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## Streaming Services and their Disruption of the Music Industry

One of the most ever-changing forms of media is music, where there has been a lot of change in the past few decades. While there were vinyl records, then cassette tapes, then CD's, the biggest disruption was when smartphones and streaming services became popular. Now, any song can be played from anywhere on any device connected to the internet. Streaming services are almost as convenient as it can get, without any extra physical hardware needed or extra purchases.

Streaming services have disrupted the music industry. The way people consume and create music has changed drastically. People have switched from buying separate CDs for their favorite songs and albums to just streaming them on different platforms from their smartphones or computers. One aspect of streaming that has allowed it to be so disruptive is the price. Streaming services are not very expensive - Spotify, the most popular music streaming service, charges users \$10 per month - with a \$5 per month student plan, and a \$16 per month family plan. This is pretty affordable, especially considering all it offers - \$10-15 might get you one traditional album on CD format. For a month, you can spend \$10 for one album on CD. Or, you can spend \$10 on Spotify and have access to almost any song you would ever want to listen to, unlimited listening, accessible anywhere. This is a great example of a low market disruption.

Why would someone not take the latter? A much cheaper price than traditional physical forms of music, with extreme convenience, accessible anywhere, at any time. There are even free versions of most music streaming platforms, which makes them even more accessible. This method of listening to music is accessible to anyone with a smartphone, and there is no significant barrier to entry. These huge jumps in convenience, cost, and accessibility has allowed music streaming popularity to skyrocket, and become a huge disruptor to the music industry. Music streaming is a completely new way of listening to music that could not have been predicted a few decades ago. People no longer have to separately purchase albums or songs on their own - it is much more flexible now, and people can choose whatever they want to listen to. The disruption that music streaming platforms has caused can clearly be seen through their audience, culture, speed, scale, and impact.

First, the **audience** of music streaming services is huge. By far, streaming is the most popular way to listen to music in the United States. It is the new normal, and many people may find it odd for people to listen to music in any other way. Especially for younger generations, it seems that almost everyone uses streaming to listen to music. The audience of streaming platforms is huge, and it makes sense. These services are for anyone who listens to music. That's it, and there are no huge limitations or drawbacks that would single out large user groups. There are predicted to be around 530 million people around the world that use music streaming services as their main method of listening to music, which is a huge number, and a decent percentage of the Earth's population. According to Billboard, over 77% of internet users in the U.S. use streaming services to listen to music. Again, this is a huge percentage of the population, and it only continues to grow.

Next, music streaming has created a huge change in the **culture** of listening to music. Before, people would buy individual albums, sometimes directly from artists. This could have given consumers a feeling of ownership as they own a physical copy of the album. It physically takes up space, and they spent their own money on it, so they could have had a more personal connection with the music they buy. Also, buying albums in this way encourages people to listen to entire albums all the way through, in order - most likely how artists intend them to be listened to. This culture is now changing, as people now can pick and choose what songs they want to listen to off of albums, and only listen to a few songs from artists rather than entire works. However, this adds a new level of personalization to the music listening experience - and a new way for listeners to **express themselves**. People can now create their own playlists which can mesh different songs and artists together, creating a new, unique, story that is meaningful to the listener. These playlists can then be posted on these streaming platforms, allowing others to explore them. Playlists can also be directly shared with friends. Users can also showcase their favorite artists and songs that they feel resonate with them. All of this allows for a new social, expressive, aspect of music listening that was not present before. This aspect of the culture of music streaming has also allowed these platforms to serve as a **good space for teenagers**. Teenagers can find comfort in listening to music that they find relatable, and it helps them see that others experience the same problems they do, which are expressed through music. They can also resonate with artists who share similar perspectives, and can showcase their music as almost a part of their personality, helping them find grounding and insights about themselves and their emotions. Spotify, especially, seems to know this. Spotify themselves have curated playlists they post on the platform, ranging from different genres to different moods. Some of these playlists are targeted towards teens, and music that they like. Some examples are playlists like “teen

beats” and “young and free,” which feature new music that is most trendy and liked amongst teenagers, and even feature lots of music which is made by teenagers. This leads to the next important cultural change that streaming has brought, which is the ability for **anyone to be a content creator**. Music streaming services allow anyone to post their own music online themselves, for others to listen to. This has allowed a lot of young people, including teenagers, to be involved in the content creation process, when they otherwise would not have the means or connections to publish content without these services. This causes **publishing companies and other corporate aspects of the music industry** to be less relevant. This is another great aspect of streaming platforms for teenagers, as a lot of the music teenagers may listen to can be music made by other teenagers, allowing the content to be even more relatable and targeted towards this demographic. This “do it yourself” kind of mentality has been on the rise, and has allowed many people to feel comfortable expressing themselves through music, as it is now easier than ever. The idea of being an “independent” artist is now more and more enticing for people, especially when these independent artists make it big - which is becoming more common. There have even been new genres and terms to describe this kind of music. For example, “bedroom pop” is a new term to describe this do-it-yourself, independent, style of making music. The term comes from younger artists recording and releasing music, (predominantly pop music for this example) all by themselves, which can all be done from their bedroom, and is made accessible to anyone with streaming services. This authentic, easy-to-listen to, comfy, homemade-feeling music is, again, on the rise thanks to streaming services, and is hand-in-hand with the new **prosumption** aspect of streaming services, where anyone can make their own music as well as listen to music made by others. All you need is a laptop, maybe your voice and an instrument or 2, and you are able to create quality music for a potential audience of hundreds of millions of

people. For this reason, traditional publishing companies and record labels feel threatened by streaming services, which is another aspect of the music industry that streaming services have disrupted.

The **speed** of the growth of music streaming has been very quick. A decade ago, people were just starting to learn about streaming services like Pandora, which allowed users to listen to radios similar to songs and artists they liked. Now, it is by far the most popular method of listening to music. Spotify was released in the U.S. in 2011, and at this time, they had 1 million worldwide paying users. This was reflective of the rest of the streaming industry, with the general public not knowing much about it. Now, 10 years later, almost everyone in the U.S. uses streaming services, with Spotify being the largest one. Streaming services have been the most popular way to listen to music for a few years now - so their explosive growth happened in less than 10 years.

The **scale and scope** of streaming services is huge. These platforms are targeted towards anyone who listens to music, which is almost everyone in developed countries. These platforms cover almost all potential users who fit under this category. There is no method more convenient than streaming services, nothing more accessible, and pretty much nothing as affordable, provided internet and smart devices are present. Music as a form of **media, and how it is listened to, has had a lot of evolution**, and streaming services are the ultimate solution to their limitations, as well as a great upgrade to their features. Vinyl records are the original form of listening to personal music, but they are large and difficult to transport. They also require special extra, unwieldy equipment to play. Cassette tapes are much smaller, but still require additional hardware dedicated to playing music. CDs come out, and they are the most portable and easy to use form of this media. Still, they require a CD player, and a lot of them can take up storage.

Now, we have music streaming, which is seemingly as convenient as possible. An enormous amount of people carry smartphones around everywhere anyway, so streaming services require no extra hardware to carry around. Even for those who aren't near a smartphone at all times, streaming services are available on laptops and computers as well. Some, like Spotify, take advantage of **the internet of things**, so streaming music can seamlessly switch between desktop computers, laptops, and even TVs and smart speakers, so any of these devices can be used for streaming as well. There really is not any way that this technology, and listening to music in general, can get more convenient and accessible. Streaming is also much cheaper than any physical form of music. So, there are no downsides of streaming that would be a dealbreaker for almost all consumers - this is how they are able to have such a huge scope. One possible downside is sound quality. However, almost everyone would take the convenience of having access to all music at any place over a small decrease in sound quality. There could also be the downside of needing an internet connection, or a smartphone. However, the consumers who are buying CDs or vinyls (which require their own hardware and electricity to play) but don't have access to a smartphone are definitely a very small population. Besides these two, there are no real downsides of streaming music for consumers. There is a niche population of individuals who still do like to use vinyls. Some audiophiles find value in having their favorite music in its physical, pure, form, with great sound quality. However, **this old technology can coexist with new streaming services**, and most people who use vinyls still may use streaming services to casually listen to music on the go - just at home they may like the novelty of vinyl records. So there is such a wide range of consumers that's needs can be met by streaming services, as there are no real downsides or lack of features that would cut off groups of potential users. Also, in addition to just music, streaming services are beginning to **converge other forms of media** with

their music platforms. Now, they have podcasts and some even have audiobooks. So, even for someone who doesn't listen to music, these platforms can be relevant, and their favorite books or podcast series can be found there too. All of these aspects of streaming services has allowed their popularity to skyrocket, and be used by all types of people around the world.

Of course, streaming services have had a huge **impact** on the music industry. These platforms completely change the way we see music. It is now as convenient as ever to listen to and create music. Before, you needed connections, lots of equipment, and companies had to help you publish music. Now, none of these extra steps are needed. A 15 year old can upload an mp3 file they recorded in their bedroom on any streaming service, and have a potential audience of hundreds of millions of people. The music industry has become a lot less corporate and serious as the do-it-yourself mentality that has been made possible with streaming services is the new trend. Anyone can feel encouraged to start a music career, and many people have, with just a laptop. This could not have been possible without streaming services. Publishing companies are not needed as much, and record labels are getting less attention as people are moving towards wanting an "independent" career. People would rather rely on **algorithms** that recommend their music to users on streaming services than signing their music to a label and having it put out that way. Algorithms are what puts new songs in a listener's "recommended" page, or on radios that feature music similar to a specific artist. This is another important aspect of streaming that further takes power from traditional music companies. As well as the corporate side of the music industry, streaming services have almost eradicated the need for physical forms of music like vinyl records, CDs, and cassette tapes. However, some consumers still like to use these for novelty purposes, despite them being less convenient. Nonetheless, they have had a huge impact on the distribution of music. Again, streaming services have had a huge impact on the music

industry, as well as the distribution of music, and while they may be some negative changes for certain corporations, they are all positive for the consumer.

It is hard to say if this technology will be disrupted by something else in the future. Right now, we find it hard to imagine anything more convenient than streaming services. We can listen to music at any time, any place, as long as you have a smartphone or laptop with you (which almost everyone in developed countries, and even some developing countries, do). It takes minimal effort to play something, and we have access to almost every public song created at our fingertips. We just have not created technology that could disrupt this one yet. Personally, I don't think we can create anything so much better than what we have now that could disrupt it again. However, there is no way to know for sure. Maybe one day we'll have computers in our brains, and we can listen to any song just by thinking about it. But for now, I would say I do not think streaming services could be disrupted by a new innovation.

To conclude, streaming services have become extremely popular, and the main method of listening to music for a huge population of people - the most popular way to listen to music in the world. It is extremely convenient, and almost everyone in developed countries has the means to use these platforms. There really are no huge downsides to these platforms for consumers - while still being the cheapest option to listen to music - which has allowed their popularity to explode. While gaining this huge audience, streaming services have disrupted the music industry, as well as the culture around consuming and creating music. Music as a form of media has been around for tens of thousands of years, and it has had a lot of drastic evolutions, especially in the past century. Streaming services are the biggest step in making not only listening to music, but creating music, accessible for everyone.