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Approaching Media Industries Comparatively: A Case Study of Streaming

Daniel Herbert, Amanda Lotz and Lee Marshall

Abstract

Although ‘streaming’ media has become increasingly common across multiple media industries, significant differences underpin the industrial practices that allow this behavior and explain discrepant experiences of internet distribution across industries. This article uses collaborative comparative media analysis to investigate the commonalities and variations among streaming in the US music, film, and television industries to assess the viability of theorizing the cultural implications of streaming as a consistent phenomenon across media industries. The article explores the consistencies and divergences of streaming among consumer experience, business practices, and textual implications to compare how established uses, production practices, and media content have been affected by internet distribution. Such detailed industry comparison is a novel approach, and the article also considers the methodological value of rigorous collaboration among scholars expert in different media industries. The analysis is based on industry data and practices obtained through trade press, industry reports,and interviews with media workers consistent with a critical media industries approach.

Keywords

digital distribution, film, media industries, music, streaming, television

The study of media industries has developed into a distinct and thriving area in the last 10 years (Holt and Perren, 2009; Mayer, Banks, and Caldwell, 2009; Author removed, 2009; Arsenault and Perren, 2016). Much excellent research and analysis has been produced that explores traditional media industry structures and the digital disruptions they have experienced in recent decades. However, the majority of research in this subfield tends to be produced within ‘silos’ of particular media industries and rarely considers multiple industries in significant depth. Comparative work is often restricted to the consideration of different industries in parallel chapters, or chapter sections, but such work offers restricted insight about media industries more broadly.

There are explanations for such siloization: the intricacies and nuances of each industry’s operations are distinct, complex and require dedicated scholarship to master; the pace of change within all media industries is accelerating and bleeding into areas that require additional expertise. Meanwhile academic publishing churns out ever-expanding literature on each specific industry so that it is increasingly difficult for an individual to sustain a detailed scholarly understanding of even one media industry, let alone several. These challenges raise questions about whether the field can ever

genuinely be ‘media industry studies’ or whether, in reality, it remains limited to an aggregation of television/film/music/news/gaming industry studies. Do insights gained from the study of one media industry ever fruitfully advance the theorization of another industry?

While there is clearly some notable scholarship that advances claims about ‘media industries’ more broadly (e.g. Caves, 2000; Hesmondhalgh, 2002; Flew, 2011; Picard, 2011), and which offers important framing of the sector’s general features, such accounts must necessarily plane the edges of specific industrial practices. Some others aim to build theory at a broader level, as evident in Miege’s (1989) matrix of models of industry operation (flow, written press, publishing) that allows some broader, cross-media consideration. Research built on placing the particularities of specific media industries in conversation in an actively comparative manner has been rare, however. Though it has only recently cohered into a recognizable subfield that develops Hall’s (1973) “encoding” practices into a “circuit of cultural production” (du Gay et al 1997), media industry studies has primarily focused on developing deep understandings of particular industries. Is it possible to achieve a satisfactory balance between generalist theorisations and the industrial specificities that make each media industry distinct?

This paper arises from a trial project designed to explore the possibility and potential benefits of engaging in more explicitly comparative media industry analysis. Of course the concept of “comparative” study has a long history in many fields where it is typically used to indicate a comparison of national and or regional contexts, e.g. comparative political theory, literature, or sociology. Media and communication studies too use comparative to signal analysis across geographies (Hallin and Mancini, 2004; Chakravarrty and Roy, 2013), though also uses comparative study—as we do here—to place different media forms, uses, and contexts of creation in conversation. Comparative study across media industries should be valuable for all the same reasons as comparative study across geographic and cultural contexts, as it aims to provide a broader and more nuanced account of phenomena and practices. The project brought together three scholars with expertise in distinct media industries – music, television and film – to focus on a specific topic common across the industries: streaming media. Our process involved days of co-present conversations and co-writing that began through description of how the industries of our expertise have been challenged by and responded to the affordances of streaming media. We began without hypotheses but with questions concerning whether our particular knowledge of individual media industries could be more insightful if forced into conversation rather than simply co-existing.

We selected streaming as a case study for several reasons. First, streaming forms the basis of some new and influential firms in each of these industries. Streaming appears as a mechanism for the emergence of new players – and thus potentially new forms of industrial organisation. Second, streaming is how many consumers

conceptualise and engage with much of the media they consume. ‘Streaming’ consequently appears as a cultural shorthand for new patterns of media consumption behaviors that transcend particular media. Third, streaming media provides at least superficial commonality among several industries and could be seen as the kind of ‘convergence’ encouraged by digitization. We were thus keen to investigate whether and in what ways it makes sense to think of ‘streaming media’ rather than ‘streaming music’, ‘streaming film’ and so on, which could itself strengthen the justification for greater comparative media industry analysis.

This paper thus serves two purposes. One aim is to reflect on the process of conducting comparative media industry analysis, considering the benefits and limitations of such an approach. Substantively, it examines the effects of ‘streaming media’ in the U.S. music, film, and television industries, attending to whether there is evidence of converging practice. Given the comparison of media industries, a single national context is used.

Our examination finds that consumers face a similar experience of newfound control over libraries of content they access at will, but there are key differences in the availability of content in music in comparison with audiovisual industries, and on the impact that streaming may be having on the cultural texts in each industry. Furthermore, despite the broadly similar consumer experience of streaming, there continues to be significant differentiation among the business practices of music and audiovisual industries, many of which derive from discrepant previous norms.

Introduction to streaming media

The term ‘streaming media’ is ambiguous and, generally speaking, used rather loosely in everyday and industrial contexts. The forces that brought about streaming have been recounted by others (Hesmondhalgh and Meier, 2017) and are beyond the scope of detail than can be recounted here. Historically, ‘streaming’ appears in the 1990s to describe a technical process for delivering media over the internet in ‘real time,’ without the file being downloaded or stored on a local drive. Alternatively, the phrase sometimes refers to forms of ‘on-demand’ services regardless of the technical means of transmission, such as cable video on-demand, and it is possible that viewers might conceive of catch up services (US MVPD video on demand) as streaming as well. More and more, however, ‘streaming’ refers to a particular kind of media service that is increasingly mainstream in music, movies and television. Key features of these services include the availability of subscription payment for on-demand access to a large media catalogue over internet protocols - though we cannot claim to be focusing on ‘subscription streaming services’ given that most music streaming occurs through free versions of these services. The streaming video ecosystem, too, is much broader than the focus here, and the industrial dynamics among various sectors make common claims difficult. In order to make this exploratory paper manageable, we will primarily

concentrate on the two largest services in movie, television and music spheres: Netflix and Spotify.[1]

Within the recorded music industry, streaming has emerged to dominate the mainstream market and transform a narrative of long term decline into one of recovery (the US recorded music industry grew by 11.4% in 2016 and 16.5% in 2017 (Christman, 2017, 2018). It is estimated that there were 206 million people subscribed to a music streaming service worldwide at the end of 2017 (Mulligan, 2018). Spotify occupies the position of market leader and, as of July 2018, had 183 monthly active users, including 83 million subscribers. Apple Music is the second largest service with more than 50 million subscribers (as of May 2018). Other important players in the field are Amazon, Pandora, Deezer and TIDAL.

With the exception of the personalised radio service Pandora, music streaming services offer an 'on-demand' service in which the user decides what they want to hear from the vast catalogues on offer. This means that streaming music services are a direct substitute for music purchases and, given the convenience afforded by streaming, consumers are seeing fewer reasons to purchase music (with legal downloads now seeming like a transitional technology and disappearing more rapidly than physical music formats). Income from streaming now accounts for well over half of all revenue in the US recording industry (i.e. more than all other forms of retail combined) and will soon cross that threshold in the UK, the world's second biggest streaming market. Aside from a few specialist areas, it is plausible that streaming will totally replace traditional music retail in the future. At this stage it has had less of an impact on radio listening, though it too is likely to be affected at some point.

In the audio-visual sectors, streaming services are becoming an increasingly prominent part of the media landscape but have not yet come to dominate in the same way as in the recorded music industry. By 2015 there were nearly 100 different streaming services in the U.S. although fewer than a dozen counted one percent of the population among subscribers. The broad libraries offered by Netflix, Amazon Video, and Hulu attract by far the most subscribers. As of 2018 Netflix was the dominant service, with over 125 million subscribers worldwide (including more than 55 million in the US alone). Amazon Video is available to all Amazon Prime subscribers, some 85 million globally, and Hulu has 16 million subscribers (Spangler, 2017).

All the major video streaming services offer both film and television content, leading to a potential overlap of the two media forms. Nevertheless, movies and television remain distinct industrially, as the media conglomerates that commonly own them continue to differentiate these two media divisionally, and related institutions, such

[1] This does mean that YouTube is excluded from our analysis. This may be somewhat surprising given that it has been the largest streaming website for both video and music by some metrics, but YouTube does not actively curate (gatekeep what content is included) as much as functions as an open access distributor. While YouTube is undoubtedly affecting practices within the industries we discuss, it remains external to them and subject to its own logics that require a distinct analysis.

as the Motion Picture Association of America and the Federal Communications Commission, distinguish film from television in a variety of ways. Partly as a consequence of these industrial, institutional definitions, streaming has likewise affected each industry somewhat differently. For movies, theatrical release remains crucial to the cultural impact and overall financial success of most films. As of 2016, the theatrical window remained stable in terms of revenue, at $11 billion (NATO, 2017a), and tickets sold, with 1.3 billion admissions (NATO, 2017b), although this window is shortening due to shifts in industrial practices in response to the increased adoption of streaming movie services.

Streaming's greatest impact has been in 'home entertainment,' which garnered $18 billion in revenue in 2016 (Faughdner, 2017). Streaming has almost fully replaced brick-and-mortar movie rental and is beginning to surpass other home entertainment distribution technologies such as kiosk rental and electronic sell-through. For instance, subscription-streaming services earned $6.2 billion in 2016, surpassing for the first time physical media sales, which fell to $5.4 billion (Wallenstein, 2017). Similarly, subscription streaming garnered more revenue than electronic sell-through and video-on-demand, which stood at $2 billion each (Wallenstein, 2017).

In television, streaming continues to grow but remains far from replacing linear broadcast and cable services at this point; streaming accounted for 24 percent of U.S. television viewing in 2016, compared to 39 percent for live television (Molla, 2017a). Although more than half of American homes now have Netflix subscriptions, streaming is used mostly as a supplementary activity: Nielsen (2017) reported that Americans spent 24 hours, 26 minutes per week watching live television, 2 hours, 47 minutes watching video on a computer or smartphone, and 3 hours, 18 minutes watching DVR or timeshifted television. Nevertheless, analysis in 2016 found that Netflix provided the fourth most minutes of viewing, placing it ahead of the networks and channels owned by CBS, Viacom, Time Warner, Discovery and A&E (Molla, 2017b). Streaming is thus substantial enough that it has pressured industrial practices of non-streaming services by drawing significant attention away from them, but it has clearly not come to dominate, nor should it necessarily be expected to in the future.

The implications of streaming thus vary for these media industries as of 2018. It has become crucial to the music industry as a revenue stream while for film streaming functions as an additional revenue stream and competing mechanism for home video distribution. The variation of television—which includes programming such as news and sports valued for its liveness as well as scripted storytelling similar to movies—makes it likely that streaming will never dominate television viewing. But streaming has already become a significant enough practice as to produce industrial change.

To bring these disparate media in conversation, we will now compare the similarities and differences within streaming in relation to three areas: consumer experiences, business practices and media content. Of course, in reality these areas

are not discrete. For example, the importance of subscription is a core part of both consumer experience and business practices. This analytical segmentation nevertheless helps reveal the extent and areas of more and less profound change.

Consumer Experiences of Streaming

Within the recorded music industry, the defining characteristic of the transition to 'streaming' is undoubtedly the move from consumer practices based on *ownership* to ones based on *access* (Mulligan 2018). Rather than paying a one-off fee for the perpetual right to use discrete 'items' of music - as was the case of purchasing music - subscribers to streaming music services pay a monthly fee for a time-limited right to access a much larger amount of music.[2] Most streaming music services thus promise a 'what you want, when you want' experience, with consumers able to access their libraries and playlists on computers, phones, dedicated music hardware such as Sonos systems and connected devices like Amazon Echo speakers and smart TVs, with things like playlist positions seamlessly syncing between them.

The vast catalogues that users face when logging on to services like Spotify mean that navigational techniques are required to make the material manageable. Some of these techniques, such as recommendation algorithms, are 'top-down' strategies implemented by service providers but some are more 'bottom-up': for example, Spotify users are able to create personal 'libraries' which function much the same way as conventional record collections. The most notable shift has been the rising importance of playlists; users personalise the service by creating individual playlists that can then be shared with other users (Hagen 2015). The consumption of music has always had a strong social dimension to it, and streaming services are enabling many of those dynamics to transmute into the online sphere, though curated playlists are also a key element of Spotify's 'top-down' navigational devices.

While theatrical movie going remains an 'occasion' for many movie audiences, domestic consumption via both movie rental and purchasing has been more common since the 1980s. Streaming movies has thus been more impactful to the home video sphere than in its implications for movie going. Much like music subscription services, consumers pay Netflix or other subscription video on demand (SVOD) services a monthly fee in return for access to a selection of movies and television programs; unlike music, however, this catalog is limited and narrow, and movies appear on and disappear from Netflix on a monthly basis. Consumers can select any of the available movies and watch them on any device connected to the internet with the Netflix app, including televisions, laptops, phones, and tablets. In many ways, SVOD functions as a kind of 'virtual video store,' where the video box covers and store shelves have been

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[2] On some services, most importantly Spotify, consumers can use streaming services for free, with some features restricted and advertisements played every few songs. Also, Amazon offers a streaming music service with a more limited (though still substantial) catalogue 'for free' to its Prime subscribers.

replaced by thumbnail images on a menu screen. More precisely, Netflix in particular and SVOD more generally take a range of existing shopping, rental and consumption practices and combines and enhances them. It offers geographic convenience, as one can browse for and consume a movie anywhere one has a device with an internet connection, intensifying the convenience offered by older cable 'on demand' or 'pay-per-view' services. Most major SVOD services offer non-linear access to a selection of around 4,000 films (Luckerson, 2016), resembling and competing directly with the selection one might find at a rental store or other video retailer; Blockbuster Video stores, for instance, carried between 7,000-10,000 movies (Author removed, 2014). The monthly SVOD fee distinguishes the streaming exchange from the 'per item' transactions that otherwise characterize movie sales and rentals, but resembles and furthers the experience offered by subscription cable channels like HBO. Thus, for consumers, SVOD has made movies easier to access and consume, seemingly more abundant and consequently more catered to personal tastes, and seemingly less expensive on a per-movie basis.

The consumer experience of television has changed tremendously over the last twenty years, but in different ways from movies and music. Unlike the other two industries, television content could not be purchased and consumed at will--except for a notable but small boom in DVD boxsets in the early 2000s--and thus the dominant form of television viewing has for decades centred around the broadcast schedule. At the turn of the century, early digital technologies such as the DVR offered a substantive improvement on the VCR as a way to organize television viewing separate from the network-determined schedule, and the aforementioned DVD box sets also emerged and allowed viewers to break from a 'one episode per week' pattern of viewing. Video on demand technologies—available but mostly offering just subscriber funded services or pay-per-view films until 2012 — likewise initially freed television content from a schedule. These technologies simultaneously expanded choice and convenience. They allowed viewers to select among a library of current content—as opposed to simply what was 'on' at a particular moment—which provided more viewing options, or choice, for viewers. However, these technologies were used by comparatively few and the hours of personally scheduled viewing were negligible compared with the expansion of these behaviors enabled by streaming technologies beginning around 2010.

Streaming thus introduced extensive change to the experience of television. As well as freeing it from the network-defined schedule, streaming also enabled greater use of subscription as the primary funding mechanism for television. This allowed for a viewing experience not structured by regular commercials and encouraged the creation of television content notably different from that supported by advertising (HBO offers a precedent here but continued to be organized by a linear schedule). Streaming also normalised preliminary 'binging' behavior introduced by DVD sets, especially internet-distributed services that 'dropped' all episodes at once instead of forcing audiences to

wait a week between installments. Thirdly, streaming services expanded choice by licensing libraries far more expansive than the schedules offered even in an era of hundreds of channels, though were not able to license current seasons of programs created for other services and channels. Notably, by 2012, the U.S. viewing experience became increasingly 'on demand' due to two different technologies that allowed access to two different types of programming. Viewers could choose to watch current season episodes through on demand services provided as part of cable subscriptions (mostly with advertising included and fast-forward functions disabled, often identified as 'catch-up' services), or they could watch past seasons and original streaming content via services such as Netflix.[3]

Looking across the three industries as a whole, they may be at different points in the road being travelled but it is clear that there is significant similarity in the consumer experience of streaming media and this behavior has moved into the mainstream. Most importantly, streaming offers an on-demand service that liberates media users from previous forms of scarcity (the broadcast schedule or the retail inventory). The major services all offer users personalised recommendations to help steer them through vast catalogues, though some music services also offer more explicit forms of expert curation. These new services offer considerably greater choice and convenience for users, with 'always on' access to media facilitated across a range of different devices. Such services are generally paid for via monthly subscription (though there are notable exceptions discussed below) with no payment required at the moment of use, so the consumption of particular media feel 'free' to the consumer.

There are some distinctions related to media specificity and industrial norms. In short, streaming music services offer exceptional choice as well as control of the listening experience, while streaming film and television services expand control but only provide limited choice. Moreover, the phenomenon of binge-watching does not really have an analogue in music consumption, music playlists do not have an equivalent in the audiovisual industries and cinema attendance still has an important place in movie culture. Nonetheless, broadly speaking, there has been notable convergence in the experience of media consumption in the three industries. The developments to date make it plausible to argue that further convergence in consumer experience may be likely in the future.

Business practices

The strong convergence in media consumption practices may lead one to assume that similar business models underpin streaming services in television, movies and music.

[3] In an effort to maintain the legacy linear television business, networks fought against making current season content available on demand for fear it would cannibalize the live audience to be sold to advertisers. Likewise, studios--who owned the series--feared this additional exposure would diminish the price content could fetch in downstream windows. Renegotiation of retransmission deals and the spectre of Netflix finally led to the crafting of licensing deals that allowed current season episodes on VOD.

However, our analysis suggests this is very far from the case. In this section, we detail the impact that streaming has had on the business practices of each of these industries, noting similarities and differences among these practices.

The most notable similarity between Netflix's and Spotify's business models is in the centrality of subscription revenue.[4] Although Spotify does receive advertising revenue, this is a small proportion of its total revenue: despite 69 percent of its users accessing the service via the ad-supported version, advertising revenue reportedly only provides 3 percent of the company's revenue (Weissbrot, 2018). Netflix brings in no advertising revenue and is almost entirely dependent upon subscription income. As a result, it is not really incentivised to prioritize which specific media items its subscribers consume (or even whether they consume anything at all). These services build and sell access to a library. They succeed when users derive value from the library rather than from transacting particular goods (Miége, 1989). Previously, the industries relied on clearly differentiated primary revenue streams: television networks relied on advertising and studios on licensing series in various domestic and international windows, recorded music predominantly on retail sales, and film primarily on theatrical box office revenue and license fees and revenue from home video and cable. In all cases, revenue normally depended upon the consumption of *specific* media items, such as the sale of a CD album, theater ticket or rental/sale of a movie, or audiences attracted by a specific television show.

Although there were some media industry antecedents that used a revenue model based on access to a library, and the extent to which the subscriber model has become dominant in each sector varies, this represents a significant shift in all three industries. The growing importance of subscriber revenue in these industries masks a significant divergence of business models and practices across the sectors. If we look at product differentiation as an example, in the recorded music industry there is a remarkable similarity in the libraries and features of streaming services. There are minor areas of differentiation (e.g. TIDAL and Deezer offer higher bitrate streams for $19.99) but, generally speaking, access to 40 million songs for $9.99, with various concessions for group subscriptions and students is the deal offered by Spotify, Apple Music, Amazon Music Unlimited, Deezer, TIDAL, Google Play Music and Napster. The services compete for users on two fronts. The first is user experience: certain services

[4] The most important major player who diverges from the models being discussed here is Amazon. Despite the multiple ways in which the company has diversified, Amazon is first and foremost a retailer. In 2005, it launched its 'Amazon Prime' subscription service offering 'free' two-day shipping for a yearly fee. In 2011, it began offering a streaming catalog of around 5,000 movies and television programs to existing Prime subscribers and, in 2014, also offered them Prime Music, allowing them to stream a catalog of over one million songs to various devices (it also offers a standalone music subscription service more akin to Spotify). Prime Music/Video are presented as 'perks' for Prime subscribers rather than drivers of subscription in their own right, situated within a larger retail context in which Amazon also sells physical media and digital downloads of music, television and films. Amazon—with over 80 million Prime subscribers in the U.S—has to be considered a significant music and video streaming service that influences the sector, however, it is unclear how many Prime subscribers access the streaming services.

offer better integration with particular kinds of hardware; some services offer recommendation systems driven by expert curation rather than algorithms; some offer a greater social element such as collaborative playlists. The second major area of differentiation concerns the provision of free services. Spotify and Deezer offer a free tier in which customers receive the same service as subscribers (with some minor restrictions) but with the introduction of audio advertisements. The provision of free services has been a cause of controversy within the record industry (Author removed, 2015) but, from the streaming service's perspective, the 'freemium' level offers a way of getting users to engage with their service's ecosystem, increasing the chances of conversion to full subscription while generating a small amount of advertising revenue.

Within the recorded music streaming sector, therefore, a small number of providers offer very similar services grounded in access to--only slightly hyperbolically--'all of the recorded music made by the entire record industry ever'. A very different picture emerges in the audiovisual sector. For one thing, a myriad of small services catering to specific genres and niche forms of content exists (e.g. MUBI specializes in art-house fare and Shudder in horror films and thrillers) of which there is virtually no equivalent in music. Despite these, the audiovisual sector is similarly dominated by services that achieve scale by targeting many different viewer tastes: Netflix, Amazon and Hulu (Author removed, 2017). For film and television, the streaming market remains in its early stages and it is unclear which services compete or function as complements (there is much more chance of an individual subscribing to both Netflix and HBO Now, for example, than to both Spotify and TIDAL). There is currently no equivalent of the ad-supported freemium tier service found in the music streaming market, though several services offer a free trial, as do the music services that do not offer a free tier. At this point, video streaming services compete primarily on range and depth of catalog, which is highly differentiated, and to a lesser degree on price. There is more pronounced price differentiation among SVOD services than music services, though these correlate with library scale. Some video streaming services emphasize television content, such as Hulu and Netflix, while others offer a stronger catalog of feature films, such as HBO/HBO Now.

The difference in industrial strategies used in library acquisition was one of the most notable cross-industry contrasts to emerge from our analysis. The difference results from the discrepant practices by which streaming distribution services contract with IP rights holders: Spotify and other music services do not have to pay in advance for a license to stream media whereas Netflix and other video services do. Within the music sector, labels grant non-exclusive licenses to streaming services and then receive a percentage of Spotify's revenue based on how many times particular songs are streamed. Because music services remunerate labels based on content use, they have no content costs until that content is consumed, which explains why music services can afford to provide a free tier and exhaustive library. In television and film,

however, services pay up front to license content from studios for a defined time period, with significantly higher prices for exclusive rights. Licensing ‘all television and film’ would thus be prohibitively expensive for video services.

The business strategies underpinning these streaming services have therefore stayed fairly consistent with the analogue past. In the recording industry, labels bear the upfront costs of production and gradually recover their investment primarily through the popular success of a record, though technically this now occurs via licensing income rather than retail sales. In film and, to a large extent, television, studios recover their production costs by licensing their content in specific ‘windows’ for limited periods of time. Streaming video services thus emerge as an additional window through which to distribute content.

As the preceding discussion suggests, the streaming services’ most important business relationships are with rights-holders, and the tenor of those relationships marks a further noteworthy difference between the industries under discussion. Though not without contentious moments – the existence of a free tier remains a bone of contention to some, for example – Spotify’s relationship with record labels is relatively harmonious. This is partly because they exist in a relationship of mutual dependence. Obviously, and especially given the expectation that streaming music services offer a complete catalogue, Spotify depends upon reaching separate licensing agreements with each of the three ‘majors’ (Universal, Sony, Warners) as well as Merlin, the umbrella organisation for independent labels. However, each individual label is equally dependent upon Spotify: it is inconceivable that, say, artists signed to Sony would not be on one of the major streaming services. Thus, while there may be difficult negotiations, both sides need to achieve agreement. Furthermore, there is a much more fundamental sense in which labels are dependent on Spotify (or at least streaming services). The record industry experienced more dramatic digital disruption, and much earlier, than either the film or television industries, losing approximately 40% of its revenue between 1999 and 2010 (Author removed 2012). This rapid decline was often attributed to piracy and one of Spotify’s most powerful claims to rights-owners was that streaming provided a way of monetising previously piratical behaviour. Whatever the accuracy of such diagnoses, it is clear that streaming is driving a recovery in the recorded music market and it is difficult to see what kind of future would exist for the major labels were Spotify/streaming to ultimately fail.

The relationship between Netflix and the television and film studios has fluctuated more, and at times been more competitive/antagonistic, than that between Spotify and the major labels. The film studios had a somewhat contentious relationship with Netflix during the 2000s when Netflix was primarily involved in the rent-by-mail business. At that time, the studios feared that Netflix’s subscription model and low price point, compared to that of the sale or rental of an individual movie, would lower the overall perception of value of the movie commodity (Economist 2011). In order to

protect the pricing models of the established methods of distribution, studios fought to impose a designated window just for Netflix, which would come after conventional video retail but before pay/cable television. The picture grew more complicated when Netflix began offering streaming video.

The Hollywood studios treated Netflix as a new and competitive buyer for the rights to movies, and many studios forged lucrative licensing deals with Netflix as DVD sales and rentals diminished. Still, the studios continued to prioritize earlier, more profitable windows of release, including theatrical release, physical media sales, and electronic sell-through (EST). This means that Netflix's streaming service largely offers back-catalog films and not the latest releases or biggest movie hits. Recently, both Amazon and Netflix have experimented with feature film production, and there are indications that Netflix plans to enter the feature film market more strongly in the 2018-2019 period, with films to be released directly on the streaming platform.

Whereas the relationship between the movie studios and Netflix was initially lukewarm, the relationship between Netflix and television studios was initially symbiotic because streaming service revenue seemed new, rather than as replacement, revenue. There was no previous mechanism to monetize convenient access to television series in the way home video provided for film, so studios did not fear Netflix replacing another formal revenue stream. For television studios, licensing series to Netflix produced new revenue just as the ad-market stumbled, and Netflix received access to the type of content needed to persuade audiences to try streaming. Netflix does compete for viewer attention, drawing viewers away from advertiser-supported television. Though Netflix does not threaten to replace any existing television entity, its contribution to eroding the number of viewers available for sale to advertisers does affect the business (though advertising rates have actually remained steady). The relationship evolved to competition once Netflix pivoted into original production of television. It began funding series creation in 2011, expanding beyond its initial status as a secondary window.

In response to Netflix's shift to developing as well as distributing video, both television and film studios have announced or begun launching their own services that allow them to leverage the value of their library without a middleman distributor. For instance, in summer 2017 Disney announced that it planned to create its own streaming platform and service, and that it would withdraw its films from Netflix at the end of the current agreement. In contrast, while there has been notable vertical integration in the recorded music industry in light of the downturn earlier in the century, Spotify has thus far not shown any signs of impinging on record labels' core activities and, indeed, has explicitly stated that it does not intend to become any kind of pseudo-label. This is partly because of the risks associated with being in the record business but also presumably reflects an intention to position itself as supporter of the labels rather than as a competitor.

In sum, despite the fairly consistent consumer experience of streaming across media industries, the business practices that undergird it differ significantly. Much of this differentiation derives from the fact that these industries did not have consistent practices in a pre-digital era and that, to this point, have in the main subtly adapted previous practices. However, the paths being outlined for Spotify and Netflix indicate potential for even greater divergence in the future.

Texts and Contexts

In this section, we consider how the phenomenon of streaming may be affecting the content of media texts themselves as well as how specific media are framed and interpreted. Three important provisos are needed when considering texts and contexts. The first is that it is still too early to begin to make firm judgments about how media texts may be evolving. The second is that we are not suggesting that streaming has 'caused' textual or practice-based changes in any kind of determinist way. Rather, distribution technologies offer particular kinds of affordances, some of which may be adopted by users while some may be rejected or used in unexpected ways. How users take up and adapt particular affordances then shape the responses of content creators and service providers. This relates to the third important proviso: several of the themes and practices discussed in this section pre-existed streaming and emerged in relation to prior media formats, distribution technologies or business practices, though we argue that many are being enhanced or intensified by streaming.

An example illustrating the above points would be the rising importance of the music playlist, which is becoming a kind of musical format in its own right rather than a simple consumptive practice. It is commonly acknowledged that one consequence of the shift to digital music has been the 'unbundling' of the album. Albums had been the artistic and financial bedrock of the music industry for decades but downloading enabled consumers to cherry-pick songs rather than download whole albums, resulting in the cultural re-emergence of the individual track/single and, arguably, the declining cultural status of the album and genres tied to it. This trend likely continues in a streaming environment but has been exacerbated/enhanced by the emergence of playlists - a feature of digital music generally but not one that had been particularly influential in the digital download era. Today, however, playlists are becoming the dominant way to consume music within streaming services. This has implications for how important (or not) individual artists and genres may be for categorising and conceptualising our music in the future. Furthermore, it is already beginning to shape the kind of 'release' an artist makes and contributing further to the decline of the album. For example, in March 2017 hip-hop star Drake released a playlist, *More Life*, containing new material by him and songs on which he does not appear. It was positioned as neither a mixtape nor an album but is clearly a major release, breaking records with over 76 million streams on its first day (Petridis, 2017).

By contrast, the adoption of streaming video does not yet appear to have affected the form or content of feature films in any directly observable way. Despite substantial surface and stylistic differences, movies work today very much as they did in the 1980s, 1960s, or even the 1940s in terms of overall narrative structure and aesthetic form (Bordwell, 2002); movies typically tell self-contained stories with decision-making protagonists, can be divided into three major acts, and play for 90-150 minutes. However, while there may be no real change apparent at the level of the individual film, the proportion of the *types* of films released appears to be changing, as there is some evidence to suggest that the Hollywood studios are increasingly prioritizing films that can be enriched by viewing in a theater or deliver ancillary revenue, such as superhero, sci-fi, and other spectacle films, though this trend has existed since the 1980s. Moreover, the theatrical experience has changed little since the spread of 'megaplex' theaters across North America during the 1990s, which enhanced the theater-going experience by offering improved visual and audio capabilities, better seating, and cafes (Acland, 2003); most recently, some theaters have added to these 'luxury' offerings with larger menus of food and alcohol as well as reserved seating.

Movies, however, do appear to be losing some of their culturally-defined specificity as a particular form of moving image entertainment due to the way in which they appear on the interface for some streaming services, and particularly on Netflix. Services such as Netflix offer movies as just another form of entertainment, alongside and thus equivalent to programming that would be understood as 'television.' Movies and television programs are frequently placed into the same generic blocks, such as 'horror' or 'comedy,' suggesting that theme and tone are as important as the distinction of 'movies' or 'television' in defining media types. Additionally, and somewhat analogously to the playlists found on music streaming services, users of Netflix and other SVOD services can assemble 'watchlists' made up of content (both films and television) of their own choosing. Netflix's endeavors to produce and distribute movies directly and exclusively on the streaming platform further challenge the longstanding textual, institutional, and cultural factors that have separated film and television. By bypassing the theatrical window entirely, such content could effectively appear as a two-hour-long, self-contained television program.

Television texts arguably demonstrate the most pronounced change, though many of these changes began in a pre-streaming era and were initiated by subscriber-funded, linear cable channel HBO's endeavors in original series production in the late 1990s. Other advertiser-supported cable channels followed suit, introducing series that differed markedly from those developed for broadcast networks. Original cable series sought 'distinction' through textual strategies such as more complex narrative structures, ambiguously heroic protagonists, serialized storytelling, and uncommon themes. Partial or full subscription funding supported an emphasis on series viewers

valued enough to pay for, which had different textual norms than those reliant on advertiser funding.

These same strategies are central to the series streaming services produce. Additionally, streaming services are not bound to a schedule, which further enables changes in program structure previously introduced by HBO such as fewer episodes per season, flexible program length, and structure (no commercial breaks). Services such as Netflix also commonly made complete seasons of programs available, rather than forcing viewers to wait for weekly episodes, which in turn encouraged further use of seriality in television storytelling.

All three industries have experienced some changes to media form, though the extent of that change varies significantly and how much can be specifically attributed to streaming is open to question. From the evidence seen so far, it is difficult to draw parallels between the different media or to offer a narrative of convergence. Television texts exhibit the most pronounced change as a result of streaming and its related industrial practices, a continuation of pre-streaming shifts also evident in the music industry's transition from the album as the primary unit of music distribution. The form of movies has changed little, but adjustments in the types of films made can be identified and tied to shifts in the broader techno-industrial context.

This variability may be a function of asking this question too soon. It seems reasonable that attributes of songs may adjust in response to artists' aims to have them included in playlists, and movies may provide more evidence of change if perceptions among artists of the primacy of theatrical exhibition fade. The changes affecting the television format and the repositioning of film does suggest there is less distinction between the two media than in past. It is difficult to conceive of these textual changes as evidence of convergence, rather they suggest adjustments in form characteristic of shifting technological affordances and industrial practices.

Reflections and Conclusion

Comparing streaming across three different media industries reveals both consistency and variation, suggesting that implications for each industry derive from pre-streaming norms at least as much as the common implications of streaming. There is notable consistency in the consumer experience across streaming media. Consumers foremost experience streaming as a more convenient form of media engagement, whether it is ready access to vast libraries of songs and wide ranging playlists geared to all manner of mood and activity, film as further available separate from the theatrical distribution window and on whatever screen a viewer finds convenient, or television series divorced from a viewing schedule that bound the dominant experience of television in time. It is likely the common perception of 'streaming' as a consistent phenomenon and ideas of extensive media convergence derive from this shared consumer experience.

Notably, however, this investigation has revealed limited convergence in business practices across media industries. This, on its own, is not difficult to explain: the most profound change, in user experience, has been spurred by innovation initiated by non-legacy players. What were initially experiments in providing new ways to use media by technology upstarts were—in these cases—adopted and preferred by consumers, forcing established companies to adapt to support these new consumer practices. The responses of legacy companies to streaming have thus largely been adaptations of their significantly divergent pre-streaming industrial practices. Recorded music has historically been based around the selling of individual goods. This has evolved into an access based model but one that still remunerates incrementally according to consumer use. In both film and television, the business practices that support the most widely used streaming services adapt previous methods of windowing content by selling IP to channels for a flat fee for a period of time rather than connecting revenue to particular titles or number of uses. For television, the changes in business practices derive from new control and convenience of viewing that require more direct payment from viewers who previously understood television as 'free' because of its advertiser funding. The business practices of film have arguably shifted the least and continued the negotiation begun in the early 1980s when the ability for individuals to own or rent films emerged. It is likely the case that the impact of streaming remains in initial stages in the film industry and that more profound adjustment is yet to come. For over a decade, there have been discussions about 'day and date' release practices that would decenter the theatrical window within the industry, but the emergence of films created by streaming services--that somehow achieve the imprimatur of film more than made-for-tv movie--may prove a tipping point.

Placing the experience of these three industries in conversation revealed that the timeline of adjustment of different components such as consumer experience, business practices and content is occurring at different rates in each medium. The timing of this investigation catches these industries in various stages of transformation. Though we cannot speak certainly of what is to come, at this point we do not think it is appropriate to present 'streaming' as a unified phenomenon - singular cross-industry claims about 'streaming' cannot be made at this time. This is not surprising in light of the cross-industry variation that preceded streaming and the particular histories and affordances of each medium that produced similarly distinctive industrial practices and modes of engagement.

Despite the fact that our conclusion on streaming emphases specificity, the exercise of comparison has proved valuable for more deeply revealing the interconnected adjustments in each single industry. Our view is that the process of investigating comparatively revealed insight into the consequences of streaming normally obscured without the impetus to look for parallels in other industries. Overall, the experience of developing this article has demonstrated to us that there is extremely

valuable insight to be gained from venturing out from our silos. Firstly, in terms of the substantive topic, we believe that engaging in comparative media industry analysis in this way means that this article is able to make assertions about streaming that would not have emerged if we had instead each contributed separate short papers about streaming in our respective industries of specialization. To aid clarity regarding the detail of potentially unfamiliar industries, and to facilitate explicit comparison, we kept discussion of each industry relatively distinct in the organization of this article. Such a strategy should not imply that it is the culmination of three separately crafted examinations, however: the content of each subsection emerged from placing our individual preliminary assessments in dialogue with and in response to the insights of other industries. Our view is that working from the 'inside' out (i.e. starting with specialised knowledge about specific industries and searching for connections and/or disjunctures with other industries) enabled a more detailed, nuanced, and maybe critical account than would be achievable by an individual scholar working from the 'outside' in (looking across media industries at a general level).

Beyond the ability to assess the coherence and variation of a phenomenon such as streaming, the process has demonstrated significant other benefits that likely will only come to fruition over time. It enabled us to better see the constructedness of particular industry practices in ways that will enrich our single medium research. Our main conclusion is that the study of many phenomenon and habits of mind of media industry researchers would be re-energised by engaging in this kind of process. While there is commonality of key concepts across industries, their modes of use and industrial implementation can be very different. Understanding these differences has the effect of helping the fish to see the water in which they swim, forcing us to reflect on the myriad industrial practices that come to seem natural and then elucidating how they enable a range of textual outcomes and media experiences. Perhaps the most powerful defamiliarisation for us concerned how the underlying IP relations between the services and the content creators allow very different libraries and thus competitive conditions. For scholars of these respective industries, it is worth imagining how different the streaming music environment would be if the industry used flat licensing and likewise, how video would differ if peruse remuneration were paid in a manner that made available complete video libraries.

Our overall argument is not that all media industry study should take a comparative approach but, rather, that our experiment suggests that comparative media industry analysis offers a number of advantages from which media industry studies could benefit. There are certainly potential limitations to consider. For instance, our example relies on a relatively small number of participants and industries. Both conceptually and practically it remains to be seen how effective the approach can be if more industries are brought into the conversation: can the insights from journalism, gaming and so on be synthesised with those of music, film and television in a way that

does not become too generalised? Secondly, there is a question of whether the approach suits only certain topics. We certainly selected streaming for the particular opportunities it offered. However, during the course of the project, we also generated a long list of other possible topics that could benefit from similar analyses (e.g. piracy, worker relations, 'talent', and consumer practices). We see no inherent reason why the approach would be restricted to certain kinds of topics. Finally, like all approaches, its relative success depends on the particular people doing it: the greater the level of specific expertise and theoretical awareness that the participants have, the more sophisticated the results should be. Overall, however, we view these issues as pragmatic and to be evaluated with regard to individual instances rather than intrinsic features of the approach.

This project began out of curiosity about whether media industry scholars could come out of their silos in order to engage in collective analysis of a shared phenomenon. We hoped that such an approach would produce new knowledge and generate productive insights inaccessible to us from our siloed perspectives. The conclusion on both counts affirms the value of a comparative approach. Rigorously comparative analysis valuably denaturalizes taken for granted assumptions that can be invisible to the industry specialist and reveals insights absent from generalizing accounts. We expect the full proof of concept regarding comparative media industry analysis is not in evidence in these pages but will come to light in subsequent separate work as we return to focus on our respective industries with new perspectives and insights produced from comparative media industry conversation.

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