishers, etc.)” (Negus 2019). This shift impacts artists and songwriters, who are now being scrutinized with every digital and musical moment being second-guessed by analysts. Data is changing the way songwriters write songs. Carter (2024, 349) attributes this to the financial decisions, finding “labels attempt to minimize market risks by pulling together elite teams of songwriters to create industrialized, ‘machine-tooled’ hits, or songs that are ‘optimized for streaming.’” Bourreau et al. (2022) studied the acoustic diversity of music across the four digital eras—Napster, iTunes, YouTube, and Spotify—and found a decrease during the iTunes and YouTube eras. This could be a result of the data available to artists and record companies, as YouTube in particular offers OACs a suite of data called Analytics for Artists, which shows the total time users have watched their videos, traffic sources (where users found their videos), and top-earning videos, among other things.

Analytics for Artists also includes information on an artist's audience, including the commodification of fans. Oh and Lee (2013) observed that YouTube is more “sophisticated” than traditional broadcast models (radio and TV) with the ability to collect user data, giving advertisers a more efficient way of marketing music. Out of the 22 papers studied for this scoping review, none explored the potential risks or advantages this information brings. Another consideration to explore would be the ethical implications of manipulating this data.

Future Directions

As seen here, YouTube has a significant impact on the entire music industry (including songwriters, artists, record labels, and music publishers) and extends beyond (affecting tech companies and fans). The mere fact that this scoping review yielded only 22 English-language studies suggests that there is considerable opportunity for future research. The impact areas that were only covered in a single paper—songwriting, consumer data, and homogenization of music—deserve further research on that fact alone. As noted previously, further exploration into the impact of OACs and an understanding of how music and music videos are distributed to DSPs are also needed. That said, three major areas of impact have emerged from this analysis: AI, live music, and music video streaming on services other than YouTube.

While generative AI may seem like a hot topic in contemporary discourse, the implications it will have on the music industry—and music video streaming in particular—warrant further review. The music video is an art form that has survived the evolution from music-only TV channels to music video

streaming. In the digital age, the term has expanded to include lyric videos and other visual representations of music. An entire subset of the industry employs directors, editors, actors, and producers to create these pieces of art. An analysis of the impact of AI's immediacy and low-cost options on the video production economy is needed. A thorough examination of the ethics surrounding AI-generated music is also necessary, particularly when considering posthumous work. Do ethical considerations change depending on who is creating the work? In 2023, the two remaining members of The Beatles—Paul McCartney and Ringo Starr—released “Now and Then,” a song based on a demo tape by the late John Lennon from 1979 (Galuszka 2024), and used AI to enhance the audio quality of Lennon's voice. Should that work be considered with the same regard as a posthumous cover created by a fan and uploaded as UGC?

Other situations and uses of AI also need to be explored. In 2024, Country Music Hall of Famer Randy Travis, who had been unable to sing or speak since a near-fatal stroke in 2013, released his first song in a decade using AI (Zemler 2025). In a situation where the original artist has the cognitive capacity to consent to the use of AI, different allowances should be considered. A deeper examination of the legal ramifications is also necessary as legislation continues to evolve. As of this writing, the only way an AI-created work is eligible for copyright in the U.S. is if it contains “sufficient human authorship.” (Reed 2023) What implications does that have for monetization or copyright protection? In Travis's case, the voice of James Dupré (Zemler 2025) was used to create the new music; however, there are no legal guidelines regarding Dupré's rights to the work. Is he owed an artist's royalty, or can this be considered a work-for-hire? Travis's team may be able to copyright the work because of the human authorship included, but how are the artists and writers whose work was used to train the AI compensated or acknowledged? A review of evolving legislation is also necessary, as states such as Tennessee enact laws like the Ensuring Likeness Voice and Image Security (ELVIS) Act, which protects an artist's voice from unauthorized use (Leibfreid 2024).

Live music is another area that was barely addressed in the literature. Live recordings and music videos have become a regular part of an artist's marketing plan. Live streaming of concerts and performances surged during the COVID-19 pandemic, as artists were compelled to find innovative ways to connect with fans. Studies examining the impact of each would have a profound influence on artist marketing and release plans. From another perspective, an analysis of how music streaming—and the streaming of music videos, in particular—influence ticket sales and the live economy would tie the digital and in-person sides of the industry together. Special consideration of how consumer data collected on

platforms like YouTube is used to promote live music and concerts offers insight into the interconnectedness of the digital and in-person sides of the business.

Lastly, there is a void in academic research considering the greater music video streaming industry. As previously noted, there were no studies in this review that included Amazon Music's brief foray into music video streaming or Apple Music and Spotify's current work. Understanding music video streaming on other platforms could help conceptualize YouTube's place in the wider music streaming economy. The challenge here, though, may be access to data to extrapolate these conclusions. To that end, research into YouTube Music and its differences from YouTube could help researchers and the industry understand whether listening to music streams or watching music videos drives most of the traffic on the platform.

The assertion made by Carter (2024) that recorded music is being consumed more now than at any other time in history highlights the urgent importance of distribution methods. Academics and practitioners alike benefit from further exploration and exhaustion of these topics. Perhaps the most exciting takeaway from this scoping review is that the potential research topics for music video streaming are boundless.

Conclusion

This scoping review began as an attempt to assess the state of music video streaming scholarship. In the findings, though, it became clear that music video streaming is synonymous with YouTube, as there was no work focusing on other DSPs with audiovisual offerings. From there, three major themes emerged as areas that YouTube has particularly impacted: music discovery, monetization, and data. Studies have found that UGC is the major driver of how YouTube has uniquely changed music discovery. YouTube, which is widely recognized as the first ad-supported payment model for music, jump-started an ephemeral music economy that is essentially “free” to users in exchange for a few moments of their time. Today, Spotify, Amazon Music, and Pandora all have ad-supported options. As a subsidiary of Google, and the second-largest search engine in the world, YouTube has also made data a prevailing part of its appeal to artists. In a reciprocal relationship that benefits both the company and artists, YouTube provides artists with the tools to better connect with their fans. With the potential that YouTube has to build artists' careers, further study would be beneficial to the music industry. Music video streaming in general has a great impact on the music industry as it is a part of the *Billboard* chart tabulation process and therefore should be further examined for opportunities, biases, and challenges.

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