

THE USE OF DIGITAL PLATFORMS BY THE MUSIC INDUSTRY:  
A CASE STUDY OF THE VHEMBE DISTRICT, LIMPOPO REGION IN SOUTH  
AFRICA

By

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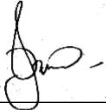
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## DECLARATION

I, **Rendani Fulufhelo Mashau**, hereby declare that the dissertation for the Master's degree hereby submitted by me, at the University of Venda, has not been submitted previously for examination for a degree at this or any other university and that it is my own work in design and execution, and that all reference materials contained herein have been duly acknowledged.

Signature:  \_\_\_\_\_

Date: 12 November 2021

## ABSTRACT

The digital era has brought about a flood of new music platforms since the 2000s. Many artists now have an opportunity to record and place their music on these platforms with little or no assistance from major record labels or publishers. Because of more affordable digital recording tools, independent (indie) artists from all parts of the world have creative freedom to create new music. Accordingly, thousands of songs (in audio or video format) are being uploaded online daily for public consumption. Even non-professionals or people who do music for fun or as a hobby, have found a new ground because they can afford recording equipment and an Internet subscription. Despite the overwhelming quantity of uploaded music, a very small amount of it receives great attention. Other supporting industries such as video production, information technology, marketing and artist management have a significant role to play in the development of the music industry. Focusing on the Vhembe music scene, this study explores this phenomenon using a descriptive-qualitative research methodology. Interviews were conducted with independent artists, independent record label owners, music producers, independent music publishers and consumers in the region to discover why majority of local music is not found online and furthermore, to establish what can be done to get more artists to use these platforms. Participation in the study was voluntary with no monetary compensation involved. The study aims to contribute to the development of the local music scene.

**Keywords:** Indie artist; Digital platforms; Online publishing; Marketing; Project studio

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# 1. CHAPTER ONE: INRODUCTION

## 1.1. INRODUCTION

This chapter provides the introduction and background to the dissertation: “THE USE OF DIGITAL PLATFORMS BY THE MUSIC INDUSTRY: A CASE STUDY OF THE VHEMBE DISTRICT, LIMPOPO REGION IN SOUTH AFRICA. This includes a problem statement, literature review, the aims and objectives of the study, major research questions, the motivation and major definitions of concepts as well as the breakdown of chapters.

This dissertation explores the impact of digital technology in the music industry and how independent (indie) artists from the Vhembe region in South Africa utilize these technology tools to enhance their music careers. The study was conducted in the Vhembe District Municipality in Limpopo. This is a rural are with several small, remote towns such as Makhado, Malamulela, Musina and Thohoyandou surrounded by many peri-urban settlements. This study examines how local Vhembe artists use digital platforms in comparison to artists from cities such as Durban, Johannesburg and Pretoria who are mostly seen to be dominating the South African music industry. It also provides a segment that analyses similar trends amongst artists from other countries as music trends are global phenomenon.

## 1.2. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Over the past two decades the South African music industry has experienced a significant transformation concurrent with the global transition to digital technologies for the music industry. Despite the dominance of major record labels in the South African market place by Sony/BMG, Universal, EMI, Gallo Records and Sheer Sounds, many independent record labels have emerged in South Africa and across the continent, especially in the larger music markets on the continent, such as Kenya, Nigeria, Tanzania and Uganda. In his *Guerrilla Music Marketing Handbook* Bob Baker (2001) said:

For decades, aspiring musicians thought the only legitimate route to success was landing a record contract with a major record label. The times have changed. The internet and low-coast recording technologies have created a huge do-it-yourself music movement. Unfortunately, thousands of aspiring songwriters and band members still believe the road to widespread recognition can only be travelled through a record deal.

(Baker, 2001:3)

The mid 1990s heralded the “do-it-yourself era”, where many artists became self-reliant. Unlike in the past when recording studios could only be afforded by a few wealthy individuals,

the dawn of digital recording technologies presented new and less expensive recording equipment. These Digital Audio Workstations (DAWs) allowed many artists, sound engineers and producers to own home based or small project studios, which previously were highly unaffordable. Today independent labels and independent artists are introducing a range of new music directly from home recording studios (also known as bedroom studios) and posting it on online streaming and distribution channels with little intermediary engagement. This is a very cost-effective way of getting the music to the public. Websites such as Myspace, YouTube, Facebook, Spotify, Amazon, Deezer, iTunes, Soundcloud, Pandora, Kasimp3 and many others are opening new market platforms for indie music, although some of them offer free streaming service.

Recording studios such as ContiMental, Winman, VCC, Matshete and Burning Shack are amongst the most popular in the Vhembe district amongst Venda speaking market. These studios are involved in the release of many independent artists in the region. These days, even artists who cannot afford high end DAWs such as Pro Tools HD, could still access versions of Cubase, Reason, Fruity Loops and Studio One for recording and production. Now, recording, mixing and mastering tutorial videos are widely available for free on YouTube. Therefore, studying music technology or sound engineering became available to most with only the cost of an internet subscription (except in the case where formal skill accreditation is required). These platforms contributed simultaneously to the decline of physical music sales, and new opportunities for Vhembe artists to record and sell their music independently, at a time when music from the region was not recognized by major record labels as commercially viable. Now there are recording studios in almost every village in Vhembe district. Although some of them are just a computer with a pirated DAW and a simple microphone without a proper audio interface, many artists record and press their CD for commercial distribution in such facilities.

Prior to the internet era, the introduction of compact disc (CD) technology presented a self-distribution opportunity for many indie artists, as artists could burn and print CDs from their home computers. Others could utilize companies such as Compact Disc Technologies (PTY) Ltd. for replication at an affordable cost. As Kats (2004) observes:

In the 1990s it became much easier and cheaper to create CDs. Besides, most personal computers come with CD burners, making any home with a PC a potential pressing plant. With the advancement of CD production technology, many performers have decided to go into business for themselves.



(Katz, 2004:13)

History shows that on December 6<sup>th</sup>, 1877, Thomas Edison made the first recording of a human voice on a tinfoil cylinder phonograph, and filed for an American patent on December 24 the same year. According to Schoenherr (2005) this is known to be the first audio recording device. Since then, recording innovations have evolved to create more user-friendly and affordable devices. After the First World War these technologies contributed to empowering the business and commercialization of music with the introduction of music recording studios and radio stations for mass distribution of music. In turn, home-use audio players like vinyl players, tape cassette and CDs injected wealth into the industry through record sales. Unlike previously when music was mostly experienced at concert halls or venues that offered live band performances, the masses now had access to more music. Today there is a well-spring of devices that record high quality audio, including some mobile phones. In this digital era, owning a basic recording studio could cost as little as owning a computer, simple audio interface tools, a microphone and a pair of speakers or headphones which could be the equivalent cost of recording just one song in the 1980s and earlier as recording was very expensive then. Today, music is bought, sold and consumed through computers or mobile phones, via online platforms. This means every artist has direct access to global markets through their phones or home computers, without a middle man unless they leave these administration tasks to a third party.

Furthermore, in many developing countries such as South Africa, music streaming services are not widely used, partially due to exorbitant Internet subscription and data costs or lack of Internet services or reliable internet access. Many artists signed to major labels still have more market advantage through traditional radio airplay and television, such as MTV, Trace, Channel O and others as these platforms are still the main form of information distribution mediums in South Africa. Local independent artists, played on local community radio stations, but who are not signed to major labels, have to fight for recognition to be played on the larger, more recognized nationwide South African Broadcast Corporation (SABC) radio stations

### **1.3. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

In this digital and social media era, independent artists are well positioned to build a music career by using digital platforms. Digital technologies such as audio interfaces, music software's (DAW or digital work stations) and the internet have created additional

opportunities for music practitioners to make a living through music, in addition to live performances, sales of CDs and merchandise, or radio and TV play.

Despite these positive developments, most artists in Vhembe are still struggling to mainstream their music, in order to make a profitable living from their craft. Despite the large number of songs and albums released online nationwide every day, much less content from the region is trending online. This could mean most Vhembe artists are either not utilizing digital marketing avenues on the internet to grow their careers, or, their content is not recognised or met with interest. The cause of the discrepancy between the above points prompted this study. Digital platforms have created many music marketing and dissemination opportunities but Vhembe artists seem to not use them to their advantage. In addition to recording music, many artists end up handling their own marketing and career management, which could or should be handled by artist managers, who sometimes are not effective, adding to the challenges of building a career in the music industry. While there are many factors that go into building a career in this industry, that differ from careers in other industry sectors, the lack of knowledge seems to be the fundamental hindrances to artist progress. If such discrepancies are not tackled, the Vhembe region stands to lose national recognition of a culturally rich heritage and the development of artists and music business opportunities. Furthermore, aspiring artists are likely to leave the industry and consider other non-artistic industries. This will be very unfortunate to the vibrant Vhembe music tradition which hosts such a diverse music culture and potential to add value to the global music scene. In addition, musicians who choose to remain loyal to a music career will continue to struggle economically without appropriate support, tools and recognition. Resolving this problem of lack of business knowledge and skill will help artists build their music careers and realize available opportunities.

This study also seeks to help identify other creative sector business opportunities such as: film production (for music video productions, music documentaries and artist interviews), Information Technology skilled personnel (for online support), marketing professionals, cultural entrepreneurs, and artist managers. This will help identify additional job opportunities throughout the music industry value. The findings of this study could also serve as a case-study for individuals seeking to venture into business with artists from the Vhembe region.

#### **1.4. RESEARCH PROBLEMS AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

## Guiding Questions

The following questions will form a guide to identify the loopholes and hidden opportunities local indie artists are missing.

- Why do many artists in Vhembe not use digital platforms to advance their music careers?
- Why is there no (visible) formal value-chain<sup>1</sup> structure in the Vhembe music industry?
- What can be done for Vhembe music to gain access to and become known in the global music eco system?

Answers to these questions will lead to an understanding of what is hindering the progress of local artists in the Vhembe region in this digital era with open markets and great opportunities for musicians.

### 1.5. AIM OF THE STUDY

The overall aim of the study is to investigate the extent to which Vhembe artists harness or fail to harness the opportunities presented by the digital technology boom. There are three key areas that the study will focus on to address this aim.

- The impact of digital technology in the music industry.
- The state of the music industry in Vhembe district.
- Strategies to improve the music industry in Vhembe district.

In addition to the points stated above, this study wishes to recognise those artists and businesses that are harnessing technology to empower their careers which also contributes to promoting local music to the masses.

### 1.6. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

To achieve the stated aim, the following objectives will be pursued:

- To explore the impact of digital platforms in the making, marketing, distribution and consumption of music in Vhembe district.
- To investigate the necessary aspects to support a professional and successful local music industry, including the entire value chain.

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<sup>1</sup> “A value-chain is the full range of activities – including design, production, marketing and distribution – businesses conduct to bring a product or service from conception to delivery” (<https://www.businessnewsdaily.com/5678-value-chain-analysis>).

- To investigate why Venda music is not trending on many (online) digital platforms. Addressing the above-mentioned points will help answer the study questions.

## 1.7. JUSTIFICATION OF THE STUDY

Despite the availability of digital platforms to produce, distribute and make money online in the music industry, the uptake of digital technology in the Vhembe region is low. This is worrisome in the digital era. This study aims to unearth the reasons and suggest potential solutions to the stated problem. It will add value to the body of knowledge about the music of the Vhembe region and in South Africa as a whole. As a maiden study in the area, the author expects that others will use it as a basis or source for further research in the field.

## 1.8. DEFINITION OF CONCEPTS

**DAW** (Digital Audio Workstation): An audio editing application that runs on specialized “workstation” computers. Most DAWs share in common the capability to sequence, record, and mix music, but increasingly can be “played” using soft synths (software synthesizers) that emulate every instrument imaginable. (Bell, 2015:45). The term DAW is commonly referred to as music software by most people. The most commonly used application in Vhembe is Cubase, followed by others such as Pro tools, Logic, Sonar, Studio One which are used by very few producers.

**Digitization:** Is creating a digital (bits and bytes) version of analogue/physical things such as paper documents, microfilm images, photographs, sounds and more. So, it’s simply converting and/or representing something non-digital (other examples include signals, health records, location data, identity cards, etc.) into a digital format which then can be used by a computing system for numerous possible reasons (Brennen, 2014).

**Music Copyrights:** Intellectual Property and copyright law varies by country. Susan Ward (2018) said that: “Literally, the definition of copyright is the right to copy. Copyright describes the legal rights of the owner of intellectual property. The person who owns the copyright to a work is the only person who can copy that work or give permission to someone else to copy it” (Ward, 2018). According to Legal Dictionary “A copyright is a formal declaration that the owner is the only one with the right to publish, reproduce, or sell a particular artistic work. The

protection of a copyright is granted by the government, and covers original literary (writings), dramatic (stage and film) musical, artistic, and other creations” (Content Team, 2017).

**Music Streaming:** Music streaming is a process of listening to music online, that is sometimes free and sometimes for purchase or available on a subscription service. Greg Mangan highlighted that: “Music streaming services generally offer online access to an expansive database of music through both a web browser and a smartphone application (also allowing songs to be downloaded for offline access) for a monthly subscription fee” (Mangan, 2014:83).

In comparison, Ian Dobie (2001) notes that the CD mail order and digital download models rely on purchase and ownership of specific sound recordings, and the streaming on demand model is based on access to music rather than ownership of it, as storage and ownership will no longer be required (Dobie, 2001:134).

A recent definition is addressed in an article titled What Is Streaming Music? Mark Harris said that: “Streaming music, or more accurately streaming audio, is a way of delivering sound—including music—without requiring you to download files from the internet. Music services like Spotify, Pandora, and Apple Music use this method to provide songs that can be enjoyed on all types of devices” (Harris, 2018).

**Social Media:** “Social media’ is the umbrella term for web-based software and services that allow users to come together online and exchange, discuss, communicate and participate in any form of social interaction. That interaction can encompass text, audio, images, video and other media, individually or in any combination. It can involve the generation of new content; the recommendation of and sharing of existing content; reviewing and rating products, services and brands; discussing the hot topics of the day; pursuing hobbies, interests and passions; sharing experience and expertise – in fact, almost anything that can be distributed and shared through digital channels is fair game” (Ryan and Jones, 2009:152). The most popular social media examples are Facebook, Tweeter and Instagram.

**Producer:** A producer is responsible for bringing a creative product or service into tangible form (a recording, a music video, advertisement or other). This involves helping and guiding the artist to maximize the potential of their ideas (Dobie, 2001:2).

## 1.9. LITERATURE REVIEW

Undertaking a literature review means consulting the written material relevant to a research question. One of the essential primary tasks when undertaking a research study is to go through the existing literature in order to acquaint oneself with the available body of knowledge around one's study.

According to Kumar, (2005), a literature review assists in connecting the research question to theory; and identifying previous research; and giving direction to the research project. There is a vast amount of literature on digital technology concerning the music industry, some of which form part of this literature review. For this study I reviewed books, web articles and videos related to this research.

#### **1.10. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

This research is descriptive in nature and is used to understand and explain a phenomenon of digital technology and its use in the music industry. Descriptive-qualitative methodology is applied as this is a case-study. Therefore, interviews, observation, participant observation and documents reviews will be applied. This information will determine the finding of the research and its analytic outcome. The detailed methodology applied to this study is addressed in chapter three, along with data collection methods, instruments used to collect data, data analysis, ethical consideration and challenges encountered when conducting it. The study setting, population and sampling also form part of the research methodology section as it determines the quality of information that forms the outcome of the study which in turn determine the framework or design of the final thesis presentation.

##### **Ethical considerations**

In conducting this research, the researcher did avoid ethical pitfalls such as exploitation, deception, revealing people's identity without their consent or making them feel like industry misfits as addressed by Silverman (2006:316) who said that in any kind of social research, ethical issues are more to the fore. This means one should hold ethics in high regard. Silverman (2006:323) ethical guidelines were followed by ensuring that:

- Participants were informed before the interviews that their contribution is voluntary and there is no financial compensation.
- There is mutual trust between the study and people being studied.
- Their information is not misquoted or misinterpreted to fit the researcher's views and, therefore the interpretation of data is not biased.

These points also relate to ethics emphasized by Babbie (2004:70) who said that the respondent should be informed about the setting and the venue of the interviews as well as the content of the research, so that they can be intellectually prepared. In this research some participants were interviewed at their recording studios, somewhere interviewed when promoting their music in the streets, at Midem and in offices.

#### Anonymity and confidentiality

Most of the information in this research are based on public information and the respondents are public figures, therefore, there is no privacy on the information addressed during data collection and the principles of anonymity and confidentiality do not apply as *Ethical Principles of Research in the Humanities and Social and Behavioural Sciences and Proposals for Ethical Review Published* by the National Advisory Board on Research Ethics in Helsinki, Finland, indicated that: "Principles concerning the protection of privacy do not apply to materials that are in the public domain or to published data, which can concern individuals and their activities in the fields of politics, business, official activities and culture" (2009:10). On the other hand, Matt Henn stated that: "The researcher must be prepared to protect respondents' identity and any information that arises from their participation in the research" (Henn, 2008:85). None of the interviewees requested their identity to be hidden but others are addressed with their stage names instead of their real names as agreed with them.

#### Deception

The respondents were made aware of the research conducted. Its content and its objectives were clearly addressed to avoid deception. This was in line with the points addressed in *The Practice of Qualitative Research* which said that: "Deception in research doesn't have to occur by going 'undercover' in carrying out a research project" (Sharlene Nagy, Hesse-Biber; Patricia Leavy, 2006:92).

## Informed consent

All interviewees were informed about the research and understand that their participation was voluntary. They knew it is an academic research which will also contribute in the development of Vhembe music through its findings and recommendations. The book called *Analysis in Qualitative Research* said that: “Informed consent is intended to ensure that the participants are placed in a situation where they can decide, in full knowledge of the risk and benefits of the study, whether and how to participate. In other words, those who are researched have the right to know that they are researched, and they should actively give their consent” (Boeije, 2010:45).

## Using documentary source

The study used public archives as sources in comparison with data collected during the study period. Some of that information was found on the internet as it one of the leading information centres in the world. *Handbook for Research Student in the Social Sciences* said: “Today we have access to far more written records than we can conventionally handle, and records may also take a format of photographs, film, audio disks, video tapes and computer diskettes. Each of which requires slight modification of our traditional techniques of study” (Allan; Skinner, 1991:171).



### 1.11. CHAPTERS OF THE STUDY

1. **Chapter one:** Introduction. An introduction to the study is provided and thereby developing the context and framework, in order to present the research questions, rationale and relevance of the research.
2. **Chapter two:** Literature review. The theoretical framework is provided, together with the key concepts through the review of relevant literature.
3. **Chapter Three:** Methodology. The research design and methodology is expounded in this chapter, thereby defining the hypotheses through data collection techniques and data analysis.
4. **Chapter Four:** Research findings and discussion. The research findings are listed along with a summary of the chief findings and analysis and discussion of the study.
5. **Chapter Five:** Conclusion and Recommendations. An interpretation of the findings is presented by reviewing the key points and discussing the relevance of the study.

## **2. CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1. INTRODUCTION**

There is a large body of research available on the impact of modern technology on the creation, marketing and distribution of music. Much of it provides the foundation for this review, although none of the available content addresses the music of Vhembe. This research will therefore compare global standards and practices in the music industry with the state of the music industry and the related value chain in Vhembe. Some of the literature written about digital technology globally including articles that found on the internet. The literature review will consider these four main points:

- The impact of digital technology in the music industry
- Use of digital technology in the music industry
- The impact of streaming and how artists respond to it
- Report of digital dissemination in the music industry

### **2.2. IMPACT OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY IN THE MUSIC INDUSTRY**

Until recently, the music industry was controlled by few major record labels who dominated the entire value chain. Majors would typically sign deals with independent record labels as they controlled the global market. With the advent of the digital era, major labels lost market share and this reduced the amount of control they held over the market place and in turn opened doors for more independent artists to gain a share of the market. As a result, the independent music industry now controls an estimated 38-40% market share according to 2016-2017 survey published on billboard.com Smirke, (2017). This means major record labels are no longer considered the only gateway into the music industry. In a research paper titled *The Music Industry in a Dilemma: How New Technologies Can Turn an Industry Upside Down*, Tung Q. and Nguyen-Khac said:

Additionally, due to the increasing maturity of hard and software in the field of music, artists took the opportunity to influence the development and production of music content during the past ten years. For creating and marketing music content a private person is not solely dependent on the big music corporate groups any longer. The industry's attitude acts as a further aggravating factor, in so far as instead of strategically build artists and formats, it has always focused on short-term profit maximization.

(Nguyen-Khac; Tung, 2003:11)

The technological developments alluded to by Nguyen-Khac prompted different interpretations about the state of the industry. Some believe that it yielded a positive outcome, while others blamed it for the fall of record sales through sophisticated and non-transparent internet business models, piracy and a reduction of production quality. That was written in 2003 and in the last fifteen years the industry has evolved greatly. Considering all that, one would believe that such contrasting views might depend on the state of one's industry position. In his academic research conducted in 2010, titled *Digital Models of Music: A Case Analysis of the Music Industry's Response to Technological Changes*, Taurra SunEagle observed that:

From the perspective of major record labels, the music industry is in a state of chaos. To many new musicians who are vying to get noticed in the mainstream market, however, the music industry is thriving now more than ever. The internet has fostered a new age of communication, connectivity, and access to information that has opened the floodgates for public consumption of new artistic material. Over the past 12 years, the digitization of music has transformed the way in which music is produced, distributed, promoted, and consumed. The effects of these changes have yet to be seen in full force, but they have already had major consequences on the business of music.

(SunEagle, 2011:1)

From 2010 to now, in many countries the industry has encountered the decline of music download with music streaming becoming the leading form of music distribution preferred by independent artists and record labels. RIAA Music Revenue Report shows that with the overwhelming number of album releases, artists are now presented with an enormous challenge of competing for listeners' attention on streaming services. President of RIAA Mitch Glazier said that:

The music streaming economy presents myriad new opportunities, but also its share of challenges too. According to Nielsen, more than 70,000 different albums were released by mid-year. Finding an audience amongst an extraordinary range of music choices, competing for the user's attention against other entertainment options on the ubiquitous smartphone, and being prominent on dozens of different digital platforms is not only critical for success, those are attributes that uniquely reside within today's record company.

(Glazier, 2018)

The subsequent proliferation of new independent artists with newly-innovated genres from every corner of the world, without the interference by major record labels, confirms that fact. In the article *The Boom in Africa's Music Industry Continues*, it is written that:

A few decades ago traditional African folk music dominated the industry, but the trend has shifted. Now, driven by a hunger for local tunes rather than output from the pop hubs of the US and Europe, African artists are mixing traditional African beats with new rhythms to produce cross-genre sounds.

(Writer 4, 2016)

The article gave some projections on the growth of Nigerian and Kenyan industry through digital technology. Vhembe is also experiencing this wave of new music development. Many artists are producing new sounds (mostly influenced by Nigerian Afro-beat), more than ever before, although they seem to struggle to reach the mainstream level. This begs the question of whether they are well-equipped to utilize Internet tools for marketing and promotion, or if the quality of their production is a hindrance. In a paper titled *The Impact of Computer Music Technology on Music Production: How has computer technology impacted on the artistic practice of musical composition?* Steven Thornley wrote that:

The development of recording technology, software applications, the internet and portable music have created a world where a song can go from a composer's head, to being available to an audience of millions within hours. Composers have led - and will continue to lead - the evolution of modern music with the assistance of computer technology as a tool and resource for further musical exploration. In essence, the composer has not become an instrument for the computer; rather, the computer has become an instrument for the composer.

(Thornely, 2014:5)

According to this statement, computer technology has simplified the method of production and distribution. Therefore, these software applications empower composers and producer to expand their realm of creativity. In fact, some local music composers and producers don't even need to have music instrument or electronic music keyboard playing skill to compose music as they can just click the buttons on a computer keyboard or use the mouse to create beats or songs.

### **2.3. DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY IN THE MUSIC INDUSTRY VALUE CHAINS.**

This part deals with the extent to which new technology innovations have redefined business prospects and the value chain of the music industry. This value chain covers the production,

marketing and dissemination of music. How such technologies were further able to compress the entire music production process with many facets into one or a few main tasks and bypassing several stages will also be addressed in this part of the study.

### 2.3.1. Digital technology in music production.

Digital recording technology presents great opportunities for music producers, sound engineers and musicians to own their own recording studios. This is due to low computer prices, digital interface tools and recording software that are easily available. With DAWs such as Cubase, Sonar, Logic, ProTools, Ableton Live, Digital Performer, Reason, and Fruity Loops, the roles of the music producer and music engineer have become intertwined. (Joe Schloss, 2004:41). Whereas previously the engineer would bring the technical expertise to realize a producer's vision, now one can achieve both aspects using DAWs in a home studio without the extra hires. In most remote towns and rural areas of South Africa, there are many so-called bedroom or home-owned recording studios, with very basic equipment (such as a computer; one or two input audio interface tools; a microphone and a set or regular speakers), owned by one person who would multitask between engineering and production. Some of them do not even have an audio interface or soundcard, but use computer mic-input and audio output for production. Such studios are very cheap to record at and typically in high demand and very busy, but a very small of their products mainstream music market. Investigating such production methods and studios will help establish whether the production is of professional quality and meets industry standards. In an academic paper titled: *The Evolution of the Music Industry in the Post-Internet Era*, Ashraf El Gamal said:

The production costs of music began to fall drastically starting in the 1990s when new technologies made robust recording equipment available to individual musicians. Today, there continue to be a growing number of powerful, and affordable, software compatible with personal computers. This removes the necessity of expensive studio time freeing musicians to create through their own means.

(Gamal, 2012:9)

On the same note, ten years prior El Gamal's paper, Ian Michael Dobie wrote a doctoral paper: *The Impact of New Technology*, where said that:

Until recently then, the technology for recording music has been expensive and therefore owned by record companies or recording studios. Access to the means of production has subsequently been restricted by a lack of access to capital. The ubiquity of home computers and their rapidly falling price tag has meant that the technology for

recording has become more readily accessible to a larger number of producers. Therefore, the process of producing music has not only been freed from the restraints of time and space by technological development, but the home location as recording studio has freed many musicians from the necessity of seeking record company contracts as a means of gaining access to the means of production.

(Dobie, 2001:86)

The two scholars agree that through access to new and inexpensive technology tools, many artists now have access to record their music regardless of whether they have a record deal or not. Although quality production should determine a project success, there is a flood of what others describe low quality products taking up a lot of room in the industry. This research examines how people measure what they consider to be quality or non-quality music or recordings. Regarding the use of a computer to create sounds, rather than an instrument in music production, Pamela Mbabazi, (2010) says there are musicians who employ digital sounds to add effects to their voices. For example, the industry has developed production devices such as Auto-tune and Vocoder, and both can be used to produce musical sounds that a human being cannot produce. Some criticize such tools as a sign of the inability to pitch well, or being unable to sing in tune, while others support their use in serious music production. Auto-tuned production is used in most popular music from Vhembe and it appears auto-tune is trending as a music plugin in most commercial music including: House, Hip-Hop, Ven-rap, Manyalo, Afrobeat and many other genres. Vhembe artists like Makhadzi and Ramzy are well known users of such plugins on their voices.

### **2.3.2 Digital technology in marketing and distribution.**

The internet has presented a new business model for the music industry. It has become a major marketing tool, taking over conventional mainstream media such as printed publications, radio and TV in the past few years. Indie artists are embracing these digital platforms as they are cost-effective and fast to reach audiences. A mere click of few computer buttons or a smart phone keyboard enables a consumer to access a vast world of music content and other information they would not typically find via mainstream media sources. Artists can also easily upload a large quantity of content or files to the Internet and social media platforms with few, if any restrictions. In his article, Patokos said that:

The impact of the internet on artists has been significant from day one; it offered an opportunity for promotion that, for the better part of them, could not be possible otherwise. In the pre-internet days, artists were overly dependent on the music press

and the radio; were they not featured on them, they would be practically unknown, only enjoying local recognition in places they managed to visit and perform on stage.

(Patokos, 2008:240)

This is why in the past independent artists and labels were not well recognized as terms like indie artist or indie records were not used in mainstream media, as major records labels had a tremendous influence on radio DJs and they were then the only ones with a capacity to market music worldwide. Still on that note, *The Caribbean Music Industry* prepared, by Dr. Keith Nurse quoted Hayes (1996) who states that:

In contrast, the arrival of internet-based music is proving to be a threat to the major record companies...The rapid expansion of the World-Wide Web and internet services illustrates the point. It is suggested, by some industry analysts, that the internet will revolutionize product sales and marketing, change the nature of piracy and collection of royalties as well as upset the balance between the major recording companies and the independents thus giving the consumer greater choice. These gains are, however, dependent on wider access to internet services internationally, improvements in the download capabilities of personal computers and the introduction of world-wide legislation to implement the International Standard Recording Code (a built-in electronic code that identifies all recordings).

(Nurse, 2001:7)

It was recognized as far back as 1996 that the internet would disrupt the conventional record industry. And today most young people only know music in digital formats and are not familiar with the heady days of major records labels, Platinum sales etc. In the twenty-two (22) years since these predictions, the world of music has witnessed the tremendous impact of the internet. Now the internet has become the leading tool for music promotion, dissemination and consumption, and in most developed countries CDs are rarely purchased any longer (but you can still find them via major retail stores such as Amazon, WalMart and Best Buy in the United States, and many indie stores still sell CD's in Europe and Latin America, while Japan still has a market for CDs, although it too is declining). Shops like Reliable Music Warehouse, Musica, Look & Listen, Dakota in South Africa still sell CDs but most of the have closed many of their stores. Despite these developments, vinyl has witnessed a small resurgence, especially in Western countries.

Besides the opportunities presented by internet, monetization from online streaming remains challenging for the global music industry, even with the International Standard Recording Code (ISRC), which is an international system for the identification of recorded music and music

videos. This is in part due to the complexities of controlling metadata to identify the rightful owners of music, and that the music industry is governed by two copyrights, further confounding the ownership issue, and partially due to different levels of copyright protection and enforcement in global markets that leaves online music vulnerable to piracy. There are other factors that impact monetization but that is for another study. J. Waldfogel (2011:91) explained that: “The decade since Napster [e.g. the advent of accessing music on the Internet] has seen a dramatic reduction in revenue to the recorded music industry”. This is especially challenging for those who are not represented by an experienced and reputable music publisher. Many local Vhembe artists seem to have very little information about the digital monetization process, while the majority do not even know that streaming should and does earn royalties, at least in markets where copyrights protect these earnings and streaming is done through reputable sources and licensing agreements or streaming services. Furthermore, the enormous traffic of music posted online from indie artists has created competition for market share and the Internet is besieged by new forms of piracy as Heyes predicted, such as illegal music downloading and many forms of illegal music file sharing, or piracy.

Despite the threat to their conventional music business methods due to new ways of music consumption, major record labels seem to generate a reasonable amount of revenues using these digital avenues. Wilfred Dolfsma observes that:

Dramatic changes however will take place in music distribution, as we argued, as electronic channels are becoming increasingly common. The major record companies are experimenting with this – EMI is now selling sheet music through the internet but also releasing albums on the web for customers to download. As the music product can be digitized and transported and played by computers, electronic distribution channels will be able to fully exploit the virtual value chain. Copyright violations are nothing new in the music industry but a real difference is that music can not only be recorded and duplicated but that it can be distributed by using computer networks.

(Dolfsma, 2004:02)

This was written twelve years ago around the same time Heyes made the same predictions about the impact of digitization on the music sector. It did not take even a decade for the digitally driven music industry to be established. The Internet has changed consumer behaviour as many people no longer buy CDs, but rely on Mp3 downloads from digital stores such as iTunes and Amazon or they subscribe to digital streaming apps. Although it is moving in a very slow pace in South African and more especially in rural areas such as Vhembe, music



streaming is the fastest growing segment of the music industry today and income from legitimate streaming services has helped catapult the industry forward from a period of many years of minimal growth. In terms of copyrights violations, many visit sites such as Mp3 Skull, Fakaza and Tupidy for free but illegal downloads instead of finding music of legal services such as Amazon MP3 Store, Google Play, CD Universe, In Sound, iTunes Store and many more. Illegal downloads also include video content on Android applications such as Tube Mate. In his article *Music Piracy in South Africa* published by David Durbach it is written that:

Music piracy is dropping steadily in certain countries due to tighter controls and the rise of legal alternatives. South Africa, however, still lags behind the rest of the world – unsurprising perhaps for a country where television was only introduced in the late 1970s, where cassette tapes were popular well after the turn of the millennium, and where broadband internet has only recently taken hold. Piracy remains a challenge for the near future, particularly as the country's internet connectivity finally begins to catch up with the rest of the world.

(Durbach, 2015)

Besides the positive impact data file sharing and the Internet have had on music distribution, it has also led to the closure of many music shops. In Thohoyandou (the fastest growing cosmopolitan remote town in Limpopo, South Africa) alone, a number of record stores have been shut-down, leaving artists with very few options to distribute their music as they would take their music there. Artists would have different deals with these stores ranging from record stores buying music from artist or artist could leave the CDs in the stores and collect their percentage after they are sold. The route of going through a distributor only applied with major stores. In the book titled: *The Impact of Digital File Sharing on the Music Industry: An Empirical Analysis*, Norbert J. Michel wrote: "Our micro-level data test results suggest that file sharing may have reduced album sales (between 1999 and 2003) by as much as 13 percent for some music consumers". Frances Moore, CEO of the International Federation of Phonographic Industries (IFPI) wrote - in the 2012 Digital Music Report (Moore, 2012:04), that record companies are building successful digital music businesses despite the new market environment in which they operate. Figures in this report show that more than one in four internet users globally regularly access unlicensed sites that contain copyrighted music. In a recent (2019) online article titled Tackling Music Piracy, IFPI estimates that forty percent of internet users access unlicensed music content, hence the industry is trying by all means to fight such activity as shown that:

The industry is responding not with a single strategy, but with a comprehensive, multi-pronged approach. It includes: consumer education on copyright and the value of music; working with law enforcement agencies to tackle online piracy; litigation against online pirate services; and engaging with policymakers and legislators worldwide to create an environment in which the music sector can grow. The industry is also working with online stores to remove infringing apps and to ensure that apps cannot access illegal websites.

(Moore, 2019)

Forty percent is a startling statistic that captures the challenges we face in developing a sustainable legitimate digital music sector. With the growing number of illegal online music access, some positive strides are made in some developing countries. These findings also affect African markets where internet access and use is growing rapidly. In the 2017 report from IFPI, Tracy Fraser, Managing Director of Warner Music South Africa, said:

The South African market has been dominated for many years by physical sales, but they are declining rapidly. Digital is growing exponentially, but there is still a lot of growth to come, as smartphone penetration is growing quickly. Streaming is becoming very big for us, but it's still in its infancy. The largest streaming service is Apple Music, with Google Play and Deezer also leading players. Digital growth is helping enable us to expand our roster, signing artists such as ASH, Dr Bone, Josh Kempen and Locnville that reflect the diversity of the music scene in South Africa today.

(Fraser, 2017:33)

In the same article, Sipho Dlamini, Managing Director of Universal Music South Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa, said: "In South Africa, although the physical market remains important, there are already over 250,000 paying subscribers on streaming services and we expect the market to grow strongly". With the growth trajectories and optimism about streaming services growth, many South Africans believe the price for data is still too expensive for ordinary citizens, and it is hindering the growth in the sector unlike in other countries like Kenya, where data is reported to be much cheaper. Fraser further explained that:

We're seeing smartphone penetration rates start to climb in key African markets, such as Kenya and Nigeria, where it is now close to 50% of the population. As handset and data prices continue to come down, this growth should accelerate across the continent, which represents a huge opportunity for digital music services and opens the door to more investment in local music by international record companies...

(Fraser, 2017:33)

This bodes well for long term growth, while citizens wait for better subscription rates in order to access, produce or distribute music digitally (e.g. not only on a computer but also via smartphones). A survey published on the 24 October 2016 on [www.africanbusinesscentral.com](http://www.africanbusinesscentral.com) said that in Nigeria, Africa's most populous nation, revenue from the music industry grew an estimated four-fold in the two years up to 2015, according to PWC. The growth streak is forecast to continue. It indicated that Kenya is also forecast for a strong growth, at about 9.3 percent a year between now and 2020.

On the point of market expansion, Patokos, (2008) stated that all stakeholders in the industry acknowledge that the internet has been helpful in promoting artist works. Before the internet, consumers would only be informed by the music press and radio (or a sales representative,) and they would necessarily limit their purchasing choices according to the music that was found in their local record stores. Such dependence was limited and meant that an artist who did not have media coverage or good marketing, or whose music releases did not have wide distribution, would practically be non-existent for the listeners. The internet has changed the behaviour of both listeners and artists in that people have now access to a tremendous volume of relevant information (and therefore, they no longer exclusively rely on what would be on the next issue of their favourite music magazine). Artists no longer need to be backed by a record company (at least, not to the same degree as before) that would handle costly advertising. Listeners can now easily find more artists than ever before, and artists can reach a much wider audience by setting up their own streaming sites or channels and website or homepage on social media to promote their music and also link this to their online distribution stores. On the publication *E-commerce business models for the music industry*, *Popular Music and Society*, Mark Alexander Fox said the following:

Historically, the major record labels have been reluctant to participate in any alternative distribution model which would restructure the current music distribution hierarchy. This reluctance is due to their investment in the current physical distribution infrastructure and their relationship with the retail channel. Technological changes have heightened competition for the major labels. The distribution of music over the Internet requires only a single master copy, whereas distribution of music as a physical product requires producing, shipping, and warehousing CDs, audio cassettes, etc.

(Fox, 2004:204)

This statement indicate that the introduction of internet as the new driving force of music marketing and distribution widely opened doors for indie artists who were disadvantaged in

the past due to lack of major physical distribution infrastructure. Now access to international market is no longer attained through partnerships with major record labels. The amounts of music online from independent artists confirm that statement.

#### **2.4. ARTISTS' PERCEPTION ABOUT STREAMING.**

Music streaming is today the number one music dissemination method globally. Although it hasn't taken over South Africa yet, the recent introduction of Spotify prompted so much excitement for many artists. It was projected by industry experts that very soon streaming will take over downloads and wipe out CD sales (<http://www.cityam.com>). Spotify, Deezer, iTunes, Google Play and many others offer monthly subscription with a fixed monthly fee to access unlimited amounts of music. Contrary to the paid subscription streaming services like Spotify, Google Play, Afrostream (which was closed in September 2017 due to lack of finance and competition from pirates services), other legitimate sites such as Soundcloud, Kasi Mp3<sup>2</sup> offer a huge amount of content for free and many independent local artists in the Vhembe district use these free services. In Kenya Safari.com launches 'Songa' (a new music streaming service) in February 2018 while Nigeria has website such as <https://spinlet.com> for music streaming and downloads.

With all the hype over streaming, there is concern about the way streaming services reward artists. Many older songwriters complain about streaming not paying them a fair amount of royalties. Of course, there can be many reasons for this, including lack of accurate metadata to track the rightful owner of music, and that is a larger topic for another study. In a documentary film survey directed by Andy Regal (2013) titled; *Can Spotify Save the Music Industry*, conducted and published on YouTube in February 2013 by the Wall Street Journal Live, Charlie Hellman, now Head of Creator Marketplace and former Product Development of Spotify said that their company was founded to provide a product better than piracy as it streams licensed music and pays royalties. His former co-worker (who used to hold a position of Chief Content Officer and now a Special Advisor at Spotify Limited since August 2015)

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<sup>2</sup> KasiMP3 is a music download and streaming service run by Clarence "Majesa" Mapaya, which aims to offer users free music while still paying artists and labels the royalties. Mapaya explained that the idea was to present fans with advertising on the site and share the proceeds with artists and recording labels (<https://mybroadband.co.za/news/internet/44195-piracy-is-the-solution-not-the-problem-kasimp3.html>).

Ken Parks said that there is a lot of music floating around on the internet but artists are not getting paid if it is not connected to a legitimate service or licensing deal. He claims that Spotify pays seventy percent of royalties to the music industry. In the same survey, a Harvard University professor Damon Krukosky who is a member of the duo Damon and Naomi, said that Spotify gave them a check for one dollar and five cents for over 5000 streams which they had to share as a duo. Professor Krukosky believes it is not a fair share and should not be called royalty. He said: “I subscribed to Spotify. I was really happy when they came to the U.S. because the access to music I find it very personally valuable. But as a business model it does nothing for us as artists.” He does not mind their music being on Spotify because he wants the music to be heard, but he said he minds it when they send him a tiny royalty. Despite Krukosky’s dissatisfaction about the issue of compensation, in the same report, Tom Almhirst, (Grammy-Award winning mix engineer who worked with Adele and many mainstream artists) believes streaming services are good for artists as it presents an opportunity for being discovered which is better than not getting exposure. In his online article titled *What Streaming Music Services Pay (Updated for 2018)* Daniel Sanchez said:

In our report published last year, Digital Music News found that Napster had the highest pay-outs. After just 90,000 plays on the platform, artists would earn the US monthly minimum wage of \$1,472. In contrast, Spotify and YouTube, arguably the largest streaming music services, had the worst pay-outs. The Swedish music platform had a per-stream rate of \$0.0038. With over 1.1 billion users, artists would receive just \$0.0006 per play on YouTube.

(Sanchez, 2018)

On the same survey but 2019 update Sanchez shows a tiny increase on Spotify streaming service payment as he said that “Previously ranked as the service with one of the worst pay-outs, Spotify has steadily increased its per-stream rate. Last year, the service paid out \$0.0038 per play. Earlier this year, Spotify increased its per-stream pay-outs to \$0.00397. The streaming music giant now reportedly pays \$0.00437 per play.” (Sanchez, 2019).

Another survey by Hari Sreenivasan, titled; *Can the Music Industry Survive the Streaming Revolution?* was produced by PBS News Hour (Music on Demand) and published on YouTube

on February 4, 2015. In this survey an interview was conducted with Rosanne Cash<sup>3</sup> who addressed her feelings about streaming services saying:

It changed how we artists and musicians make a living, and in 1999 the music industry was a 14-billion-dollar industry. Today it's half that. It is valued at half that. There is a feeling now, a concept, that music should be free. It's like oxygen. Everyone should have access to it. Everyone should have access to it! But should it be free?

(Sreenivasan, 2015)

She said from 600,000 streams over an eighteen-month period, she got paid US\$104. Rosanne Cash doesn't buy the exposure argument but she believes "streaming is here to stay... we don't wanna turn back the clock". Aloe Black, another popular U.S. artist had the following to say about music streaming: "It takes roughly one million spins on Pandora for a songwriter to earn \$90." This is cited in an article published by Wired Magazine in November 2014 titled: *Streaming Services Need to Pay Artists Fairly*. Blacc (2014) said: "In returned for co-writing a major hit song, I've earned less than \$4000 domestically from the largest digital music service". He was referring to Pandora about a song "Wake Me Up". The music industry is governed by two copyrights<sup>4</sup>, so there can be multiple rights holders for a given song. Reviews show that a tiny fraction of a (US) cent is paid out to the record company per stream and has to be shared amongst all rights holders meaning the record label, publisher and song writer, and performer (unless the rights are controlled by one person, the pay doesn't stretch far).

Taylor Swift, who is one of the industry's biggest money makers, pulled her entire catalogue from Spotify from November 2014 (shortly after the release of her album 1989) to June 2017. In July 2014: On an article titled: *For Taylor Swift, the Future of Music Is a Love Story* published on The Wall Street Journal, Swift wrote: "Music is art, and art is important and rare. Important, rare things are valuable. Valuable things should be paid for. It's my opinion that

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<sup>3</sup> She is the daughter of the late Jonny Cash who used to be a legendary Pop music composer and singer.

<sup>4</sup> - Sound Recordings: A sound recording is a simply a work comprised of recorded sounds. For example, the recorded performance of a song that appears on a compact disc is a sound recording.

- Musical Works (that is, "Musical Compositions" or "Songs"): Both the music and the lyrics to a song, or each of them separately, can constitute a copyrightable musical work.

([https://law-arts.org/pdf/Legal\\_Issues\\_in\\_the\\_Music\\_Industry.pdf](https://law-arts.org/pdf/Legal_Issues_in_the_Music_Industry.pdf))

(<http://www.samro.org.za/news/articles/getting-your-head-around-music-rights>)

music should not be free, and my prediction is that individual artists and their labels will someday decide what an album's price point is" (Swift, 2014). Her view was not different from Roseanne Cash when she said music should not be free. The same problem left many artists sceptical of the budding streaming service industry. Google Play and Spotify demands a \$120 annual subscription fee, which they claim to pay up to 70% of to record labels that subscribe. Ken Parks (former Chief Content Officer of Spotify) said that Spotify has different deals with different artists; therefore artist cannot be paid the same way.

The statistics published by *Digital Music News* in 2016 gave a breakdown of Spotify revenue and the amount of money paid to the music industry: "Total Gross Revenue: Slightly over \$1.1 billion; Average streaming rate: \$0.0046524; Total plays: Over 162 billion; Royalty pool amount: \$75.4 million; PRO fees: Almost \$72 million" (Sanchez, 2017). This report shows that streaming services takes almost 50% of generated income. This mechanical royalty payment could be much worse when this money is converted to South African currency. Spotify was launched in South Africa in March 2018 with a monthly subscription amount of R59.99 (which is not different from Apple Music, Deezer and Google Play who came before but did not create a big hype).

Despite the dissatisfaction of many long-time working artists with streaming services, new artists seem to be enjoying the new innovation with its cost effective methods. To many indie artists, streaming come as a blessing. Some of them have reached their desired success of becoming well known. Another example of streamline success is the Norwegian duo Nico and Vinz's summer hit single "Am I Wrong" which topped the Billboard Charts for weeks with more than 200,000,000 streams on Spotify alone, which at that time (2015) only had 60,000,000 users and today has over 70,000,000 paying subscribers). Nico and Vinz credit streaming for their success. This is what one member of the duo Kahouly Nicolas Sereba has to say about streaming services on a documentary titled "*Can Spotify Save The Music Industry?*" streamed on YouTube: "Streaming to artists right now is a blessing because you are able to reach so many people with just you putting a song out on the internet and it can go from there" (WSJ, 2013) Vincent Dery (Vinz) also supported his music partner by saying: "I think it's a perfect way for new artists to also get their music out..." (WSJ, 2013). While many new, younger artists credit their success on streaming services, and believe it's a great way to launch one's career, many who experienced selling music in the traditional music business model in prior decades, believe streaming has a detrimental impact on the industry and is not a



sustainable income source or way of doing business. Larry Kirwan of the band Black 47 said that:

It used to be, it was the fat guy in a suite and a pinkie ring blowing cigar, smoke you up on 57th street. But those guys were invested in a way because they wanted a piece of your action; they wanted a piece of your intellectual property... The new streaming services, they don't care about your intellectual property. They just wanna give it away. They want to make money out of giving a service that they would make money out of and it doesn't work for the musicians. For a regular musician is not working.

(WSJ, 2013)

The band decided quit music in November 2014 after many years in the industry (as it was formed in 1989). Black 47 had a successful career playing a regular gig at a NYC West Village establishment, and although their views are similar to those of Professor Krukosky and Cash, there are still older bands that are today enjoying the benefit of streaming services. According to Ken Park, older bands such as Pink Floyd find streaming hugely beneficial to introduce their music to new audiences. His statement indicates that streaming services are more advantageous for old and new artist, which is opposite to many of those older artists mentioned above. With all the mixed feelings about it from deferent artists, Daniel Glass, founder of the indie record company Glass Note Records, said that streaming is crucial for fans to discover Glass Note's artists. He gave an example of one of his artists, Robert Delong, who had sold-out live shows after his song became a hit on Spotify. Mr. Glass said that "As soon as streaming got involved and radio got involved the tickets for the shows sold out". This could mean streaming can be used to promote artists and boost their concert ticket sales. With all the positive impact such as access to new audience and promotion, one could wonder why the band Black 47 quit music, unless the reason is beyond streaming exploitation.

Although many independent and new artists believe that streaming is the best way forward for the music industry, Frances Moore of IPFI addressed the issue of artists not fairly benefiting from streaming services when she said: "Ultimately, the music community's goal of releasing full and fair value for music is dependent on a fair digital marketplace. For that simple reason, it is united in its campaign to fix the value gap, the mismatch between the value created by some digital platforms from their use of music and what they pay those creating and investing in it" (Moore, 2019:4). This could mean the battle between the digital streaming industry and artists about payments could take a number of years to be resolved.



## 2.5. GLOBAL MUSIC BUSINESS ANALYSIS REPORT (IFPI)

The figures in the charts below indicate the shift in the way people continue to use internet platforms to listen to music. These surveys were published by IFPI in their 2018 issue titled “2017 Global Music Report” which demonstrate how streaming services are taking over market share of physical music sales and paid downloads. For example, in 2017, global recorded music revenues totalled \$17.3 billion (an estimated R200 billion). They rose by 8.1% over the 2016 survey. This is one of the fastest growth rates the music industry has seen since IFPI began tracking industry sales in 1997, so it presents a significant growth trend.

### STREAMING REVENUE GROWTH YEAR ON YEAR: 2013 – 2017

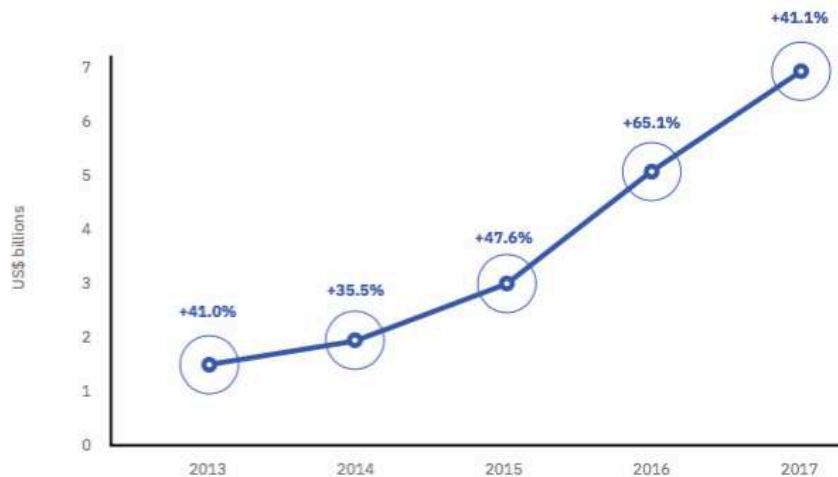


Figure 1: Steaming Revenue Growth Year on Year: 2013 – 2017 (IFPI, 2018:17)

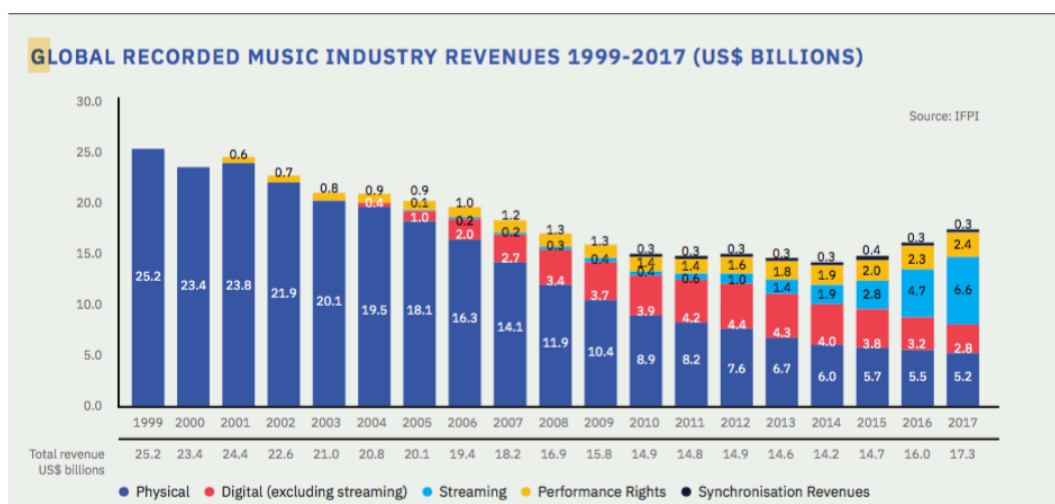


Figure 2: Global Recorded Music Industry Revenue 1999-2017 (IFPI, 2018:11)

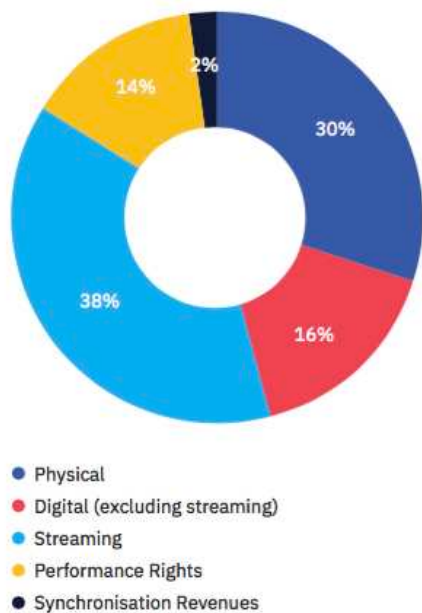


Figure 3: Recording Music Revenue by Segments 2017 (IFPI, 2018:11)



Figure 4: Top Ten Music Markets 2017 (IFPI, 2018:11)

### DIGITAL REVENUE (19.1%)

In 2017 digital revenues grew 19.1% to US\$ 9.4 billion and, for the first time ever, accounted for over half (54%) of total recorded music industry revenues worldwide. The global surge in streaming was a key driver of this growth, up 41.1%. Following a 20.5% decline, digital downloads still accounted for 20% of global digital revenue. Digital revenues now account for

more than half the recorded music market in many countries, including six countries crossing the threshold in 2017

#### PERFORMANCE RIGHTS REVENUE (2.3%)

Revenue from the use of recorded music by broadcasters and public venues increased 2.3% to US\$2.4 billion in 2017. This accounts for 14% of total industry revenue overall, but industry experts believe that this still does not represent fair value for rights holders and continues to campaign to address this (IFPI, 2018).

#### PHYSICAL REVENUE (5.4%)

Revenues from physical formats declined by 5.4% in 2017, a slightly higher rate than the previous year (4.4%). Consumption of physical formats declined in the majority of the markets, but physical revenue still accounted for 30% of the global market and a higher percentage of market share in countries such as Japan (72%) and Germany (43%). Globally, revenues from vinyl sales grew by 22.3% and made up 3.7% of the total recorded music market in 2017.

#### SYNCHRONISATION REVENUE (9.6%)

Revenues from the use of music in advertising, film, games and television programs increased by 9.6%. Synchronization maintained its 2% share of global recorded music revenues in 2017.

### **3. CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1. INTRODUCTION**

The methodology used in this study is descriptive-qualitative, as this is a case-study. This type of study helps the researchers analyse/develop detailed descriptions of specific situations, using 1) interviews, observations, 2) participant observation and 3) document review. These three approaches of outsourcing information fit well in this study, as a number of studies have been conducted on the digitization of the music industry; hence, this study will focus more on how local (Vhembe) artists and independent record labels are utilizing these platforms in their everyday music production and business practices. This study will further seek to compare study findings with the views of music practitioners within the value-chain of the industry in relation to the researcher's observation and knowledge about artists from other areas.

This section provides the research design and description of the study. It describes the data collection methods, materials used, and the approach of the research.

#### **3.2. STUDY SETTING**

Vhembe is one of the Limpopo Provinces district municipalities in South Africa. It produces many artists, most of whom depend on local community radio stations for promotion and publicity. The most popular method of music distribution in the Vhembe region however, is

*Gumba-fire*, or street performance, while selling CDs and DVDs. These artists are mostly found in local towns such as Malamulele, Makhado, Mussina and Thohoyandou. People who live in the surrounding rural communities are mostly non-working middle age class, older people and young school-going pupils. Most middle-age working class migrate to other towns and cities for better work opportunities. The youth are mostly unemployed, with a high rate of teenage pregnancy and substance abuse. Despite these socio-economic challenges, most of them use or own smart phones and use them for listening to music and accessing social media. These young people are predominantly the population who have more local music in their phones than other music, typically obtained through illegal file sharing and free download.

### **3.3. STUDY POPULATION**

For research purposes, Goddard and Melville (2001:34) defined a population as “any group that is the subject of the research”. On the other hand, Welman, J. and Kruger, (2001:47) expanded this description by saying: “a population is the study object which may be individuals, organizations, human product, and events, or the condition to which they are exposed.” Following these description, the researcher selected a number of individuals who contributed to sharing knowledge from their field of expertise within the value-chain of the industry. These individuals range from producers, sound engineers, artist managers, Indie record labels or artists and publishers. The researcher also looked at their most common technology tools used for music production as the study population is not only limited to humans. Local music consumers, especially those who are acquainted with technology and digital tools form part of the study population.

### **3.4. SAMPLING**

The researcher interviewed 10 independent musicians, 6 music producers or production studio owners, 2 artist managers and 5 music consumers. This includes both music veterans who have witnessed the evolution of the industry, and artists who started their music careers during the digital era. This group of twenty subjects were used as a sampling-frame, because, according to Blanche, M., Durrheim, K. and Painter, (1999:133), it would be impossible to cover the entire music population. The researcher also included younger artists who have only known computer and Midi technology as tools for making music in their generation. This research also includes national and international independent artists and a comparison of their music

practices or approach to the music business. This group formed the primary target group of interviewees for this study, with a focus on commercial music genres with a potential for the international market.

### **3.5. DATA COLLECTION**

The empirical nature of the study required the researcher to use three commonly used methods of collecting data in a descriptive-qualitative methodology. These are:

- Interviews,
- A focus group, and
- A document review

The interviews are defined as the primary method, and form a major source of data collection. The study used the Partially-Structured Personal Interviews method, as it was more flexible and elicited more relevant information from the source. Gertruida M. DuPlooy, (2001:177) described this type of interview as containing standardized questions, but allowing the researcher the opportunity to deviate from fundamental questions, as well as to ask probing questions based on the respondent's responses. "The conversational nature of partially structured personal interviews further allowed for insight about the research phenomenon to emerge" (Leonard, 2005:133). This was applied with caution, so as not to end up deviating from the study objectives.

### **3.6. DATA COLLECTION TOOLS**

Interviews were arranged to suit the schedule of all participants. Most of the interviews were video recorded following Blanche, M., Durrheim, K. and Painter, (1999:298) method of ensuring that respondents are comfortable with video recording and the environment is proper, to avoid disruptions and environmental noise. Those who could not meet for one-on-one interview were sent a questionnaire by e-mails.

### **3.7. DATA ANALYSIS**

All the data collected for the study was transcribed as dictated, according to the objectives of the subject matter or projected study outcomes. Monette, Sullivan, DeJong and Hilton, (2014:196) said that available data could be used to test hypotheses. All answers were analysed and summarized in conjunction with the existing body of knowledge or available data in the

research literature, such as industry magazines, journals and websites, including documentary videos sourced online that fit the subject matter. These helped identify the cause of discrepancies between modern standard music business practices and the lack of thorough engagement from local Vhembe artists in the digital music economy.

### **3.8. DELIMITATION**

A number of factors contributed to limited data for this study. Some were choices made by a researcher to stay within the boundaries of the study, while some were due to circumstances. Issues such as travel distance to the interviewee, language barriers, or other factors led to the unavailability of some target individuals for interviews. Babbie (1988) said that “we cannot determine general public opinion while considering only interested parties. But using a representativeness approach could justify the generalization of outcome derived from population sample and through observations of its general characteristic.” This point was applied to some extent, to avoid a limitation of information for this study. All interviews were conducted at a time convenient for the respondents. In situations where a respondent could not meet for an interview, other sources of information such as available data (in the form of online interviews or magazine articles) were used.





## **5. CHAPTER FOUR: PRESENTATION OF DATA, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSIONS**

### **5.1. INTRODUCTION**

Chapter three addressed the research design and methodology, theoretical framework, data collecting mechanisms and how the research will be analysed to determine the research findings. This chapter addresses the interview results and analysis of the research, with a discussion of findings.

Research interviews were conducted with participants with different roles in the industry. These interviewees are from different geographical areas in South Africa and abroad, besides the majority being from Vhembe district. All participants are indie music practitioners; meaning they are not affiliated with any major record labels. For this research, five studio owners who are also sound engineers, five local artists, three artist managers, one music publishers from Europe, two international artists (one from Ghana and one Israel), two national independent artists and two record label public relation officers (also artists managers) were interviewed and one focus group. It was important to include international and national participants in this case study to address the issue of similarities and dissimilarities in domestic and international practices.

### **5.2. RESEARCH FINDING, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSIONS**

The study sought to interview as many stakeholders in the music industry as possible, as well as consulting literature and media documents on the subject. All participants were selected from different music industry categories such as composition, music publishing, production, sound engineering, artist management, performance, marketing, promotion and sales, as these are all the key categories in the making and sustainability of the music industry. Some of these roles were found to be non-existent in Vhembe; hence the researcher relied on international and national interview findings conducted at Midem, the largest global trade show for the music eco system. This section is divided into themes according to different segments of the industry and the impact of digital technology on them.

### 5.3. BRIEF BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION OF MAIN INFORMANTS

PARTICIPANT	PROFILE
Emanuel Mamphogoro	Former gospel singer who is now a music producer and mixing engineer. Emanuel owns Win Man Recording Studio in Sibasa. He holds two certificates of Sound Engineering. He won two South African Crown Gospel Awards (2015 and 2016) for best engineer. In addition he works as a police officer (SAPS)
Hanedzani Mutele	An indie recording artist and producer who owns a recording studio in his house. He produced many artists and made his first album in 1999, after working with a group called African Renaissance, led by former University of Venda lecture Noel Khumalo. He now has four albums and works as a police officer (SAPS).
Alfred Nemauluma	Founder of Billham Studio in 2002 with Hany Mutele, the Bill Recording Studio in 2006 (which have both since closed,) and Difhisani Music Shop in Thohoyandou. He executive produced many artists, and also has two albums under his name. He worked for Escom for many years and now freelances as an electrician.
Mulalo Mukwevho aka Benjamin Morel	Studied sound engineering at Allenby Campus JHB and owns Burning Shack Productions. He produced Colbert Mukwevho, and is well known as the best Reggae producer in Venda. He is a singer and plays bass for other artists/bands. He released his own single under Rudeboy Productions.
Mutendas	He is a recording artist who recorded his first two albums under Gallo Records in 1997 and 1998. Since 1999 he is an independent recording artist. He produced his former wife Mariana's music and records at Winman studio in Sibasa Thohoyandou.
A.J Tshisevhe	A founding member of a music trio called Cornerstone. They have a number of independently released albums. He is a chairperson of an artist's cooperative called <i>Nambi dza Devhula</i> , based in Vhembe.
Gabriel Tshisikule	GTP recording studio owner which was the first independently owned studio in Vhembe. He holds a National Higher Certificate in Music from University of Venda, Diploma in Sound Engineering from Durban Westville University and a Diploma in Computer Technology specializing in hardware from College Campus Wits.

Hendrik Nematili	Murangi Production owner. He is a Univen Music graduate who worked for the Noel Khumalo studio in Thohoyandou Block F, in the 1990's.
Chris Thiba	A local independent reggae artist who works for the provincial department of housing with a Master's Degree in Town Planning from University of Venda.
Mercy Masakona	A gospel singer with five recordings under her belt. She is Masters graduate who did her research on music piracy and is presently studying for a PhD in Venda indigenous dance music at University of Venda.
Muofhe	An Indie singer from Vhembe.
G Muzzy	A young Hip-hop producer from Nzhelele.
Rita D	Owner of Rita D Entertainment. She manages Makhadzi and several commercial artists in Vhembe.
Fabrice Geba (France)	A founder of an independent music publishing company called Take-off Publishing, based in Paris, France.
Mobeatz Bangr (Ghana)	A music composer and producer from Ghana who lives in the United States of America.
Dana Elle (Israel)	An independent pop female singer from Israel.
Hlahla (Pretoria)	A Pretoria based indie record label executive.
Bomo	Founder of Bomo Entertainment. He's also a Ven-rap artist and producer.
Naphy M.	A gospel singer from Vhembe district.
Sy Ntuli	A former head of CJC Music School and an indie artist who won the SAMA award for his debut album. He is now based in Durban.

#### 4.2. DIGITALISATION AND THE NEW MUSIC BUSINESS MODEL

In her YouTube video titled *"Music Industry, What Music Industry?"*, a long-time music industry photographer who served as head of creative for many big labels, including Motown and Electro, Carol Friedman opens the video with a statement: "What music industry? Music industry is gone". She explained why she said so by addressing these points: "the music industry was filled with people and departments, legal departments, marketing departments, A and R, promo. Now a label that had two hundred and fifty employees has seven and this is not an exaggeration. And then there is everybody here flying, just flapping in the wind on their

own saying we don't need a label." She then said that the whole machine has changed as radio and tour lead songs into charts and big sales. She further said that to be a number one album one had to sell two or three million records in the "old music business", but now a number one album is estimated at only seventy thousand sold. She believes "no one is going to stores to buy music... it went from an album cover this big [showing with her hands] to a CD this big [downsizing it with her hands], then to one of those flip (cover) with just the disc, not the booklet 'cause no one cared about that; then straight to the ear. And now that's gone too. Hopefully there is still gonna be a need for virtual..." (Big Think, 2010).

She believes that this is both bad and good news but that music industry paradigm is gone and she hopes there are still going to be new pioneers to rebuild it.

In June 2016 at MIDEM in Cannes, France, a former SONY Africa representative, Rab Bakari, from Ghana, explained that he got laid off his work because of new technology innovations. This supports Friedman's claim that labels have severely downsized their staff due to the new innovations such as online marketing and distribution. With technology, work that use to be done by a team of people is compressed to one person and a computer. Now many indie artists believe they can do it themselves without the support from major labels, which could be much better for Vhembe artists considering their lack of adoption into the major label-driven, corporate music industry. Honey Mutele, interviewed for this research paper said:

I can say people who are doing music now should thank God as we can see that music and the business is no longer found in Joburg only. We no longer take long trips to Joburg. We are moving with time so fast that when a new technology tool comes out, within a short period of time someone here already has adopted it. Now we can say things are not passing us by [in Vhembe]. Artists are meeting their creative expectations here too and don't have to travel to major cities to make music or to succeed the industry.

(Interview, Mutele, 2017)

Mutele has been in the industry for around two decades and has observed the digital evolution and is embracing it. He declared with a big smile, that access to resources is the highlight for him. Technology has made audio recording and music video production very affordable with a much higher quality than during the prior music era. For content that is not played on national or local TV stations, online streaming presents yet another option for music sales in the new digital era, which is the most preferred these days. Now that television channels such as the

SABC and MNet are no longer centres of success, YouTube and other audio streaming services are taking over. Now budget is no longer a main hindering factor for aspiring indie artists.

There are many examples of indie artists in South Africa, on the continent and the world at-large, who have leveraged technology to build their business model within the new value chain system that led them into international success. In an interview held in Midem 2016 (Cannes, France) a singer from Israel, Nazareth called Dana Elle. said:

Through technology, it's now easy to connect to the rest of the world. The industry in Nazareth is very slow but through the Internet I worked with a producer from London on some of my songs. The music industry is more exciting than ever before, because indie artists are now able to compete on a global scale. My music is on iTunes and other digital stores. All credits to digital innovation.

(Interview, Dana Elle, 2016)

She raised the issue of international collaboration without expensive traveling cost where a song can be composed in another part of the world and finalised somewhere else through instant file sharing using the Internet. The music industry value chain is now compressed into a computer where almost everything can be done in one space. Benjamin Morel said that:

Digital technology has simplified things because one can record a song in his bedroom studio and post it online at the same time. It provides access to a widespread market very quick. You find that doing all that does not cost that much, and one gets ones product or service directly to the market and youth are very much into the Internet.

(Interview, Morel, 2017)

An international renowned artist DJ Black Coffee is one of the local South African success stories who believe that the internet is a great platform for local artists. He has his own record label and soon will be launching a digital platform and app for independent music artists to showcase their work as he explained it on his keynote address at Midem<sup>5</sup> (2018). At Midem in 2016, many of artists - from all over the world - expressed different views on the digitalization of the music industry, and most agreed it is a good development as it has brought more affordable industry access for indie artists than ever before. Some of these views along with

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<sup>5</sup> MIDEM is the premier global music eco-system conference which is used as a platform to connect industry leaders to the global market place through building networks. Artists attend it for international networks and showcases. It was founded in 1967.

different aspects of the industry are quoted in the following section, followed by an analysis of different territories that are relevant or shared by local Vhembe artists. Fabrice Geba, founder of music publishing company Take-Off Publishing, in Paris, France, emphasized the issue of artist's protection on online music platforms. As a publisher, he is very keen to ensure that artists make money from their streamed and downloaded music, in the new digital business model. He said:

Besides ensuring that songwriters and composers receive payment when their compositions are used commercially, a music publisher facilitates sync licensing deals by promoting compositions to recording artists, the film, television and advertising business. The real work of the publisher is to protect and defend the rights of the artists. Artists have lot of problems with rights, especially because of the internet. The internet is good for artist exposure, but most of the platforms don't respect the works of the artists. And they really need some people to work with, to be powerful to defend their rights... I think it's quite hard because if artists are not connected, with good representatives who work with them, it is hard for the artist, as they will otherwise be alone in this business, this internet business. When you attend MIDEM you often see that there is a problem between the collecting societies and the You-tubers for example. They (artists) really need to be paid for their work. We know that the platforms pay some of the music that they produce, but not all, and it not fair. We need to save the creation to save the music. If we don't defend these artists, we don't have creativity. They (streaming platforms) need to understand that we depend on each other and if they don't pay the artists properly, we won't have music.

(Interview, Geba, 2016)

Mr Geba's view relates to that of Harvard University professor Damon Krukosky who is a member of the duo Damon and Naomi, mentioned in chapter two saying that Spotify gave them a check for one dollar and five cents for over 5000 streams which they had to share as a duo. He also said streaming services work better as a promotional platform but not as a business model. On a panel discussion at Midem, collecting societies like CISAC moderated a discussion about streaming sites such as Spotify and YouTube, and the author witnessed a lot of anger, frustration and complaints due to streaming platforms not fairly compensating content producers. Such claims of artist rip-off once lead artists such as Adele and Taylor Swift to withdraw their accounts from some of the biggest stream-lines like Spotify, as mentioned in chapter two. However, there seems to be a contrast between how major artists and indie artists view and use these platforms. Fabrice Geba further said: "Now the best way to live through music is to perform. I see the platforms like Spotify and Deezer more for the visibility of their music than to have money. Now data captures where and for how long people listen to your

music to determine the demographics of your market; you can even get information about their age” (interview, Geba, 2017). The same points were addressed by Mobeatz Benger from Ghana whom the researcher also spoke with in France. He said:

Before when you made music you had to bring it to radio stations and pay a lot of money to get it played, but now with the internet and digitization of music production and dissemination, you can actually sit in your room and send your music to iTunes, get played fairly easily and build a social media following (typically for free, unless it’s a subscription platform). I think digitalization is good. I think it’s a positive vibe for people and I think people should just utilize it and find ways to get your music out there.”

(Interview, Mobeatz, 2016)

Nico and Vince, also mentioned in chapter two, are such an example of internet streaming success, and credit that to digital platforms. This indicates that most independent artists are first and foremost concerned with getting their name out there before they focus on making money, and they mostly share their music on non-commercial websites for free downloading to get their name and music out there and garner broader exposure. A young producer from Dzanani, Limpopo, called G. Muzzy, usually shares his music via WhatsApp, datafilehost.com, fakazela.com, Mzansi mp3, Facebook and many other social media sites. He told the researcher that his present primary target is to get exposure, more so than making money. His music circulates amongst local teenagers and has many followers. Not only that, but he charges as much as R300 per show when performing in local bars, lounges and pubs. This is very cheap for a take-home price considering the amount of time spent on preparation and performance duration. He says he has produced more than 100 songs of which most were shared through the above-mentioned channels. Despite all the mixed feelings about other aspects of digital technology, the majority of artists interviewed for this paper seem to agree on one fact; that this technology is here to stay and is shaping the future of many artists to bloom and doom, as they come and easily fade away.

#### **5.4. BRIEF BACKGROUND ON VHEMBE (OR VENDA) COMERCIAL MUSIC**



The researcher observed that in the history of the South African recording industry, Venda commercial<sup>6</sup> music seems to have taken a backseat compared to music of other regions or tribes in South Africa and the world at large. Only a handful of artists from the region were signed by labels before the digital era, and many went independent, while others fell into oblivion without gaining commercial success. One exception is the late Dan Tshanda of the group Splash, who spent most of his time in Botswana. Artists like Adziambei Band, Thrilling Artists, Colbert Mukwevho (aka Harley and the Rasta Family), Sibasa Pirates, Roxley Masevhe, Irene Mawela, John Mandiza, Daniel Luambo, and many more are amongst those who were signed by major record labels and became popular in the 80s going into mid 90s in Venda. Their production quality was top-notch and the music compositions matured as many of them were able to access more advanced recording studios in Johannesburg under recording contracts with companies such as Gallo Record, while some more indigenous artists were recorded by Radio Venda (now called Phalaphala FM). People loved their music and most of it is still played today. The most surprising, or disappointing factor, is that regardless of how popular their music was locally, they never accumulated material wealth and fame, like the neighbouring Tsonga artists such as Thomas Chauke, Peny Peny, Peter Tenet and others. Some of those Venda artists are dead and those that are still alive and recording still struggle to earn a living through music.

### **5.5. VHEMBE ARTISTS' PERCEPTION OF DIGITAL RECORDING**

This section focuses on local artist's general understanding of digital technology, how it has impacted and changed the recording industry, and its business models. This section also informs the study about the artists' views on whether they think digitization has been good or bad for the music industry. To begin with, the researchers asked artists how they understand digitalization and what they think about it. A few of the answers were:

The technological revolution came as an aid to artists because they would have to travel long distances like to Joburg for recording, where they would usually struggle to find a place to sleep. When you arrive, you realize the city life is very expensive. Many used to leave and return without a recording because it was too hard and too costly. That meant that such artists would stop creating their art; however, now technology has helped artists archive their goals in many ways.

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<sup>6</sup> "Commercial music can be defined as any music produced that is being marketed directly to the general public by any medium" (<https://www.imro.ie/faq/what-is-commercial-music/>)



(Interview, Tshisevhe, 2018)

In agreement with Tshisevhe who addressed the struggle of the past, Chris Thiba has this to say:

Technology has contributed to cutting costs for artists who had to travel all the way to Joburg for recording, but on the other hand, it is contributing to killing the quality of music because everyone with a computer believes they can record music, simply by using pirated software and without proper plugins to enhance the production quality.

(Interview, Thiba, 2018)

Thiba agrees with Tshisevhe on the fact of access to recording but he is more concerned about local Vhembe music production quality. On the other hand, Bil Recording Studio owner artists' manager Mr Nemauluma praised technology for affording local artists recording opportunities and its ability to correct performance inabilities.

Through the application of digital technology, we began to realize how many singers there are in Limpopo, because previously going to record in Joburg was very expensive for them. Many gave up their singing or music, but after we brought technology home to Limpopo, we recorded and released many artists with a good standard production, to compete with those produced in Johannesburg, as we used good machines and new digital technology tools that could enhance or rectify areas where the artist may be lacking in skill or knowledge to produce a higher quality sound and product.

(Interview, Nemauluma, 2017)

In contrast with Thiba, Nemauluma indicate that local productions are as good as the once done in Johannesburg. Thiba speaks of ill-equipped studios while Nemauluma speaks of "good machines and new digital technology" owned by some local studios. It seems Thiba and Nemauluma agrees on the fact that good equipment results to quality production but chance takers without proper equipment seem to harness the opportunity, hence the poor quality productions. Bomo addressed the following points on the matter:

I think it is the right evolution. This means things are now easy and better. According to me it's a good thing because production and distribution moved from analogue and now we record with a computer. Now we are able to own studios. In the past we use to go to Joburg.

(Interview, Bomo, 2018)

While Bomo seem to only focus on the positive impact of new technology in answer to the question, Mercy Masakona Madzivhandila said:

I can say technology brought the good and the bad. It makes recording accessible. Like for example if one cannot afford to call a band; computer software can provide it.

(Masakona, interview, 2018)

Thiba and Mercy Masakona did not only reflect on the positive, but also addressed the pitfalls as they said that together with the good the bad came along. The issue of quality production as mentioned by Thiba is addressed in another section, as several interviewees mentioned it during conversations. When Mutele said that current artists in the music business should thank God, it really emphasizes the fact that, unlike in the past when artist had to struggle to find recording deals, now everything is easily within their reach. Mamphogoro said that it is amazingly simple to become an indie artist because of the use of software, which just about everyone can access. He also said that the movement of putting everything into a computer helped a lot. Many artists are succeeding from that because the computer became accessible to anyone. All of the artists in this research emphasized the point of accessibility to resources as the most positive benefit derived from digital recording. Bomo said that it has enabled many like him to own studios. This is true because analogue recording machines were too expensive to be purchased by ordinary persons, especially young students or unemployed artists. Most addressed the fact that only a short while ago the only option for an artist to record was to travel to Johannesburg, which was not easy either because of the travel and accommodation expenses, which had to be evaluated before even considering the highly priced studio costs. Ashley of Matshete Studio, related many experiences of going to Cool Sport Studio in Johannesburg, including how other big artists would intimidate new artists and make it hard for them to enter the industry, to avoid competition. He said:

It was hard to even get your demo to be listened to, I mean just to listen to a demo. Because it was so hard, we got access to enter the studio. Just to go and sit in when others were working was not prohibited. Then after a while we would throw in an idea and a producer would say 'there you are right'. It developed into friendship, then I started going to studio like I worked there. Therefore, I started learning those machines... Technology has really made life easy.

(Interview, Ashley, 2018)

His initial idea was to record but when that failed he started working as a non-paid assistant engineer in Johannesburg until he come back home and opened his own studio. He only opened Machete Music Studio after computer based recording replaced old technology when tracking vocals was done with tools such as reel to reel which most ordinary people could not afford. Now he records whenever and whatever he likes in his own studio at his house in Makatu village, Nzhelele. His experience relates to the point mentioned by Tshisevhe when he said some artists even returned without recording an album. Although Ashley still uses some of the previous analogue sound modules and audio processing units, he credits computers for affording him a studio. His main challenge is having his own music played on radio stations, despite having produced a well-known Venda gospel artist Paul Mulaudzi.

Mercy Masakona Madzivhandila said that recording is very affordable now compared to years ago. Speaking of her albums, she said: “the first album cost me roughly R5000 – R6000 and prices kept rising until I recorded the last album for around R15 000 - and that recording was semi live (a mixture of live recorded instruments and digitally programed sounds). This excluded transportation costs...” She never had to travel a long distance as all five of her albums were recorded in different studios around Vhembe district. She said: “I used studios from here in Venda. The very first one I used was the late Dalton Mbedzi studio. I went to Mamphogoro and also went to Worship House under pastor Dagada.” (Interview, Masakona, 2018). In line with her point of affordability, the owner of Winman studio she mentioned, Mamphogoro said:

In the old days there was no studio recording budget. It was a matter of whether you could sing and thereby get signed by a company. They would record and do everything. But there came a time when you would have to go to Johannesburg with R6000 and book some hours to record, and if you were short you’d just top-up some more money. But long time ago [before the early 1990s] you could not even talk about recording money because it was impossible to record.

(Interview, Mamphogoro, 2017)

According to Mamphogoro statement, before the digital era, independent artists could not even dream of getting a recording budget because the prices were so high that they could only record after scoring a record contract. Hence, both Nemauluma and Chris Thiba agree that technology contributed to discovering many local artists. Mr. Thiba said that new technology also helped cut recording costs to produce albums; hence there are so many artists today in the market. In

line with Thiba, Many artists accredit the digital revolution directly to their ability to ever record an album. They believe without it recording would just remain a foreign dream for many. Thiba also addressed a very important point when he said that some claim to be sound engineers because they have a computer with pirated DAW, and without basic recording skills or musical ear. Therefore, some in the industry criticize the new easily accessible recording tools for giving access to arguable less-talented artists who crowd the industry with mediocre music. The lack of regulation provided by record industry Artist and Repertoire (“A&R”) managers, who were responsible for talent scouting, the artistic and commercial development of the recording artist, and who determine what is a talent or not to enter the industry (in the past), has made all that possible.

The issue of talent measure or regulation lies within a subjective view or taste. Many artists looked down on (artists like) Makhadzi before she became the best seller in Vhembe and most booked performer in most major and small music events nationally. She was criticized for her massive use of Auto-Tune vocal plugin and low production quality. Now that she is the most well received local artist and her music is played everywhere in South Africa, her former critics have changed the tone. Her example is an indication that the issue of talent has no straight cut of definition. Her manager Rita D indicated that using different producers and collaborations with trending artists such as King Munada generated her success. Most of her music is recorded in Johannesburg, except few collaboration she recorded with local artists in local home studios.

Benjamin Morel said that technology has shifted the power from recording industry executives to the audience to judge from the vast world of music presented to them. He believes that is another good thing brought by digitalization as no one can be shut out of the industry by someone who thinks they are not talented when consumers may think the opposite. Morel said that the use of technology also helps enhance the sound where singers can not meet a required standard, by using plugins that may help with pitching and voice toning. He believes this is a good thing and not a sign of weakness, as no artist has the mandate to judge the other. It is just the way things are in this digital age. This introduces another point; whether local Vhembe artists meet the standard required to compete in the global market (which is addressed after the next theme). Along with many positive and few negative views, some artists raised concerns about piracy which will also be discussed later on.

## 5.6. DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY AND LOCAL VHEMBE RECORDING STUDIOS

This section addresses the way in which digital software technology and the computer has turned many households with a computer into a recording studio. It also looks at the history of recording studios in Vhembe, the pioneers behind the movement, and examines different recording studios and their method of production. The purpose of this section is to determine to what extent such technologies provide recording opportunities for local artists and those who work behind the scenes in the industry, affording some the ability to own recording studios.

Digital recording can be done in many ways with different recording tools, using the computer as the main tool. As the study is based in Vhembe, artists were asked to describe the kind of studios they recorded at, and if they achieved their expected project outcome. As most artists could not provide technical information about recording equipment and production and mastering techniques, the researcher visited a number of studios around Vhembe to talk to owners, producers and engineers while also observing their recording methods. Some of the information in this chapter also comes from conversations with international indie artist and producers at Midem in France in 2016, as well as some indie artist based in Johannesburg to compare views on an international level.

The studios in this study met the minimal production quality standard, regardless of the state of devices or equipment they possessed. Research showed that some of the studios consisted of young *Ven-rap* stars recording on a laptop or computer with a basic mini jack microphone port used for recording vocals and a headphone output connected to some sort of audio playback device, ranging from computer speakers to home play audio system. At first glance those studios were left out of the research as most of the music they recorded was meant to be shared through cell phones and non-commercial website like [datafilehost.com](http://datafilehost.com). But after listening to G Muzzy's (whose real name is Phumudzo Magau) songs, the author was reminded of Black Coffee's humble beginnings, similar to that of the Ven-rap artists, and those studios made it back into the research. In his Midem 2018 Keynote Address, Black Coffee revealed that his first album was created using very basic music-making software. He said: "I don't know how to explain the production stages of my album because all I did was put down the basic ideas that I had, I didn't use any MIDI controllers; everything was played with a computer mouse" (Black Coffee, 2018). He added that "the use of live instruments in a song is also very important, giving a track that final magic touch and bringing it to life" (Designs, 2018). No one

can deny the impact of digital production that gave him a kick start into the industry. If not for the technology developments, we may not be speaking of this iconic South African internationally renowned house DJ and Producer.

Charlie, a producer at Take-Off Publishing produces his music on FL Studio as it is user friendly and good for people like him who did not study music. “Now people no longer record live like before. If you get a live band to play on a midi song, it definitely sounds bigger and better. Midi sound is great, but it can be even better if played live” (Interview, Charlie, 2017). He emphasized his point by comparing the nineties Hip-Hop genre with the one produced today: “Music made from sampling sounds much better because it was a sampling<sup>7</sup> of live bands. Big songs will still be made with real instruments instead of digital.” Without the new technology it would be hard for him to produce music without knowing how to play an instrument. But he emphasized the point mentioned by Black Coffee and Alana (from Tel Aviv, Israel, also interviewed during Midem along with Charlie) about the use of live instruments in production who said: “The market is tough now because the music is too much and it’s hard to find real music. There is so much electronic sound. Eh! It’s so hard to find live music and live musicians” (Interview, Alana, 2017). Alana plays Saxophone and her single then was recorded using a mixture of Midi sounds and live instruments. Therefore one could conclude that many artists believe that while technology made it easier to access the recording industry it has also taken away the soul of music; live instrumentation. Hence artists like Black Coffee fuse live instruments to most of his music.

Recording music is now so simple that a high school kid with a computer could claim to have a recording studio just because he could record songs using downloaded instrumental tracks (mostly referred to as “Beats” in the street). G Muzzy who started out by owning such a studio when he was in high school, at his home in Dzanani, and well known to be one of the most popular Hip-Hop and Trap producers among his peers, said he charges R30 to record a song if someone brings their own beat. “I sell my beats for R100 and give two free ones at the same time, as I am still trying to get my name out there... Who’s gonna come if I up my price? No one” (Interview, G Muzzy, 2018). This service includes mixing and mastering with Cubase software. He claims to have recorded around two hundred local Vhembe young artists. And,

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<sup>7</sup> Sampling is a process of taking a bar (a piece) or few bars of a song and loop it to create another song from it which was used by mostly Hip-hop artists in the beginning of the music genre.



like Black Coffee, who knows if G Muzzy or other local artists could end-up in Harlem, Miami or Paris!

The author of this paper observed another Hip-Hop, House and Kwaito producer, Lalo Ex, at Conti-Mental studio. His approach was different as he preferred using Reason software than FL Studio software to create beats. As a music producer graduate of Soul Candi Institute of Music, he learned basic music theory and keyboard techniques which he utilizes when composing a beat. He could use both the midi keyboard and the computer mouse approach in production, but he mostly prefers using a midi keyboard. The researcher observed that his production approach is not different from that of Ashley who owns Machete Music Studio located ten minutes walking distance from ContiMental Studio. Ashley has kept the analogue sound processing material and uses them as sound modules when programming music with Cubase DAW and a Roland dx7 keyboard. He also has a 32 channel Tascam analogue mixer. In contrast with Mobeatz Bangr who said that now one doesn't need a stack of external audio signal processing units (used to add reverbs, equalize and compress or limit audio signal) like previously, because everything is on one CD or a flash drive, or one can download such plugins to use with a DAW. Ashley also owns lots of audio processing units which he uses for mostly vocal processing. He said that he prefers using them because they have the kind of sound he needs for his style of music.

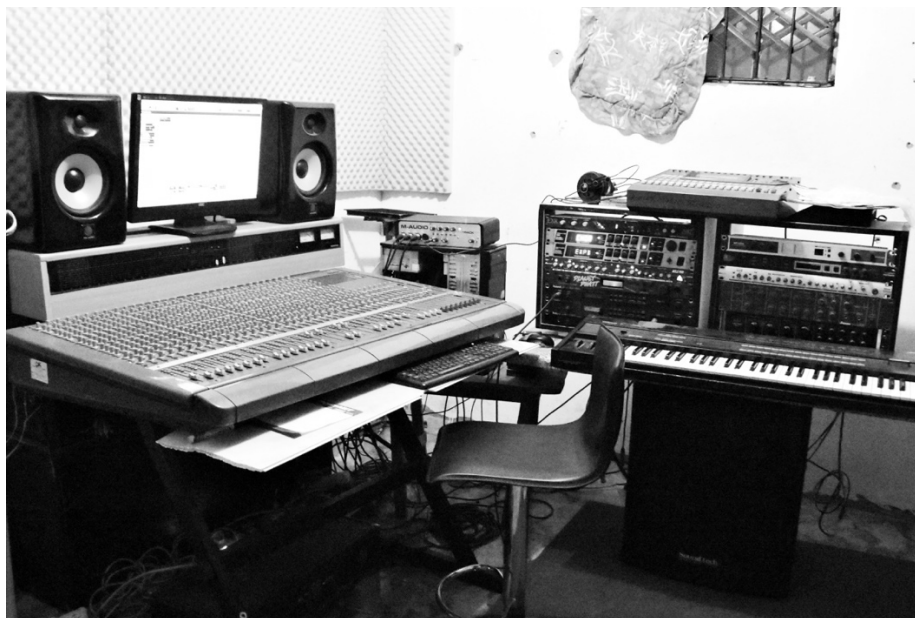


Figure 5: Machete Recording Studio in Nzhelele, Vhembe.

Tshisevhe said that all four of their Cornerstone albums were recorded at Burning Shack studio in Thohoyandou Block F, owned by Benjamin Morel. He said: “He is also our producer, but we write all our music.” He described Burning Shack accordingly:

It is a very small studio which one can carry around. It does not matter whether one uses a tractor or a hand-hoe; it is a question of whether one knows what they are doing. We don’t have big studios here in Venda, but we are coming along. As I move around a lot, I have seen only a few developing studios such as the one owned by Emanuel Mamphogoro, and the studio we recorded at still has a long way to go and needs support. And I know Vhembe Heritage [meaning ContiMental Studio] studio is good but still needs support as well. Another studio is VCC studio which got support from National Lottery and now it looks better. There are many studios producing great music.

(Interview, Tshisevhe, 2017)

Next Benjamin Morel was interviewed about production at his Burning Shack studio, as he is considered the best Reggae producer around, who also co-produced his legendary brother, Colbert Mukwevho. He confirmed that his studio is not ideal for pro production but he hopes to improve it one day. In response to questions about his recording setup and software he replied:

It is just a basic soundcard with two inputs, a condenser microphone, Yamaha monitor speakers, a keyboard and a PC with recording software. And we work in this shack with no soundproof. (He said that pointing behind himself by nudging his head to a shack he was leaning against.) Soo! We just use some software because these days technology has simplified things and with this basic setup one does a complete production up to mixing and mastering. I use Cubase and Nuendo but I prefer Nuendo more because one can do a lot with its visual mixer and it does many tracks. How can I say it? I work inside the box.

(Interview, Morel, 2017)

The shack had microphone hanging from the roof when recording, and artists sitting on beer crates. Morel said it was frustrating to record in such an environment: “a good take can be ruined by a truck or a noisy car passing by on the street that gets captured into a recording with the voice.” Yet, many artists flock to his studio as it is known to have the best Reggae sound in Venda. “I recorded my latest single here and we completed it in Johannesburg at Rudeboy Entertainment, where there is a basic setup similar to the one I use” (Interview, Morel, 2017). The single was released under his stage name Benjamin Morel. During the interview he surprised the researcher by calling one of his nephews to bring the studio equipment to the shack from the house. It was just an old looking computer box with, a very small setup put on



a small television stand or table. On the other side, Bomo of Bomo Entertainment said the following about his studio: “I have a small setup which is a computer, small 4 channel mixer, a microphone and a 2 channel Lambda Lexicon soundcard. I also made a small booth. Those are the things that form that simple setup” (Interview, Bomo, 2017). The difference between the two small studios is that Bomo has a little mixer and a booth but Morel has a Midi keyboard. When Morel spoke about the DAWs he uses to record, he said he prefers Nuendo. This is what Bomo said about his mastering preferences: “There are things called plugins that we download. For example, when I’m done mixing my song I use a mastering plugin called Isotope. It levels the volume and balances everything to standard” (Bomo, interview, 2018). These plugins replaced expensive stacks of external audient processing boards. Speaking about the difficulty of owning a recording studio when he started his music career, Mamphogoro said:

“It was very hard because owning studio equipment was very expensive and one had to also have a good space to have a good studio look, which could only be found in Johannesburg. The only studio around [Venda] was at a radio station. We tried recording at Louis Trichardt<sup>8</sup> with some white guys but the quality was poor which pushed us to go to Joburg.”

(Interview, Mamphogoro, 2017)

Now one does not need a lot to own a studio. Burning Shack studio resembles many studios found in the region where Vhembe’s well-known hit songs are recorded. For example, Eliph D studio is built of a windows laptop computer, 2 input M Audio interface, AKG condenser microphone tied on a stand holding it together with masking tape, a unit player which he uses as a monitor speaker and a borrowed keyboard during production. This studio is moved from one room to the other in the house and has recorded a number of gospel and Venda traditional albums. One example is a group called Vhavenda Cultural Group which is nominated in many music awards such as TSHIMA and SATMA. A.J Tshisevhe said; “It does not matter whether one uses a tractor or a hand-hoe, it is a matter of whether one knows how to use them.” When Morel was asked if new technology made it possible for him to own a recording studio, he confidently answered with a smile saying: “Very much so. Because it’s way less compared to what one would spend to build an old-style studio. I spent very little money. I can say my studio cost less than R20 000 to build, which is just a fraction of what used to be spent for one album

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<sup>8</sup> Louis Trichardt used to be a white town situated in Venda [now referred to as Makhado] during apartheid era.

recording” This point is in line with Mamphogoro’s above comment about the cost of having to own a studio in the past. Morel’ studio cost could be much more compared to the amount Eliph D spent on his recording equipment.



Figure 6: Eliph D Recording Studio

Winman Studio seems to have the best equipment when compared to most other studios visited by the researcher. An interview with Emanuel was held at his studio where he converted a few rooms in his big house into a standard live recording studio, with a 6/3 square meter control room (which used to be a single garage), a 4/4 square meter band booth, a 2/2 drum booth, and 1½/2 square meter vocal booth (modified from a dining room). The studio is equipped with top of the range standard recording gears such as iMac computer, Tascam DM48 digital mixing desk, two direct-to-disk multi-track recording-playbacks, DL32R (that he also uses on live recordings), a number of audio interfaces with preamps, two pairs of monitor speakers and many other tools. All the walls are well acoustic treated. At the time of the interview he was mixing a gospel album by a Swaziland artist. Being a well-known gospel singer himself, Mamphogoro could no longer record his own albums because he was working full time as a mixing engineer for many artists across the country and some neighbouring countries. Winman Studio is rated one of the best studio around the Vhembe district and seem to have the best sound quality. The studio recorded many award winning albums, including Crown Gospel Awards best sound engineer, awarded to Mamphogoro.



Figure 7: ContiMental Studio in Nzhelele Vhembe

Honey Mutele was interviewed at Winman studio where he would sometimes record some of his productions, despite owning his own studio at home. Mutele and Morel both learned about the studio business at Noel Khumalo's studio in Thohoyandou Block F, before building their own.

I have my studio in the house, but I also work with Emanuel Mamphogoro where by when I have some project I can work in his studio. I started recording at Noel Khumalo studio who used to be my music lecturer at Univen. We recorded many artists like Colbert Mukwevho, Jacky Nethomboni, Shufflers Ragimana, Kenny Murabi, Tshifhiwa and the New Sound Vibrations. Counting is a waste of energy.

(Interview, Mutele, 2017)

When speaking of the same Noel Khumalo studio Morel said:

In the late '90s I was introduced to digital recording by Noel Khumalo who used to lecture at Univen Music. He had an Apple computer with Cubase software and we would go up there and explore it and record demos. We recorded different types of music like Hip-hop, Reggae, Gospel and everything. After matric I went to study sound engineering at Allenby Campus for one year. After then I came home and did my own recording setup. I then produced artists like Khakhathi, Shufflers, Colbert and others up until now.

(Interview, Morel, 2017)

With the focus on Vhembe or Venda music, one cannot ignore the contributions of Gabriel Tshisikule of GTP (Gabriel Tshisikule Productions). His name always came up when interviewing indie artists who started recording in the '90s. He assisted or recorded many of their earliest works and helped others open their own studios, including the planning and assembling of Ringo studio setup around 1993/94, which was owned by Mr Lishivha. He said he even trained Mr Dama who became the principal engineer there, confirmed by Mr Dama during this research. Gabriel narrated that Emanuel Mamphogoro gave him a Ford Safire vehicle for a computer with few DAWs such as Cake Walk, Wavelab and Cubase 3. When recording an album with his old band at Mamphogoro's then newly acquired studio in 1999, the researcher observed that Mamphogoro would phone-call Gabriel for assistance when facing technical challenges (as he got it from him). This was few years after Mamphogoro recorded his first album "*Dakalo*" with Gabriel as the sound engineer. This is how he [Mamphogoro] explained the recording of the album: "If I still remember well it was a year 1994 that's when I was helped by Gabriel Tshisikule. We recorded the Emanuel Mamphogoro album under a tree. But it was a good album because it sold a lot" (Interview, Mamphogoro, 2017). He went on to describe the kind of equipment they used for that recording under a tree, which at first seemed like a joke. He said:

If I remember it correctly, we used a Yamaha V50 keyboard borrowed from Roxley Masevhe. We also used it to program instruments. We used a Technics Hifi to record voices using some microphones named Joseph, and we had some headphones there under the tree. That's how we recorded and my voice was great. It was here in Venda in a village called Maraxwe. That was my first album on the market."

(Interview, Mamphogoro, 2017)

He further explained how they handled their informal business model from production to dissemination. This was the real DIY (do it yourself) model at its best. He said:

We used to do everything ourselves and asked friends and family for small favours. I remember going to Mbeu Book Shop where my cousin Petrous designed a black and white album sleeve for us. From there we would buy TDK empty cassette tapes and give them to my cousins who owned high fidelity (Hifi) equipment with a recording deck for sound reproduction. They would duplicate them, and then I would hand them to Masevhe to sell them. The cassettes would immediately sell out because people loved the music... From then on, artists realized that you don't have to travel to Joburg to record; you could do it at home in your backyard, even under a tree. Many artists like Rambuwani, a well-known gospel musician, used the same approach. In the evening we would copy and reproduce the tapes, and during the day we would sell our goods

and make a penny... That was common practice back then. Even when I started recording professionally and was signed by BK, Banzi Khubeka, who use to be a member of CJB group, I took a Technics keyboard with programed music from another singer called Tancred. There was the matter of recording voices and the song, but they keyboard was the main thing back then.”

(Interview, Mamphogoro, 2017)

Gabriel also confirmed the recording stories, and added a funny vignette about a dove that was singing in the tree above which got captured into a recording along with the bird relieving itself on Mamphogoro. He laughed when recalling the story as did Mamphogoro when reminded about that experience. According to Gabriel Tshisikule, Mamphogoro was not the first one to record using that method. He said: “Tancred Netshiongolwe’s first album *‘Takulanani nga Lufuno’* was the very first one to be recorded using that method. By then I was still using Vho-Masevhe’s Yamaha V50 for programing and his Technics sound system for vocals. This was before he sold that keyboard to Vho-Makhesha of Maraxwe” (Interview, Tshisikule, 2018). Then later he got a Roland MC 500 sequencer from someone he met while recording Mamphogoro’s album in Maraxwe, who did not even know what the equipment was or what it was capable of doing.

During a follow-up call for more details about Gabriel’s studio, after learning it was actually founded in Venda before moving to Johannesburg, he confirmed that GTP was registered in 1990, but Gabriel began recording in 1992, at what he believes was the very first independently owned studio in Venda, followed by Ringo in 1993-1994 and Noel Khumalo around 1997.

Hani Mutele, [a recording artist, producer and sound engineer], confirmed this and referred the researcher to his peer Hendrick Nematili, and the three of them, including Gabriel, studied music together at the University of Venda. Nematili then highlighted the fact that he was the very first sound engineer to work at Noel Khumalo studio. The very first album recorded there that went commercial was Colbert Mukwevho’s 1997 *“Mulovha, Namusi na Matshelo.”* It was recorded after Noel Khumalo’s group which featured Hani Mutele and Nematili released the album African Renaissance. Unlike the Colbert Mukwevho one African Renaissance album never went commercial. Nematili said:

I am the one who went to Colbert when he said he wanted to go record in Joburg. I told him there is a studio here where you can record for much cheaper. He came to see the



studio and was convinced. Then he came with his younger brother Mulalo (referred to here as Benjamin Morel,) to record. He was still a young boy then. I remember Colbert would sing a line and Mulalo would play it. He played just about every single instrument if I remember well. That is why I respect him musically to this day. We then snuck into Univen radio station and recorded backup vocals at night, and in the morning we left so that we wouldn't get caught. It was before the morning program went on air; but they had equipment and we didn't and I had access to the studio as I used to be a student there. We then finalized the lead vocals at Noel studio. After that we went to Joburg to borrow a tape deck recorder as there wasn't any around... Noel's studio was the very first studio to use modern recording technology with a computer and a DAW. I think he had either an Apple Mac 720 or an 820. The other artists in our community were still using the old recording methods.

(Interview, Nematli, 2018)

Hendrick and Mutele confirmed that GTP was the very first independently owned recording studio in Venda before it moved to Johannesburg. The other two studios which were Radio Thohoyandou (now mixed with Radio Venda to Form Phalaphala Fm) and Univen Studio were state-owned enterprises.

In her study "*The Small Independent Recording Studio in South Africa*," a former Wits master's degree student Ilse-Louise Herholdt-Powell, defined a recording studio as "The place where sound is recorded. This can be any kind of space, from a top-of-the range luxury recording suite to a garage or living room. Usually the space consists of a control room with computers and sound processors as well as a recording or isolation booth with an acoustically treated environment" (2007, xi). When visiting Tshigomboza's studio, the researcher found a computer, an analogue mixing desk, audio interface and some other live equipment. He uses his lounge as a control room and put the drums in the garage for a drum booth by running a snake chord<sup>9</sup> between the two rooms. The studio looks old school and he only connects it when there is a project as he has to rearrange his living room for live recordings. This type of home studio fits the description in-line with the broad recording studio definition given by Herholdt-Powell, except that Tshigomboza has no standard acoustics in his house from the researcher's observation during a site visit. The studio is however known for its quality productions when it comes to *Sungura* (mostly referred to as *Tshingondo* in Venda) music genre.

From this field research and interviews with old and new artists, it is clear that the evolution of technology and digital production tools presented a lot of opportunities for artists as many now

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<sup>9</sup> A snake chord is a number of audio signal chords tied in one thick cable.

record their products at the comfort of their own homes. Hence we find that in almost every village in Vhembe district there is someone who claims to have a recording studio. It then prompts a question on what determines a standard recording studio. It used to be that a computer in itself without an external audio interface could not be referred to as a recording studio, because it does not record audio signal through a standard audio input (which is either a jack or XLR input). The reason for such an opinion was that a computer on its own was not meant for such work, hence there are many types of audio interfaces ranging from cheap to highly expensive state of art ones. But listening to how Gabriel and Emanuel did “*Dakalo*” album and how producers like G Muzzy record, this research found that the definition of a recording studio does not have a finite description, but can be determined by the product outcome, rather than the space or equipment used.

As mobile technology advances it is very possible that cell-phones will become a central recording studio device, like the computer, as the phones already have music recording applications like Audio Droid, Audio Mix Studio, N-Track Studio Music DAW, Music Maker Jam and other. Mamphogoro had explored this and shared the reactions he had heard from artists and producers when told that Reel and DAT (Digital Audio Tape) would in time be replaced by computer recording:

The advent of putting everything into a computer helped a lot. Many artists are succeeding because the computer became accessible to everyone. I remember when studying sound engineering in early 90s some said that in 15 years, people will be recording everything onto a computer. Many people who read it in magazines such as *Music Maker* denied it, saying a computer won't be able to record such things. But it did not even take three years. We started hearing of programs such as Cubase and Cakewalk which could record voices. From that point on it started.

(Interview, Mamphogoro, 2017)

With technology, everything is getting smaller, faster and more accessible – and even more affordable. During the 2016 USA trip to the South by Southwest (SXWS) music, film and interactive conference in Austin, Texas, the researcher met a Japanese artist whom had developed a cell phone music app called *Hum-On* with his team of app developers. This is an app where one can hum a melody then it plays the chords progression and harmonization. The app allows you to choose the type of rhythm or musical genre, as well as the instrumentation. Later on studying in the studies, the researcher remembered that conversation, and downloaded the app on Play Store. However, while it had gone commercial, the app's interpretation of melodies and functioning was a bit rudimentary; yet at the same time, the researcher realized

that music production will no longer be a matter mostly of music skill; with such application integrated into recording DAWs.

### 5.7. LOCAL PRODUCTION STANDARD

This theme deals with the issue of production quality as it is fundamental to the success of a song or production. A beautiful composition could be disadvantaged by bad recording or mixing technique. A good vocal can be drowned in a mud of overly applied plugins, bad song arrangement, or lack of musician's skill - and vice versa. Production quality could determine whether a local artist can achieve commercial success or not. In this section, the author discussed consumer views on whether local artists are offering solid products compared to content and music available from the rest of the world.

Referring to the entire African continent, Mobeatz Bangr said “we should not measure our quality by other country's standards; America has its own standard, and Africa has its own standard as well. Each territory should be measured by its own standard.” In terms of musical styles and production approach he is right; however, when it comes to mixing and mastering and also the general production outcome, it is recommended to adhere to universally agreed quality standards, which is generally determined by proven use of quality production tools. The researcher asked if local (Vhembe) artists are meeting such international standards, thereby making them able to compete in global markets; or, if local production standards were lower and therefore a hindrance to their ability to effectively compete in international music markets. Chris Thiba said:

We (in Vhembe/South Africa) have unique music which we can identify and celebrate without criticizing other music. For example, traditional music production is of high quality with producers who were educated in the art. Even in Reggae music we have producers who can compete nationally and internationally. But some of our artists are not trained and they falsely believe they can sing and with some cash they go to a friend to record. That music might embarrass some in the industry, as it even gets played on radio stations as they love *payola*<sup>10</sup>. Most of us in the business struggle with the craft, but radios don't play our art. In all, *ma10/10*<sup>11</sup> and *payola* are killing us.

(Interview, Thiba, 2018)

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<sup>10</sup> *Payola* is a bribe paid to radio music compiler or DJs to play artists' music.

<sup>11</sup> *Ma10/10* are pirated CDs sold in the streets for R10.



He then said that “real producers” don’t just take money from any supposedly talented individual. They care about their reputation and they focus on recording actual artists and even train potential talent, to ensure they meet the industry standard. Similarly, Mutele addressed the same point when he said:

Let’s speak the truth. When it comes to that part I see we are not meeting the standard. I see there are too many producers today who think having a computer makes one an engineer, and we forgot that being a musician is about having a good ear. Another thing is that poverty contributes to this situation because when people don’t have money they will go to anybody who has the equipment and offers them a recording at a certain price, a very-very low price. We end up compromising a great talent by going to an incapable guy who does not know the job but has things on his computer. That compromises singers whom do not have money. This scam is hindering some of our artists from progressing because they are recorded with a poor production quality.

(Interview, Mutele, 2018)

Mutele and Thiba seem to agree that many local artists do not have access to good production quality. They blame it on a lack of proper resources and skill. Morel gave an example of his own studio which he said himself is not ideal for high-end production as it is not well equipped. Muofhe was very unapologetic when saying that, those that are meeting the standards can be counted on one hand. On the same note Rita D started by laughing a lot before answering the question, shaking her head and saying: “Let me give you this example, probably it will answer you right. “H’n’ [meaning No] creativity yes. But hh! you can take a band which you thinking is the best in Vhembe, to a competition in Joburg, to compete amongst other bands. I don’t think they would even make it to the top 10. I’ve seen that happen” (Interview, Rita D, 2017). This could mean that Vhembe artists are creating good compositions but fail to deliver good production and performances, because of a lack of skill, not because of the production. She explained that lack of skills due to a lack of creative art institutions in the region is the actual reason for low production quality. Regarding resources, she discussed how the production team at her company finalizes productions to meet the required standard:

We have a home base studio which is where they start. It is where the team wakes up from sleeping at night to just be creative. That’s where they play around with ideas. The setup is not big, it’s not fancy. Therefore, we find that quality music sells. You can’t put music online without quality. It’s like, *ibile* [surely], they cannot, on iTunes they cannot take it. Quality is very important, so I give them that home-based studio where they can play around, make their beats, and feel free. So after that they go to

VCC studio for vocal tracking and finalization. This is where we are being given a space to work for free.

(Interview, Rita D, 2017)

This means that these artists go from realizing that they do not have proper resources, to delivering a competitive and high quality final product, by outsourcing to VCC studios – the one A.J. Tshisevhe spoke of as being one of the properly equipped studios in Vhembe. The researcher observed that some artists or producers do not have the same mind-set and approach but continue to release albums from poorly-equipped studios. This means studios with no proper infrastructure, for example without studio monitoring speakers and descent microphones. Some even charge R 1,000 for a full album recording. Such productions lack proper frequency balancing in the mixing which result to bad sounding product. Other poor productions are plagued by sound distortions and plugins are not properly applied. The mastering is also not done properly, if it is done at all. Although some of his songs sound fairly good, G Muzzy said he charges R30 for a full recorded song if the artists bring their own beats. Unfortunately, there are plenty of such studios in Vhembe.

Ashley said that after buying monitor speakers he realized the quality outcome of his productions improved. He spent a long time using home stereo system and never cared about having proper studio monitors; but then he purchased a second pair after realizing the major impact on production quality. A section in this research about Vhembe studios, shows pictures of different studio set-ups and if such have a great impact on the final quality outcome. Someone like Emanuel Mamphogoro invested more in high-end quality equipment and also pays attention to how such equipment responds to the DAWs he uses and the plugins he purchases. Like A.J. Tshesevhe, Eliph D on the other hand believes it does not depend on the equipment but the skill of the production engineer. Yet he often speaks well about how certain DAWs have more power than others - and maybe the latest version of Reason software has more powerful drums than others. Therefore, no matter how skilled one is, one cannot produce high-end products without proper equipment. The same principle applies to skills, as one cannot produce good sound without talent and skill, no matter how well equipped a studio is.

Therefore, the researcher concluded that a collaboration of good equipment and skill results in quality productions. This is the reason Rita D said she collect young people who study sound engineering and don't have jobs. Mutele said he sometimes uses Winman music studio in other

projects, which underscored that there is something he needs that could add value to a specific recording, just like Rita does when using VCC to finalize productions. This helps us understand why different producers and engineers prefer certain brands of studio equipment over others to suit their sound quality preference.

## **5.8. THE PRESENT STATE OF VHEMBE MUSIC INDUSTRY**

Wanting to get a sense of how artists view the local music industry structure or value-chain, the researcher asked whether they think the way business is done is fine or whether they think things could be done better, and therefore see a need for transformation of the Vhembe music scene or industry.

Here in Venda I don't see a music industry. I just see an individual cooking his little pot here and another one there. It's hard to find a label that produces artists who can take their music outside the boundaries of Limpopo, let alone Vhembe. Like we hear dance songs from Durban and Joburg, our artists should have the same impact.

(Interview, Mutele, 2017)

As someone who started a career in music before the digital technology boom, the researcher realized that when Mutele said there is no industry, he meant that from his understanding of the structures that construct its value chain. He observed that if individual artists recorded albums at small local studios, but then had neither marketing nor a distribution plan, this did not meet the description of an industry. This is the reason why Vhembe music does not get past regional boundaries. His points are similar to those of Rita D who said:

Can I be honest? [Laughing] I always say that we don't have a music industry in Vhembe [she laughs again]. Why am I saying it? Ehm! [She stopped and laughed], I joined this industry probably in 2003 or 2002, hoping to get rich by [she pause], it was supposed to happen five years back... You know when you arrive; it's all glam you see, with performances and VIP treatment. And when you get inside you see there is no business. There is music but there is no music business. So you get there you find that it's just walls. So it is empty. Meaning there are lots of things that are not yet done. There is so many things that I'm not [she paused] eish! There is a singer but there is no journalist. You find there is a writer but no singer. That thing where the puzzle has too many missing pieces. So, there is no industry.

(Interview, Rita D, 2017)

Without having all the necessary stakeholders and industry leaders, local music will not generate income like for example in Durban with Afrotainment of DJ Tira, or Mevin Supreme Dynasty of Don Jazzy in Nigeria, or Kalawa in Johannesburg. En route to international music trade shows, the researcher spoke with travel companion and fellow musician Nhlanhla, who said: I work for an indie record label as head of projects which does everything from production to media management campaigns, and all sorts of PR.” In contrast, the researcher here observed that there is no company with such capacity locally [in Vhembe] because the majority of the record labels or entertainment companies are just individuals with a registered entity, without personnel to handle other important roles. Rita D said that she once got in trouble with artists when she was a gossip journalist for local newspapers because artists did not realize that by publishing their issues, such as for example when Mizzo Phyl cut his dreadlocks, she was actually giving them free PR, which they would otherwise normally have to pay for. Her PR skills are noticeable in the way she works with Makhadzi. Later, talking with Muofhe about her views on local music industry, she replied:

I believe that it is very marginal in its reach. It’s very dependent on the local radio station [referring to Phalaphala FM] which in turn controls the success or demise of the artist. Artists need to understand the business of the music industry, which is lacking at the present moment and hinders us from breaking out of the region.

(Interview, Muofhe, 2018)

The reason why artists are so dependent on one major radio station is still the lack of PR (public relations). Public relation forms part of the business by ensuring the visibility of an artist on all possible channels. If an artist understood how vital this part of the music business is, they would set aside a budget for it when planning for a recording, so as not to get caught up multitasking and neglecting the promotional and sales side of the business.

In his keynote address at Midem 2018, Black Coffee said that artists need to form their own record labels and learn to build their own team as they cannot do it all on their own (Midem, 2018). Black Coffee is a living testimony that it is possible to be independent and succeed, provided one has a team dedicated to building their brand. He said that “we just need to learn to reinvest” for growth to happen. For artists like Naphy M, such investments could seem impossible especially when it comes to building a team, as he said:

If I had money, I would invest in a big team which would be dedicated full time to music as I also only do music full time. Meaning, I would have people to work with on a full time basis like a regular job, you see. The uniform I use is expensive and getting someone to even shoot a quality music video is also hard without a sponsor. We just push to survive.”

(Interview, Naphy M, 2018)

He addressed the issue facing many local artists as they mostly live from hand to mouth income, with no money to invest in music or other ventures. But Rita D presented a different argument on the matter when she said that “Some Limpopo artist make money - they just don’t know how to save money because they don’t have financial advisors or training. The moment you pay them it’s a party, and tomorrow they are broke.” She spoke of some artists - not all artists, meaning it could be a small number. She did not only refer to artist of Vhembe region in her statement, but the entire province of Limpopo. So there may be artists in Vhembe who form part of those who make decent money in order to invest back into their music business, instead of relying on grants and sponsorships.

The issue of sponsorships or investors in the art sector in general has always been problematic countrywide. This is why many artists do not break out of their local vicinity. When addressing the issue of lack of formal music business structure, Mamphogoro said:

There is a lack of PR and marketing companies so artists end up marketing themselves. This limits your marketing to recording and distributing locally where you have immediate access. This is why the Vhembe region’s music is not known worldwide, let alone around the country.

(Interview, Mamphogoro, 2017)

The matter of doing it all by oneself seems to be a hindering factor according to him, as like others’ comments above, it prevents growth and binds the artist to one region. To expand, many artists take the initiative to collaborate with others from far away or even abroad, to reach other markets. Despite his international success, Black Coffee said: “We employed a company called Verna Media from New York to create and curate content for us because although we felt on the continent we have good numbers, we wanted to grow outside you know...” It makes business sense that taking such steps could lead to greater success. Major record labels build offices in many countries and employ local executives to handle their business in those

territories. But indie record labels or artists do not have those types of resources, so they go the route taken by Soulistic Music of Black Coffee, since they do not have the capacity to own offices wherever they want. Such is the approach taken by Rita D Entertainment:

In my company I decided, I didn't know much about publishing and then I had to consult a publishing company. Now I've got a contract with The Orchard. They are publishing our music internationally. It's a company based in New York City. I had to network and research which companies to use and which one offer fair rates for my artists. It's an annual contract, and as long as I renew it yearly... They are fully publishing our music internationally but not working in SA. We are from Vhembe. We have the Vhembe market, so I decided to look for a company to publish our music outside. Like you will find people listening to Makhadzi's songs abroad and deciding to use it in their film. Now because we have a publisher, no one can steal from us. They are protecting and licensing our music. I can't be here and license my music in England as I don't have networks there.

(Interview, Rita D, 2017)

Her approach is also used by Muofhe who realized the need for such collaborations when it comes to her marketing and distribution. She said: "I am represented by Ticky-Box Marketing. They market the best in the country and I love their professionalism" (Interview, Muofhe, 2018). Having tasked specialists to handle such responsibilities works in most cases, and many record labels in South Africa successfully expand their global market reach through such collaborations. Even for Black Coffee to be recognized internationally, he licensed his music to different international labels to gain international exposure, as stated in his Red Bull Academy lecture from 2016 in Montreal, which is published on YouTube. The same applies to a band called Mokoomba from Zimbabwe, who conducts many international tours because of having a European manager who works with international agents. To have such ventures locally, there should be a demarcation of tasks based on skills as Morel said:

One has to be a generalist with basic knowledge of all the components of the music industry, because the business aspect is lacking [in Limpopo]. We don't have a trained, professional workforce for the music industry, which is why you find local musicians doing everything. Maybe in times such opportunities will be created when people start studying music business. That's when our music industry will grow.

(Interview, Morel, 2017)

This simply implies that without proper skills and industry knowledge, growth is difficult. Such skills are acquired through education and knowledge seeking. Morel said that is the only way

to see Limpopo's music sector grow. The industry can only grow if the music is of good standard. Although some artists are meeting that standard, the issue lies with ensuring that the prevailing standard results in booming and sustainable platforms, where the value chain is properly structured. Colbert Mukwevho<sup>12</sup> is one of the good examples of artists with international music quality standard but lack international exposure like Lucky Dube who was signed by Gallo Records during his successful international career. Chris Thiba touched on another contributing factor hindering growth in the region's music industry. He said:

Some artists play good music, but some just record for the sake of recording; and the challenge is reaching a wider market. We are not getting good platforms to promote our music and also there is a lack of support from the media. And many of us who play live music are struggling because people are used to CDs not live music these days. Another thing despite have good artists is piracy. It's not only in Venda but the entire country. One records a CD only for someone to come sell it for only R10 while the rest just copy it freely.

(Interview, Thiba, 2018)

Regarding promotional platforms to expose local music, radio stations can only contribute airplay but that is not enough in today's music industry. Artists still need to perform live and put on good shows to attract an audience and build a fan base. When the music is promoted well and received sufficient play on radio - whether locally or nationally - there should be an uptick in tickets sales. Even if the music is well promoted on radio, there are very limited live music platforms in Vhembe. Most artist end up being obliged to organize their own small events at beer lounges and other small venues. Such events are met with many technical challenges such as poor sound system; poor lighting and some do not even have a stage. Such technical inadequacy leads to poor performance. This mostly leads to audience disappointment. If audiences are not impressed by a live performance by the artist, they are more apt to stay home and listen to CDs instead. Because many festivals or music concerts do not offer live band music, many artists opt to miming or lip-sinking on backtrack. This means that many promoters would tell artist that they cannot afford a price of a full band and artist could only use backtrack on stage. On other cases, this backtrack reliant cannot all be blamed on lack of funds as for other artists is due to lack of live performance skill. This could also mean there is a dearth of professional music promoters in Vhembe and smaller towns in South

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<sup>12</sup> Colbert Mukwevho is a legendary Venda Reggae artist who went independent in the early 1990s after serving his contract with Gallo Records which use to produce Lucky Dube. He is also the brother of Benjamin Morel.



Africa, which limit artists' income stream. Most promoters rely on social media to promote their events and very few of them use radio promotions as they are more expensive. But this issue cannot be addressed in details in this research as live performance has very little to do with digital technology except on promotion. Despite all the challenging factors to working in the music industry, the Chairman of Nambidza Devhula artists' cooperation, A.J. Tshisevhe, said:

There are currently great changes leading to a brighter future in our local music industry, although there are many challenges we face like financial struggle and the organization of the industry itself. There are many things to learn and improve in a proper way. We still have many problems.

(Interview, Tshisevhe, 2017)

Struggling with the organization of the industry to make it a professional sector in Vhembe/Limpopo speaks to what Mutele said about each artist contributing their piece individually, and what Rita D mentioned about missing pieces of the puzzle, where artists miss the professional support of a manager or a song writer produces songs, but doesn't have trained or talented artists to sing their songs.

The industry representatives and artists interviewed in this section seem to have addressed similar points based on their understanding of how the music industry should look or be structured in Vhembe, and other parts of South Africa. They have all experienced that the industry has a system in place with structures to handle different aspects of the value chain. They all addressed the issue of not having such structures in place in the local community. Therefore, the local scene is mostly consists of all industry stake holders who are just doing their own things individually, which hinders or undermines the creation and development of a professional music ecosystem. This could simply mean there is a potential of having a formal industry structure driving the entire value chain if only those individuals practitioners can combine their effort.

## **5.9. MAKING A LIVING FROM MUSIC: HOW VHEMBE ARTISTS BUILD CAREERS IN THE MUSIC INDUSTRY**

Music distribution and sales is a key vehicle to generate income for artists and other music industry stakeholders. *The Boom in African's Music Continues*, Staff Writer 4 (as identified in



the article) said that “the one sector that has done particularly well over the last five years is live music. It goes to show what people want — they are prepared to pay a huge amount to go and watch a live concert” (Staff Writer 4, 2016). The culture of festivals or concerts attendance seem foreign to local music lovers although one of the biggest national music festivals *Royal Heritage Festival* in Vhembe is well received because of its ability to draw national and international artist. On this note, many local artists organise events at recreational venues and taverns but receive very little support, hence they mostly complain about such predicament on different media platforms. On face book page *Venda Music Promoters* one finds these kind of statements: “Venda, what are we in this world without supporting one of our own as we all know Venda is land of free everybody know each other let's unite” and “Let's try to uplift our music to the top as Venda people we must reunite and show the world Venda music need to be heard” (<https://web.facebook.com/Venda-Music-Promoters-137853229932592>).

During a Tedx Talk titled “A modest proposal for fixing the music industry” on March 28, 2014, a musician and music entrepreneur Brian Mctear said: “If you think you are here to make records and to sell them that is an old model and that is in the past... today everyone can make music, but a career in music, that is a different thing all together. A career in music is much more like a career in community outreach” (McTear, 2014). He explained that artists should find innovative ways to connect to their audience. One example he gave was of his friend Alex, who now does living- room performances, like the old salon gatherings, instead of waiting for big shows.

This method may work for Alex and few others who play instruments, but considering the majority of local Vhembe artists, most of them cannot play an instrument or perform live without a backtrack. They mostly mime or lip- synch and would not be able to hold an audience with an intimate live performance. Although a number of people in Vhembe still buy CDs since the internet revolution has not yet completely eradicated CD sales, especially for the Baby Boomer and Gen-X generations, many artists seem to have lost hope in selling records all together. Artists like Makhadzi, Mazwale, Khakhathi, Justice Mbedzi, Black Jahman, Jeremiah Navhani, Naphy M. and others still give street performances or sell music from their cars. Some move around with a mobile rechargeable audio unit player to play at shopping centres in towns like Thohoyandou, Louis Trichardt and Musina, and some record for the sake of passion and only distribute their recordings to friends and those who accidentally come across their music.

Many local artists such as Makhadzi, were launched on the streets of Thohoyandou. Her manager Rita D said that “Going and standing on the streets of Thohoyandou won’t work anymore. Your music needs to be on the internet and you have to get paid for it. People who have recorded, say for example, ten albums, but none of their music is online, are actually losing a lot of money.” Although she believes online distribution is the way to go, she acknowledges that streets still generate a fair amount of income, as they have not shut it down completely. She further said: “We still sell physical copies because there are people who love collecting music, people who want hard copies. We still go back to the streets, but we only do that at the end of the month. If we don’t have a lot of events, we just go to places like Krobasdall or go to Alexandra [township] or Bree Street” (Interview, Rita D, 2017).

Although some artists feel like street promotion is out-dated, it seems like it is still one of the most effective ways, if not the best working method for selling music in Vhembe, because most of the music shops or record bars are closed down due to piracy problems. Those that only live from music without an alternative career, barely survive, while those with other careers besides music seem to be doing ok. When I asked if he thinks musicians in Vhembe are able to build a career and make a living from music, the legendary former gospel singer and award-winning sound engineer Mamphogoro said:

I see people who are earning decent money from music but my fear is how long this can be sustained as some depend on one individual who sponsors a band, and if that person leaves town or passes on, there will be a problem. Many artists survive through street promotion where they sell music because Vhembe doesn’t have record bars anymore. I can only think of two now, one in Thohoyandou and one in Louis Trichardt, and all of the artists wants to take their music there; but it won’t work. That leaves the only option of going to the streets to sell *ma10/10* [referring to R10 CD in the streets]. There is money there and I am sure of that.

(Interview, Mamphogoro, 2017)

Although some artists look down on that approach, and others believe it wouldn’t work for them, many are forced to join in as there are no shops to sell their music anymore in Vhembe, like Mamphogoro said. As noted earlier, Mamphogoro also works as a police officer which makes music an alternative career for him. Another artist, Chris Thiba, provided the following insight during a conversation in a relaxation space he had built behind his big house:

I go out to promote my music. I used to travel around every local town doing street promos during the weekend... I sell my music on my own. I tried to go to shops and record companies, but the problem is the percentage share offered is very low. I believe if you grab the people they will follow you and you can even be more successful than those who are signed with record labels.

(Interview, Thiba, 2018)

Balack Jahman is another artist, whom like Jeremiah Navhani, even dresses up in elaborate outfits for such street performances. Both Chris Thiba and Black Jahman also hold lucrative jobs with senior positions in the government. The researcher asked some artists if a music career is still relevant now. This question was in connection with Brian Mctear scepticism about music being a career today.



Figure 8: Black Jahman doing a street promo at Nzhelele Spar Supermarket.

Perhaps this state of affairs is why a Reggae singer Jacky Nethomboni, who is also a school teacher, sang “*Athi imbi Reggae nga ndala. Ndi kho ladza midzimu. Ndi kho fhirisa mulaedza.*” meaning “I don’t sing Reggae because of starvation. I’m appeasing the ancestors. I’m passing the message.” His CDs are hardly available in stores nor have people seen him promoting his music in front of shops. Could it be because he earns his living through teaching profession like his fellow reggae singers Shufiers Ragimane, Kenny Murabi and the late Jahman Tshiganzha? Are they satisfied with creating the music without expecting to make a living from it? During the course of researching this paper, the author found that most, if not all of the artists whom appear to be economically stable in Vhembe, do not do music as their first career, as mentioned above. The standard for being economic stable implies being able to build a

standard three-bedroom house or larger and being able to afford a car and standard music production equipment and instruments. This could also be referred to as a middle or working-class standard. When asked if music was his only career, or if not why, Muofhe said: “No, it is not. I am a freelance writer. I don’t believe music can sustain me financially right now” (Interview, Muofhe, 2018). A number of Vhembe artists share the same view and have even found creative ways to stay close to the music sector. Muofhe’s debut album producer Honey Mutele who also works as a police officer like Emanuel Mamphogoro, said:

That is a very important question. I did not join the police force to arrest people; I joined it for the police brass band where I’d be able to apply my music knowledge as they use music notes. At that time the salary I earned from the police was very important because the music industry was not reliable. Back then one had to wait for someone to organize a gig, which would pay way below your expectation. We’d go to record an album thinking it would be a hit and you’d sell a lot, only to find that the market was going the opposite direction. This left us with an obligation to go find a job in order to survive. I felt that music is my first and chosen career, but I knew I had to go find a back-up job and instead do music on a free mode in my spare time. Music can be a career that guarantees financial security, but if one stayed here in Vhembe, no one could guarantee financial security. But moving upwards to places like Joburg, opportunities are more - but here I don’t see it happening.

(Interview, Mutele, 2017)

Mutele’s comments imply that he is not confident about relying on music as an income generator, as it has no guarantees (like for example a government job or a more traditional career). Mutendas once sold over twenty thousand cassettes with his self-marketed album in 1999 after leaving Gallo Records, and in 2001 sold twenty-two thousand (22,000) with the album featuring the song “*Phoshi vho mu dadza*” – a big hit – but today he concedes, he can no longer survive from music sales alone like he did in those days. He does other businesses to survive while selling music on the weekend. With a sad face he reminisced about the days when money was not a problem in music. When asked how he sells his music these days, he replied:

I used to deliver my cassettes to stores like Dakota Polokwane, and some areas in Joburg had shops that sold our music. Places like Malamulele, Giyani and Musina were our hot spots. I only recently started selling in the streets because those shops were closed from piracy and they went out of business. Pirated CDs used to be laid out and sold cheaply right outside the record bars. Barely a handful of record bars survive today, here and there. That is why we now sell the music ourselves. Piracy really killed music sales because people no longer buy music like before.

(Interview, Mutendas, 2017)

This is from a well-known artist, Mutendas, who was once attacked and beaten by actual music pirates trying to take his CDs from him in Thohoyandou. Back in those days, Mutendas explained that cassettes were more in demand than CDs, as it was not easy to reproduce the original quality from dubbing using a home cassette player. For Mutendas, the real music industry is something of the past, and he experienced his career hay-days long before the advent of CDs and Mp3s, let alone the digital music landscape.

Jerry N (Jeremiah Navhani) is one of those artists who believe that street promotion is now the only way to sell music despite the resistance by some municipalities that have put noise pollution restrictions in place to curb such activities - as they have heard from authorities. The researcher met with Jerry N when he was promoting his music in front of a shop close to Boxer Supermarket in Thohoyandou. He danced and rolled on the ground, theatrically acting out the message in his songs while his wife and a young boy in his company walked around with a bowl collecting donations and holding CDs for sale. Soaking in sweat under a blazing sun, in the middle, before or after the song, he would start to preach in synch with the content of the song, creating a church-like environment and some bystanders would reply "*amen*". After a while, when new faces come around, he would (again) call out individuals in the crowd to come and compete for a CD and a DVD, while the crowd put money in front of their favourite contender.

When the song ended, he took all of the money and gave the winner a CD and DVD. From that one activity he collected around R350 for a CD or a DVD he sold for less than half of that amount. That day he was accompanied by a female singer and dancer called Mazwale, who put up a spectacle of a show, along with the boy and the wife. He said that he is not afraid of the municipality as he is not stealing from anyone, bravely declaring that he lives and supports his family through music. During a break - the two artists took turns performing - he told the researcher that he had already sold six thousand rand (R6000) worth of his music that day. It took around three hours to perform and sell all of his CDs and DVDs and then he had to go renew his stock from a Chinese duplicator who presses CD and DVDs from his plant in town for most of the Vhembe artists. In reply to a question about breaking the municipality rules on combating noise pollution he said:



I will never stop selling music this way no matter what Thulamela municipality says or does. This is our job and this is how our families eat. They allow thieves to sell *amaten-ten* but when I sell a CD with my face on the cover they want to arrest me. They should be chasing those ones who steal from us and leave us working. Even if they take my things, I will come back here with or without their permission and perform. I don't care if they arrest me. People want the music and we will give it to them the best way we know how.

(Interview, Jerry N, 2017)

He said this with passion, inflamed with anger, making it evident that he was willing to stand against any resistance to feed his family or to protect his music career. Jerry N's strategy seems to work really well for him unlike those who just park their car in a parking lot by the shopping complex and play and wait for passers-by to come and buy the music.

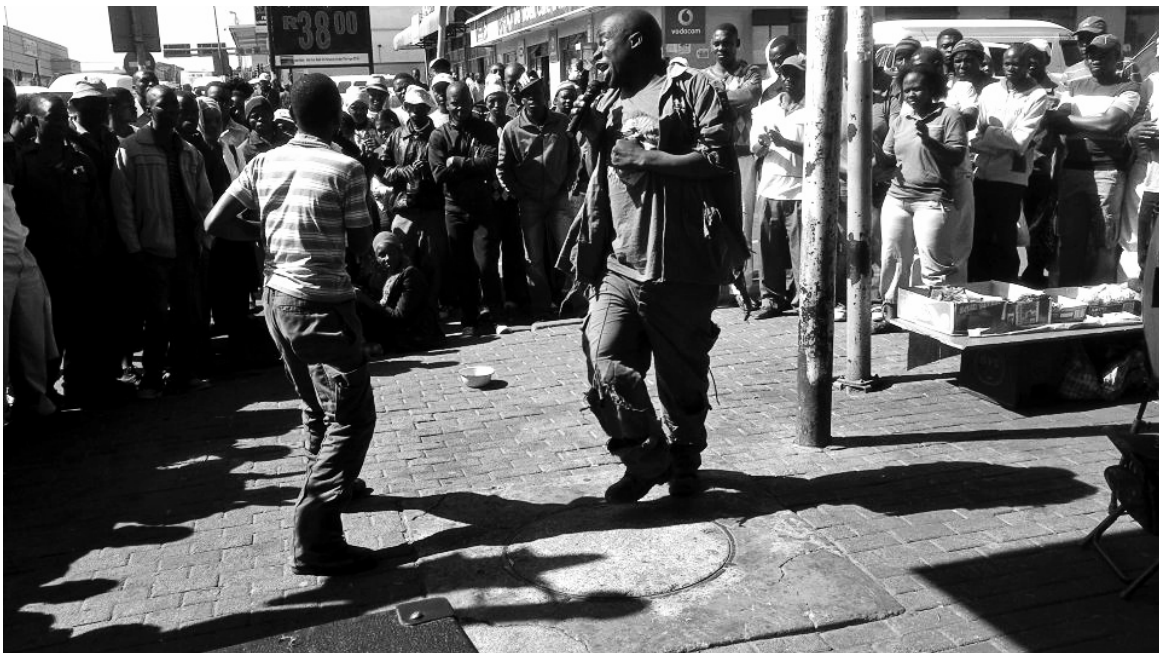


Figure 9: Jerry N on street promotion

Justice Mbedzi, also known by his stage name Just Ice, put a booster on his Uno car sound system to sell his music. He believes going to the streets is the only way left for Vhembe artists to gain some brand recognition and sell music, as there are few or no other options around. Another artist, Naphy M, travelled with Jeremiah in Gauteng for a month doing street promos and sold over a thousand copies of the album with his ever popular song "*Ri tshi Funana*,"

recorded at Misho Recording Studio in Rabali village. Another artist, Mercy Masakona Madzivhandila, said:

I used to sell cassettes then CDs, which was simple to sell directly to customers, but now there are new online ways which is more challenging as we artists are not as knowledgeable about how it all works... I still sell physical CDs at home. What works well in my experience is going out as an artist to sell directly to people. The strategy of handing your CDs to shop owners is not ideal because you don't get all the income from your music, and sometimes they keep your money after selling your music. Sometimes the shop owner closes the shop because of piracy and I loose.

(Interview, Masakona, 2018)

Like many other gospel singers in South Africa, Mercy promotes her music at churches. She mentioned her concern about local music shops not paying artists and some shops closed taking the artists CDs. Many artists in Vhembe were affected by the closing of two shops in particular which shall remain nameless, but were closed keeping both money and CDs that belonged to local artists. Those shops had encouraged artists to leave their CDs under a deal where the store would take a cut and give the rest to the artist after the sale. Many artists were sceptical about this method, and A.J. Tshisevhe of Cornerstone said:

JET Music distributes our music CDs. They sell music by local artists in many of their shops around South Africa. Local artists brought their best recordings and JET asked them to include all the detailing such as barcode on the CD. Because our industry is still small, we also travel with our CDs to sell wherever we are. I encourage other local artists to hand over their CDs to JET as well, and in return we receive good promotion for our music through their extended networks.

(Interview, Tshisevhe, 2018)

Few months after this interview was conducted JET Music in Thavhani Mall Thohoyandou town store was also closed like many other music shops. Tshisevhe further said that "Cornerstone also Promotes at many events such as weddings and music festivals. Radio broadcast and promotion brought us a lot of recognition and momentum, therefore we have a big following near and far". Cornerstone does not do what Jerry N or Black Jahman and the likes do; his band never promotes on the street. Almost every member of Cornerstone band engages in physical distribution, indicating that despite the spread of piracy, CD sales are still the main form of music distribution in South Africa. And as Mercy Masakona said, digital distribution is more complicated and to date South Africans are more likely to

purchase a CD than to find digital recordings online of local Vhembe artists. When Chris Thiba spoke about promos (e.g. street promotions) and how he sold CDs moving from town to town with Khakhathi, he, like Tshisevhe, acknowledged the role radio stations played in branding his name and music:

Phalaphala FM played a big role in promoting Chris Thiba, but things changed when we started becoming vocal about some issues we were not happy about concerning the radio station. That affected our airplay negatively, but before then we got a lot of airplay and opportunities from the radio promotions. Other community radio stations like Univen FM, Makhado and Tswane, played a role but still, in the years leading up to 2012 Phalaphala is the one I give my most gratitude to.”

(Interview, Thiba, 2018)

In his comment, Thiba seem to believe that radio seems to still hold a lot of power in determining local artists’ success. This view is also supported by Consumer Insight Report 2018, published by IPFI which indicates that despite the stream of digital music radio is still resilient and South Africa is rated one of the top two countries (sitting at 94%) of consumers listening to radio (IFPI, 2018). This sentiment is shared by Muofhe and many other artists. When the organization *Nambi dza Devhula*<sup>13</sup> holds meetings, member (artists) often complain about the short amount of radio airplay they receive, and from Phalaphala FM in particular (which is the main national Venda language broadcasting station). Artists like Makhazi have posted video clips on social media platforms complaining about the local radio station not playing her music, and soon after, her music was on rotation. This demonstrates that while the music industry has gone digital, conventional radio stations still play a major role in promoting songs, bands and artists. When artists are repeatedly played on the radio, royalties from collecting societies like SAMRO grow bigger, and in a normal trajectory of events, artists would then get more gigs and sell more CDs because their names also start trending.

This was an argument presented by artists protesting the domination of international music on local broadcasting (radio and TV) channels, chosen over South African music. The argument is based on the income potential: instead of giving royalties to local artists, more money goes to USA and to artists from other countries. Hence, South African artists celebrated SABC’s declaration led by Mr. Hlaudi Motshoeneng, to mandate ninety percent of music on airplay be

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<sup>1313</sup> Nambi dza Devhula is Vhembe artists’ cooperation meant to unite singers towards a common goal of economic empowerment through initiatives like organizing their own events.



local music. This was a long battle and an important, yet protectionist move. Artists felt that it was victory, but it didn't last long as Mr Motshoeneng was discharged from the national broadcast cooperation. List of corruption allegations were put against him and his accusers indicated that the ninety percent local content bill drained the public broadcast financially. This is an important point in this research because radio play creates buzz and helps build fame, and fame pushes sales. Brand and product awareness triggers interest, hence many local singers worry about radio not playing their music, despite the ability to promote themselves online (which is less powerful in S.A. because of highly priced internet data bundle).

The situation for artists not receiving needle-time royalties in Vhembe was highlighted when attended a presentation by The South African Music Performance Rights Association (SAMPRO) rival, The Independent Music Performance Rights Association (IMPRA), at the Thohoyandou sports centre. There, many artists declared that they had never received any needle-time royalty money from neither SAMRO nor The South African Music Performance Rights Association (SAMPRO). Some had a different story as they confirmed they did receive some money, just too little to make an impact. This was due to the amount of radio play as local Vhembe artist mostly depend on one radio station (Phalaphala FM) which is the only national station playing Venda music. The radio station is part of the South African Broadcasting Cooperation (SABC) that pays the most royalties. The rest of other radio stations in Vhembe are community based, but still they contribute in artist promotion in a smaller scale as they can only cover radius of few kilometre. Speaking of radio and street promos Haney Mutele said:

In our time when we started recording, radio was the only major promotional platform. Some programs allowed people to choose a song for air play and one would be lucky to have a song played now and then... When the local municipality still allowed street promotions we would plug our speakers in front of a shop and sell our CD. It worked for us then but this system doesn't exist anymore. Gospel artists like me market our music at churches and church gatherings. Looking at my latest album things are much easier because we use social media and platforms like Facebook where one can post music for people to comment and promote an album before its release.

(Interview, Mutele, 2017)

When Mutele said street promotions no longer work, it brought back the point that for many artists for whom music is not a first career, they no longer go to the streets, but those artists in Venda who still survive from music income full time keep the method alive. Many artists such as Eliph D, Christopher Mathogo, Naphy M and others now walk around the streets of towns

such as Thohoyandou and Louis Trichardt (also known as Makhado) carrying portable speakers playing their music and selling CDs. Another point that is frequently raised is the issue of online marketing that has taken on a major role for marketing music, although radio is still used as a viable tool to promote artists. In Vhembe however, it is still a major platform, sought out by all local artists. Unlike Friedman who said “there was something called radio and that doesn’t exist. The combination of radio and touring is what established an artist to get exposure, move up the chart and achieve a number one record” (Big Think, 2010). Friedman says the digital revolution killed the music industry, while others believe the industry is thriving, while it’s only the method that changed. Whether dead or transformed, digital tools have prompted the release of more music without gate keepers such as radio station managers, regardless of whether the artists make money or not.

Before the mid-1990s making a career in music was very hard, as Mutele narrated from an experience he had when he and fellow musicians went to Johannesburg to look for a marketing and distribution deal:

Eysh! Things were difficult. Truth be told... although I don’t remember who I was with... We were told something very painful after being asked where we came from and answered, we are from Venda. The recording studio producer said “If only you could come to Joburg and spend a year, and gain a bit of complexion” I’m talking of things we encountered. What we were told really pained us. Several times we were told our music was good and producers could work with us but only after working on the image first before starting with the music itself. Meaning we were too dark in complexion for the industry.

(Interview, Mutele, 2017)

This band’s experience shows that building a career in music was largely determined by other people; musicians and artists had little control over one’s entry into the industry, unlike in today’s market. Any excuse could be used to block an artist from entering the gate. Hence, Mutele believes that people who are living from a career in music now should thank God because it is nothing short of a miracle. All of the artists interviewed for this project are aware of the power of the internet and social media in promoting music, gaining recognition and building a viable career in music.

When asked which marketing and distribution channels Nemauluma uses to support his music career, he replied:

Eh! When we started then, marketing needed a person who was not lazy because they had to go out and promote directly to consumers, face to face. Artists had to go to shopping centres to sing and dance to attract an audience. But as time went by we realized that digital music could be sold via the internet to people everywhere. So far so good. The internet is very exciting because one's talent is heard by everyone in the world.

(Interview, Nemauluma, 2017)

When Nemauluma started recording, digital recording had already been introduced because his first studio with Haney Mutele was opened in 2002, where he also recorded his first album. At that time the internet was not as popular as now. Therefore, social media, online distribution and streaming services were not known or used locally. Although Napster, which is known for introducing this revolution, and was already established, followed by Myspace which came along before Facebook and Tweeter, local artists relied on radio and street promotions. This is still the case today in Vhembe, while in the United States of America and European markets seem to have completely switched to digital music dissemination.

In this section the researcher explored how many artists view the possibility of having a career in music and how those active in the industry sustain themselves financially. Many artists in Vhembe seem to have given up on a music career due to the fact that musicians do not seem to make enough money to sustain family needs. Some artists believe music is their only way of survival which is the reason why they go against the system imposed by local municipalities, and do street promotions. It is clear that many of those who do not go out to promote like others have reached financial stability from their day jobs, and are therefore not going to starve if they do not sell their CDs or music. Maybe soon this new technology will fully kick in for Vhembe artists, but still there is no guarantee that artists will benefit from and scale digital tools the same way they did during cassette times and still selling CDs presently although sales are reduced by piracy. This brings us to the next theme about the use of digital technology in marketing and distribution which many artists touched on.

#### **5.10. THE USE OF DIGITAL MARKETING AND DISSEMINATION IN VHEMBE**

Marketing is the only way of building an artist's brand, while distribution of the music ensures income through sales. Artists who don't market their products stay unknown and struggle to make money. Patokos (2008) stated that before the Internet, potential buyers would only be informed of new talent and music from the music press and radio, and they would necessarily

limit their choices to what would be available on the shelves of their local record stores. Such dependence on few distribution or limited channels of exposure would mean that an artist who did not enjoy media coverage or whose releases did not have wide distribution would practically be non-existent for listeners.

Therefore, this theme expands on the amount of understanding artists have about digital marketing and distribution and whether they are using such tools. The researchers asked which tools artists use and are aware of. Dana Elle (from Israel) said that she uses all known social media platforms to market herself and connects with her fans. She then said: “I always make sure that my fans are up-to-date with my everyday activities to keep them hooked. They know that I’m now in France attending Miden and I don’t need a radio or television interview to inform them; I only need social media” (Interview, Dana Elle, 2016). Social media is now the most trusted marketing platform for indie artists today. Addressing his understanding about digital platforms, A.J. Tshisevhe said.

The internet has two ways to it. It helps and also damages. The positive side is that one can disseminate music far within a short space of time, although it is challenging for independent artists to distribute their music internationally. But when it can be downloaded on the internet, everyone can access it, meaning, you can sell your music without carrying your CD everywhere.

(Interview, Tshisevhe, 2018)

In tune with Tshisevhe’s points, Nemauluma said “iTunes has replaced street promotions and in any case, it is forbidden to sell music in the streets because of noise pollution. And again, piracy is playing a big role in reducing artist income. So it’s a double edged sword.” (Nemauluma).

These statements show that many artists know about new industry developments. They know the benefits and the disadvantages. Although, this paper does not address the issue of piracy in detail as other researches have done so extensively, it is briefly highlighted due to its impact on the dissemination and monetization of music, as it is prompted by the digital revolution. The researcher asked follow-up questions according to how artists responded to the first main question which is: Do you use digital platforms to market and distribute your music and how? Many artists provided different answers and different reasons for their actions. Mutendas for example, was reluctant to answer the question directly as he started talking about the benefit

of digital platforms. His answer covered the points addressed by Tshisevhe although the question required a simple “Yes” or “No” answer with an explanation. During the interview the researcher coaxed him to feel comfortable by encouraging him to speak his truth on whether he had started using the internet to distribute his music or not. That is when he said “Well, I don’t have it on the internet but we are working on it.” He seemed a bit embarrassed about that. Perhaps it is because he has been in the industry for two decades and is reluctant to embrace new technologies to move with times. The researcher assured him that many artists are in the same position as they observed in many informal discussions with many Vhembe artists.

Nemauluma was very positive when asked about which internet sites he uses to market his music, and replied: “So far iTunes is the one which seems to be safe and protected as it has a good track record of sales and payment to copyright owners. This is my favourite one. The rest I don’t care about. That is why I will only speak of iTunes. For me business wise it is very good” (Interview, Memauluma, 2017). He underscored why he is a fan of iTunes: “Iyaa! iTunes gives you a good report. They even give you a statement; then you can claim your money with no trouble. And those managing iTunes stick to the agreement rules on the contract.” Not a small feat for someone in South Africa used to people breaking contracts or not sticking to an agreement and the rules, especially in the music industry. He then said that there are artists who testify and prove with statements that iTunes is working for them. As he produces many artists and engineers a lot of projects, Mamphogoro also weighed in on whether local artist are using the internet to promote and sell their music, and this is how he replied;

Iyaa! There are very few artists who take their music online. I checked with groups like Adziambei band, and they don’t even have a single song online. I also don’t have music online which brings the appearance that we undermine our own business. To tell you the truth, that is where the world is heading. We have to take it seriously and do digital releases. There is money there. I remember another group I recorded received R30 000 from digital sales, and they are not even well known. The music is seen and heard by people from afar, like for example a movie maker in Japan who might like to add some African music flavour, and can download and buy it which translates into money in the pocket!

(Interview, Mamphogoro, 2017)

He indicated that other artists have received some earnings via the online market place. On the same note Mutele also spoke of another artist he produced who was into digital distribution.

There is one guy called Thomani who really challenged me. He does Reggae music. I think I recorded him three years ago and he has two albums. He told me that I'll never see his music on CD and since then his music is sold only online. And he says he is generating income from it. He says he can sell just a song instead of the entire album, because some people prefer buying that one song they like only, rather than an entire album. That is how it works now.

(Interview, Mutele, 2017)

Mamphogoro came up through the era of cassettes and then the CDs, and is now witnessing this new revolution. He was very convincing when he said digital releases are the future way of disseminating music. But with so much music insight and views of the future, one could wonder why he is not jumping onto that boat. Unlike Adziambei Band which started recording in the early eighties and now dominated by older people who are not acquainted with new technology, artists like Mamphogoro who know about this new music business model are supposed to be using it to market their music. Tshisevhe answered the same questions by saying "Some are, some are not but there's a small amount of artists using the internet." He then further said that "We do not have evidence of local artists who are succeeding online through this new technology or even creating big names for themselves through it." He went on to talk about digitization plans with his band:

We are now planning on that as a band. We will be uploading all our albums online as we have just created a payment and deposit account where money will be allocated. We have some videos on YouTube posted by a fan that just shot us at a performance with over two thousand views, hence we are not cashing in on that as it is not uploaded from our account.

(Interview, Tshisevhe, 2018)

The band recorded its first album in 1999 and is now on its fourth album but still has no music online. His view seems to collide with Nemauluma and Mamphogoro who claim to have evidence of artists who are making money from iTunes. But neither mentioned a lot of artists, which could indicate that there are still a relatively small amount of people using the Internet and also benefiting financially from online exposure and sales. Bomo is one artist besides Rita D, who confirmed that he uses online distribution and it is working well for him:

We sell music digitally via iTunes. Back then we even made a documentary on E-TV. It was about the Ven-rap Digital Store. In that we were trying to form our own iTunes platform, and it is still running today. Those who want to use it have to sign the

agreement of terms and conditions then we give them a sales code tagged to their uploaded song. There is a monitoring system which checks how many downloads there are and it delivers a report. It was a long process as we learned as we went along how to even get service providers to intervene. It is still poor because few local people yet understand digital marketing.

(Interview, Bomo, 2018)

Having their own digital store (Ven-rap digital store) shows their level of understanding about new technologies. Like other Ven-rap artists, Bomo has a number of music videos online. Although their video resolution quality on YouTube doesn't compare to those of many celebrity artists from Johannesburg, Durban and of those from other African countries, they are trying to at least be visible. Quality is likely one of the contributing factors (besides the video storyline) for why almost of the locally produced music videos have a very small amount of views. Lack of high resolution quality may be caused by the use of low resolution cameras, for example.

Rita D seems to have contrasting ideas about the matter of video quality and success. She first said that (sound) quality determines success. But when we spoke of Makhadzi's only video that has reached over a million views on YouTube, she said that a video shot by a cell phone of very low quality camera can sometimes beat a fully produced music video with big cameras and a creative team around it, because of the quality of the content. The video was created when Makhadzi performed during a soccer match half time for local teams Tshakhuma tsha Madzivhandila and Black Leopards, in Thohoyandou Stadium, which was then posted on YouTube. It is the only video from Vhembe of Tshivenda content that has reached a million views. The video even surpassed all her music videos with dramatized and directed content. It was better received than those shot during other official music events, including the Royal Heritage Festival<sup>14</sup> where the stage presentation was great and the lighting really complimented the camera resolutions. This is what Rita D said about it:

Funny enough here in Vhembe there is no artist who has reached Makhadzi's online video views, but we've got legends and the problem comes back to that their music is not [she gesture signs]. And all of our videos are good [in views]. The views are very, very good. If people love an artist, they don't look at the video quality. If I love Brenda Fassie I'll still go online and watch her videos regardless of whether it was shot with a

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Royal Heritage Festival is the biggest music festival in Vhembe held at Nandoni dam on a South African heritage months (September).



cell phone or tiny-little camera. If the music is appealing to people, they will follow it no matter how-much it is played on radio. But with a music video, if it is played ten times a day, you'll end up whistling to the tune of the song. I think people are attracted more to visuals than listening.

(Interview, Rita D, 2017)

YouTube is the most popular free video streaming service and the most effective music promotion site, followed by Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Soundcloud is one of the most effective free audio streaming services used by artists to promote their music. When speaking to Sy Ntuli he said that:

Eh, *mina* as an independent artist and a business person who is running his own record label. The advantage of digitalization has been, number one, with distribution - because as an independent artist as you would - we have been struggling to get our music to the people so that has been a big problem but with digitalization of music we are now able to get our music to our people and basically not only national. It goes international. When you release your music online it goes global. I think for me eh, that is one's biggest advantage and the great thing about digitalization.

(Interview, Ntuli, 2017)

Sy Ntuli explained there are many different methods of selling music using digital platforms, such as emailing audio files, Dropbox, WhatsApp, Google Drive and other direct file sharing method to individual costumers. As the former head of Central Johannesburg College music department and a music business teacher, he seems to be very well acquainted with the music industry. Besides knowledge of online stores and social media platforms, local artists still struggle to build their brand and this contributes to fewer streams and downloads. Yet, many artists are not active on these digital platforms. The following theme addresses the possible cause for this discrepancy.

When addressing challenges with marketing and distribution, none of the artists spoke about the issue of streaming. This confirmed that digital forms of music distribution have not yet fully arrived. When the researcher raised the issue of commercial music streaming, most were not too sure exactly how it works, including Rita D. When asked about her opinion on streaming and subscription services overtaking download she responded:



Eish! [Screeching her head] Uh! Now, when you have to purchase, when you have to stream your own playlist, heish! Maybe because you can take one song from Makhadzi, one song from Lil Wayne, one from someone else - then you can make a playlist and stream the whole month and pay only R39. Hey, that I'm not sure but if they say they are making money which means artists are going to make money but I'm not sure. I'm not sure about that.

(Interview, Rita D, 2017)

Bomo seemed very keen about online sales, streaming and downloads, and he asserted that local artists need knowledge about how audio streaming works. This was not surprising because streaming is not so big in South Africa. Only two men interviewed for this project subscribed to Apple Music, and many artists do not know the difference between Apple Music (for streaming) and iTunes (for downloads). As stated in chapter two, Sipho Dlamini said that there are already over 250,000 paying subscribers on streaming services in South Africa and he expects the market to grow strongly. His information is published in 2018 Global Music Report published by The International Federation of the Phonographic Industry (IFPI). 250 000 is a very small number comparing to European countries and USA. Most of the people including artists are familiar with YouTube video streaming or unless the term streaming is the one confusing.

#### **5.11. CAUSES FOR NOT USING DIGITAL MARKETING AND DISTRIBUTION AMONGST VHEMBE MUSICIANS**

This theme examines the reason why many Vhembe artists are not visible on digital platforms, and why they do not market and distribute their music online. Some seem to know about these things from their views about digitalization, while others are intimidated by the technology or simply can't afford it.

As a long-time Chairman of Nambidza Devhula artists' cooperative, and a prior office administrator, Tshisevhe encountered numerous proposals from those interested in helping artists put their music online. He addressed a few reasons why many are not on these platforms:

The reason why local artists are not visible on digital platforms is due to a lack of understanding about how things are done and for some it is due to time. As a band we have to consult each other and reach a group consensus about how or whether to go online, but for a solo artist it is easier as they don't have to consult many people.

(Interview, Tshisevhe, 2018)

He mentioned lack of understanding, time and mutual understanding between band members when it comes to group settings. This sounded like someone who did not want to admit that as a band they do not know how to conduct digital music business or they simply have not considered it to be a viable method for their band Cornerstone. The third issue should not be viewed as a problem due to the fact that the principles of marketing and distribution are the same regardless of whether it is physical or digital; namely to reach a large number of people and convince them to buy the music.

Cornerstone is built of very active members who are very familiar with technology as one of them was even a radio personality, and an event organizer who uses all these platforms to market events. However, the researcher was surprised when Tshisevhe told him that the only content they have online are videos of live shows that were not even posted by them, but their fans. A live performance video on this link <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ggoDfaLNMqW> is posted by a fan named Khuliso Tshiongo, and there are many others posted by different people. So, Cornerstone members are not even curating their own art because they are not familiar with the practice. Tshisevhe already mentioned in other comments, that there is no evidence of people in Vhembe district that are earning money from digital distribution besides addressing all the benefits one could gain. He knows that there are benefits in digital platforms even though Vhembe artists are not using the platforms.

Unlike Naphy M who said he has no idea how digital sales and distribution works, and has tried to seek assistance from those who know, until he found someone who posted his videos on YouTube using his own account. He said “my music is on YouTube but it is not registered in my name. When you go to download, if there is money it might be going to the person who uploaded it for me, because he used his own account. You only see that it is Naphy singing and the song title but the other information is his.” This two links (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tOIWJ6F3kLk>, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x5aVSiDPdLI>) provides evidence to his statement. This speaks to Rita D’s comments about people exploiting artists using these platforms:

I realized late that there are actually a lot of people making money from Limpopo artists because they lack knowledge to protect their rights. Some say excitedly “Rita, I saw

my song on YouTube” not knowing that someone who posted that song online is actually monetizing their music and getting paid for it, but not the rightful owner! And that person knows nothing about music, they don’t compose, nor write; they’re not even in the entertainment business, but they earn ten grand a month from that video they recorded of you performing for peanuts. There are people who just scout well-known artists in areas like Vhembe who don’t have profiles or exist on digital platforms. Those people could come to an artist and say “I can make your songs visible on the Internet”. Because artists lack knowledge, they feel like it is like a fantasy, and they hand over their rights by just signing some papers without reading or understanding them. Only to later find out that they gave that person 100% of their rights. It’s like selling your music automatically. You don’t own any of it. So, that’s happening in our country, and especially here in these areas [around Vhembe]. Because people lack knowledge of what is music digitalization and how music on line, they fall into such trap.

(Interview, Rita D, 2017)

We do not know if those posting the music of artists like Cornerstone and Naphy M intended to benefit from them, or if they are just consumers with YouTube accounts who know nothing or do not care about monetization. The fact is that it takes a substantial amount of data, [which is very expensive for the average South African] to post a video on YouTube. Such a commitment and expenditure is expected to yield benefits to the publisher (the person posting the video, who may not necessarily be the rightful owner); yet, artist in this case will not benefit if the song is popular and reaches a paying amount of streams. But for many artists, the joy of being online is benefit enough, and few realize they are being deprived from driving a financial benefit from this form of dissemination. Chris Thiba made the following point about his use of online platforms.

Now I am using ReverbNation and Facebook. I created a YouTube channel which is not active due to time constraints. I have not yet committed myself to it as one has to be proactive in promoting ones content, by creating awareness via other social media platforms. With ReverbNation one can pay a certain amount to get music marketed on many different platforms. You need to have content to put forward but the long term benefits are good. You can only monetize your content if you pay for the online service.

(Interview, Thiba, 2018)

Thiba’s comment prompted the question of how much time is enough time to gain recognition and monetize ones music online. Like many other local artists, Thiba is proactive on Facebook, posting a lot of activities he is involved in; whether it is rehearsals or gigs he participates in. That use of social media is its own form of online promotion. His point about time correlates with Tshisevhe who said having enough time to do it all, is a significant factor for some. In

Thiba's case one can understand the time constraint as he has a full time day job, and only does music when he is off from that work. But for a full time artist, time should not be a factor. Take for example a Master's Degree graduate and current PhD student at Univen, Mercy Masakona's comments about the matter:

I used to sell cassettes, and soon after we changed to CDs, which was simple as we could do direct sales to customers, but now there are new online ways which is difficult, as we artist are not knowledgeable enough about how it works. We don't know what to do to benefit from digital platforms and sometimes we are even scared if we could get all our money from these platforms...

(Interview, Masakona, 2018)

Mercy's comments about the difficulty of online dissemination and monetization demonstrates that this is not a problem of whether one is educated or not, but a question of whether one is willing to learn more about how online tools function; and it can be intimidating to learn at first, in all fairness. Or it could be that artists shouldn't be expected to do it all as it is time consuming and a lot of work to create, perform, produce, promote and sell ones music. This brings to mind the saying "it takes a village" as there clearly is a need for teamwork to handle the many facets of the music business. Managing an online profile can be complicated and very time consuming, especially in the beginning. Honey Mutele spoke his truth with the following words:

To speak the truth, my album is not online. I had a great appeal last year for a platform where singers were gathered for workshops by experts in the field because our world is changing to digital. In three years-times you might find that the CD market has declined dramatically. Now people are on the internet. But here [in Vhembe district] there is a lack of experts who can come and teach us how to use these platforms for our music to be accessed around the country and overseas.

(Interview, Mutele, 2017)

Mutele explains that education about online tools is critical and there is a lack of experts to bring knowledge and skills transfer to local artists about the digital platforms and their importance in today's global market place. This study highlights the fact that lack of knowledge and understanding of their functionality are the reasons why his and other local artists' music is not online. Many artists bare the same plight – and it is clear that Vhembe needs training and tools to get up to speed in the digital economy. Mercy Masakona said that she did not know

much about any other online channels except for YouTube. When asked if she understands the system of YouTube monetization of music she answered:

We still need knowledge about it. I have one video on YouTube but am very concerned about whether I will get money from it or not. We need workshops as singers, as we are not sure about what we are doing online. If I at my age [she has been active in the music world since 2000] speak like this, how about older artists - which is why I keep emphasizing that there is a great need for artist workshops on how to apply these new digital developments for the music industry.

(Interview, Masakona, 2018)

From all of the comments about not having workshops, the researcher wondered if the local artists realizes that the same YouTube they use to view other people's music, or Trevor Noah's jokes, has all the free workshops they need from industry experts and famous artists, about how to start the journey - although they might still need experienced publishers to collect their money from YouTube and other sophisticated online platforms. Many of these local artists are very active on Facebook, but that is where their online activities stop. This is what Mutendas said about the matter: "I need that knowledge - that is why I haven't gotten into it. Once I get that knowledge I'll dive into it. We need some workshops so that artists will know how to reach those [online] opportunities" (Interview, Mutendas, 2017).

Mutele also addressed the issue of unity in the music community, in terms of knowledge sharing and uplifting one another. Black Coffee said that African artists need to start sharing knowledge and helping one another to succeed (Midem, 2018). After inquiring about the issue of unity among local Vhembe artists, Mutele reemphasized the matter:

Venda artists are not united because they are very individualistic. They don't want to be told what to do or how to present themselves. Everyone is doing things on their own. There won't likely be a free flow of information, because when you come tell me - or any artist - about new developments, we look at who is telling us and believe that person does not have the right to tell me anything about my music or career in the industry. We in Vhembe, in South Africa, have to understand that we need to pull each other up and the one being uplifted should be up-lift-able and give back in return. There is information available, but when one offers a workshop but people are sceptical about others, and they first look at who called for the workshop - only to find only ten in attendance. However, when coming to attend an award show, you find out that perhaps two thousand artists have applied for the award! That's how it is. When you look at other countries like Nigeria you'll see that artists are very united even when you look at their movie productions you'll see many stars collaborating.

In Venda we lack the industry. It is hard to find people who are even willing to commit to offer training for artists, even when the artist is really motivated to receive training on any topic, to advance in their careers. The local radio station called us for an artist's production workshop, which Mamphogoro and I spoke on the panel for, but still only a fraction of local singers came. When you call them to help them with information they won't come. Like this info about digital distribution, you'd find that someone is still in the dark about it, but he won't come when you call him. It will be very hard to explode into an industry if we still have that attitude that certain individuals cannot tell you anything.

(Interview, Mutele, 2017)

Considering the fact that most local artists follow other artists on these platforms (unlike older artists who tend to avoid the internet,) they need to also spend time and utilize their paid-for data-bundles wisely, to seek for the information to fill the gap in their music development, and eventually build their own team to help with all facets of their music career. The president of the country, Mr Cyril Matamela Ramaphosa, spoke about the price of data bundles being one of the contributing factors to why some small businesses struggle to survive in this digital age. He mentioned this in his 2018 State of the Nation Address (SONA). This applies to the topics discussed in this paper, and the music industry in South Africa as artists need access to robust data-bundles in order to be fully engaged in online music marketing and distribution. The high cost of data services is not a new issue in South Africa and is being addressed in many socio-economic areas in society. This is how Rita D expressed her thoughts on data bundle issues in South Africa as citizens pay significantly more than what citizens in other African countries pay. She said that "Data must fall by the way. Data in South Africa is very, very expensive, but the times have changed. It has become electronic and about social media, so we can't live without data. Like myself, I cannot see a day without data because my business is gonna stand still. I can't access anything without data" (Interview, Rita D, 2017).

If this issue is left unattended, South African indie artists and small businesses will not grow as fast, or may be stifled all together and fall behind the digital norm. This battle can only be resolved with political willingness to rectify it, as network service providers are known to exploit citizens with monopolizes and exorbitant prices. Without affordable data services and internet access, there will be no future viable music industry in South Africa. But knowing how to use the internet to monetize music and access to affordable and strong data is not the only challenge for the future of music industry. The next part discusses an equally important matter,

namely the protection of copyrights and preventing the theft of intellectual property in the online environment.

## **5.12. DIGITALIZATION AND MUSIC PIRACY**

After most of the respondents to this project addressed the impact of digital technology on their music career, they did not miss an opportunity to mention piracy as one of the negative impacts of the dynamic online tools and new economy. The researcher did not intend to dwell on the matter because much research about piracy has been conducted at the University of Venda, Yet it is impossible to not talk about online piracy and it's profound impact in the context of the music industry going digital, and it would not do justice to this paper if the findings and views of other academics and music industry leaders are not included, provided the fact that digital technology is behind this scourge of lawlessness that now seems so normal and common. Mercy Masakona details the topic in her Master's thesis on local artists, and Thulani Zulu addressed it in his study of the music industry in Johannesburg. This chapter addresses the impact of technology on music piracy. When Sy Ntuli addressed the advantages of digitalization he said:

The biggest disadvantage of piracy is that you're excited at first to upload your music online, and the next thing you realize is that it's suddenly available everywhere over the internet and there are sites you don't even know how they got hold of your music. There are massive issues of piracy as a result of digitalization of content. It happens with physical products too, that is not uniquely a digital problem. Digital adaptation simply accelerated the rate at which piracy could function and the amount of content that is pirated. Technology adapted to the crime!

(Interview, Ntuli, 2017)

To those artists who did not mention piracy when responding to other questions for this project, they were asked if they think computer accessibility and digital technology contributed to piracy. Mercy Masakona answered:

When I look at online marketing and distribution of music from the artists' perspective it kills me. It does not benefit us much because you record your music today and soon it will be all over the internet, without you receiving any benefits [unless you know how to use it, but even then it is not easy or a given that income will flow in]. Meaning, someone copies our music and sell it for their benefit. That is theft. That is why I say digitization and the Internet brought good and evil, as you could record and get your music shared and known far and wide, while on the other hand, artists frequently don't benefit. Many artists left the



industry due to piracy, online and off, but fortunately I'm still in the industry because I persevered and believed in myself and my music, thought good times and bad. Data sharing through smartphones, USB' and via computers is contributing a lot to the problem, because suddenly music is available seemingly for free, but this sharing, often without the artists consent, reduces music sales, as anyone could download music illegally and share it among groups of friends.

(Interview, Mercy, 2018)

She mentioned several piracy practices such as data file sharing, which is very common today amongst people of different age groups, across the globe. It is not only the youth who own USBs and smartphones with pirated content. Mamphogoro shares the same view, as he said:

Indeed, I can say the computer contributed to piracy because of devices such as memory sticks and re-writable and recordable CDs, which copy music with its original quality. Hence I love the Apple Mac idea of saving our content and hard-drive files in the cloud. During cassettes times we used to earn, but when CDs came it only took a short while before people realized they could just copy, instead of buying originals, despite the effort made to prevent that. With cassettes one would not get the proper quality of a home copy so it wasn't as big of a problem.

(Interview, Mamphogoro, 2017)

Before CDs came to place, many artists seem to have made substantial amount of money through selling cassettes because in South Africa it was not easy to find people with multiple cassettes duplicators. Unlike today when computers come with fast CD writers that duplicate music with original quality even with compressed Mp3 format; people only owned Hi-fi systems with single or double cassette player. Dubbing music through those systems was common between friends but the sound quality was not as good as it would come with a lot of noise; hence it was hard to commercialize such home duplicated cassettes. But in other places people would sell such bootlegged cassettes. Such was witnessed by Fabrice Geba when he visited Togo (a place of his father's origin before relocating to France). He told the researcher that in the street people would sell non-original cassettes of music that was hardly accessible in record stores. But the practice was not massive. Artist and producer Nemauluma believes that that was the best era for earning a living from music because in Vhembe there were no illegal music sellers. Also, Mutendas, who sold over 20,000 copies on his first independently released album, believes technology killed the business, starting with CDs that were so easy to copy. Nemauluma said:



During the year when music was recorded and sold on cassette tape, one had to go to a shop to purchase the music. We used to do radio advertisements to tell people where to go to buy music. Customers used to buy a lot of cassettes, and we used to make more money than now. And cassettes with local music were hard to pirate because good cassette making machines were only found in Johannesburg; but CD became simple because home computers came with CD players and burners. If the industry had continued to use cassettes, we might still be in business.

(Interview, Nemauluma, 2017)

CD piracy has been prominent in Vhembe, although it is a countrywide and global phenomenon. Presently, it is mostly older people that purchase those cheap and fake, R10 CDs. However, younger people get music to their phones via file sharing, typically through phone applications like Bluetooth and Share-it – and “free” downloads online from many illegal websites such as Tupidy, Mp3 Skull, Fakaza and TubeMate, where instead of streaming they can simply download videos to watch offline. On the same issue of modern technology Tshisevhe said:

It really is damaging when one person downloads your song and shares it with everyone by any available means. We see it even at taxi ranks [where most black South Africans get mini-buses taxis to work] in Thohoyandou, where people sell pirated music because they have the means through this technology to press CDs and sell pirated music. They are robbing the artists of their profit. It is very discouraging.

(Interview, Tshisevhe, 2018)

In North America, Europe and Asia, artists generally no longer complain about pirated CDs but online piracy. In those markets, people share music digitally, by any means available, including via cellphones and other mobile devices. The result is that instead of revisiting that one video to increase its view counts (which also means more money to artists as the video is monetized for each view), they watch it once and then they keep it in the device and view it offline, including sharing with friends. Both illegal download websites as do certain legal websites benefit from advertising on their platforms- and this has put the industry in a state of chaos.

The music industry loses a lot of money as many would rather take a ‘free’ download than purchase or stream music on a subscription. “*Why buy if you can get it for free*” is the kind of

attitude many possess. Many in our society do not have debit or credit cards and function in the cash economy, which makes it impossible for them to get the songs they like or the hit songs of the moment, and illegal music websites provide them that with the click of a cell phone button. To achieve all that, one needs only few data bundles, or free Wi-Fi, and a mobile device. One of the youth said that the cost of data to stream videos on YouTube is so high, he cannot afford a subscription on top of that, which is why he and his friends share such videos after one download. In addition, there are not many places that offer free Wi-Fi in Vhembe. Nemauluma expanded his thought on internet piracy by saying:

This new technology is killing us on the other side because people no longer prefer buying music whether physically or online, since they can just pull it from a computer without paying a penny. And they enjoy the music they didn't pay for. Reality is that technology brought both good and bad, of which the bad is killing us.

(Interview, Nemauluma, 2017)

Whether it is done online or through physical CDs, piracy is mostly blamed on the new technology and many artists have lost hope that the crisis can be resolved. Despite efforts made and street demonstrations by artists in the entire country of South Africa, it seems that new technologies will always present news to access and own music illegally through personal computer and cell-phones. The protection of music online appears to now be an impossible task all together according to Thiba who commented:

Technology is good but exposes artists to a lot of challenges, as the music is no longer protected. Once your music is recorded digitally, within minutes it can be copied and pressed, or digitally shared illegally. This technology has fallen into wrong hands and not even soldiers or the police can combat the crisis because people can do this on their home computer, and everyone is allowed to have a computer.

(Interview, Thiba, 2018)

His view is not different from Fabrice Geba, who said that: "There will always be pirates. I remember people selling copied cassettes when I went to Togo with my father when I was still young." South African artists never complained about cassette piracy but according to Geba, in Togo cassettes were pirated. Rita D said:

We are making more money online. The problem with hard copies is piracy. For example, I can release a new album and press 2000 copies aiming to do five promotions. I'll have to go to towns like Musina, Malamulela, and Liphilale. The moment I go to

Musina I'll sell 200 CDs stock out right. Tomorrow when I go to Elem I'll meet up with piracy because at night they'd be doing *maten-ten* [illegal CDs sold for R10 in the streets]. Which means if I sold 200 in the first day the rest will be around 150, 150. That's where the business is headed towards now. Because there are people who prefer to buy *maten-ten* because they can't afford original CDs. Hard copies don't have music profit this days...

(Interview, Rita D, 2017)

Piracy moves fast in the new digital economy, with the spread of technological developments. Rita D says they make more money online than from physical sales, but only few artists in Vhembe are selling their music online. Most young people in Vhembe share Makhadzi's music via cell phones, and her music is available on pirated CDs all over the taxi ranks, sold for only R10 by thieves and criminals – because that is what piracy is. This indeed is supporting evidence to corroborate her above statement on physical CD piracy. But this does not mean they do not experience digital piracy too. Both cell phones and USBs are also used to circulate Makhadzi's music.

When looking at all the examples, analysis and experiences from many artists in this research, one could be obliged to conclude that only those who understand the value of music and are very sentimental about owning original material are the ones left to support legal music. We just don't know how many or which percent does so, but the number is declining. The need for social awareness on the impact of such actions and behaviour, as well as attitudes towards the value of music, needs to be intensified. Together with increased social awareness, simple solutions like affordability of data should be presented because lack of internet access is one of the major factors on why artist are not fully participating on the digital platforms. On the same note, some music lovers cannot afford data for free streaming services like Soundcloud. Many of these potential streaming supporters are people who only buy data for Facebook and WhatsApp mostly on highly discounted price or access these services on free mode presented by their network providers.

### 5.13. POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS TO THE PROBLEM

To assess possible solutions, the researcher asked artists and industry experts in Vhembe what could be done to upgrade the local music industry, as well as mitigate the threats to the music business from piracy. Many of them agreed with and expressed the following points by Tshisevhe.

First, we have to train our people to understand that music has great impact on our nation – and is recognized worldwide. In my view, it is only now that local music is finally taken seriously for the first time ever in our history. Previously, people only supported festivals with artists from other provinces, and without our local audience support we won't go far... Only once people stop buying stolen music and start buying from the music creators and owners they will see growth in the industry. People should stop buying *maten-ten* CDs if they truly love the artist's music, and start buying legitimately produced music directly from the source or a legal representative that is authorized to sell their music.

(Interview, Tshisevhe, 2018)

According to Tshisevhe then, the success of local music lies in the hands of people who buy the music; not only the artists, composers, producers and managers themselves. Only if consumers change their attitude and support music purchasing legitimate music, can further growth of the industry be achieved. If consumers continue to support devious practices and pirated merchandise, the industry will continue to suffer. Instead of relying on consumers changing their attitudes, musicians are more likely to be successful by emphasizing skills development, government involvement to improve policies and enforcement of laws, and quality music productions.

Muofhe, [a local Afro-Soul singer], said that local artists need “knowledge of the industry and its processes, quality in recording music, designing and packaging and respect of the art. Chris Thiba, [a Reggae artist in Vhembe], addressed a common point by saying that “People should not only rely on music produced from technological tools. They should learn to play musical instruments, and fuse it with new technology for quality purposes.” (Thiba). On the issue of knowledge and skill, Nemauluma said:

There is a lot of schooling to be done in Limpopo as a whole, especially in Vhembe. Artists don't have full knowledge about how things work in the music business. I think if it is possible, [and it absolutely should be!] music organizations could organize experts to come and explain digital marketing and distribution, so that our artists can know about the advantages and the disadvantages of a career in music. I think local

artists could benefit a lot from such knowledge. They need to enter the industry knowing what they are going to face professionally.

(Interview, Nemauluma, 2017)

The main challenge leading to a dire economic instability in Vhembe music industry seem to be mostly associated with lack of marketing resources and skill beside consumer attitude on buying pirated music. The lack of expertise in the specific industry value-chain levels is keeping the local industry under developed. To have such structures in place some artists believe that government intervention is necessary because none of Vhembe artists has the financial muscle to put up such a structure. And also, if the structure is individually owned it would still keep other artist out of the gate. Emanuel Mamphogoro addressed the issue of governmental support by saying:

I would suggest the creation of an establishment funded by the government, responsible for marketing and distribution. Before it takes a project on, there should be a listening session to determine whether that music is ready. I think we lack that distribution establishment funded by government. I would have started it if only I did not work for the government. I would have written funding proposals to the Lottery and other potential funders.

(Interview, Mamphogoro, 2017)

The idea of having such an organization seem to be a great solution but only without the regulations addressed by Mamphogoro as that would have control over music production and how it is promoted and distributed. This idea can somehow work if only such an organization is introduced as a trade association that could give access to resources such as internet, travelling funds, marketing tools, free workshops and skilled personnel without determining whether the album is ready or not because such evaluation is subjective. For example, in the research some indicated that a lot of music was not considered commercially viable by record labels and that contributed in keeping many good artists out of the industry. Benjamin Morel addressed the issue of government support by saying:

If there could be a backup from structures like Arts and Culture. There should be more investments in structures like performing arts centres. Creating such establishments can help grow our industry, because when musicians grow musically, the quality of their work grows. The assistance from centralized funds and government agencies that support the arts could help keep up the industry. And when the industry grows, we can

have good resources to keep up with the technology development and tools that are advancing very fast.

(Interview, Morel, 2017)

His idea was more focused on the production quality which is fundamental to industry growth. Performing arts centres build artistry but trade associations help with access to market. With good local organizational structures progress is possible. Still on the issue of government support Rita D. addressed issues of government negligent to art industry including music (with more specific reference to Limpopo province where Vhembe district is found). She said that:

First thing first we need a database of music and artists (including, good metadata to make sure names are spelled correctly so revenues reach the appropriate copyright owners) because a lot of artists are being exploited in Vhembe. That is why Limpopo singers are not recognized. The government should start taking Limpopo seriously, and arts and culture in Limpopo seriously as a viable economic contributor. I don't know if I can say it is twisted. They tell artists they are funded but only give you that money after four years. I don't know what is happening in Limpopo, but we don't have an industry because of the government. They should start building institutions like Music Institutions to train and support local talent. The way they are doing it in the other departments; let's do it in arts and culture. They should push to find strategies that support the arts and also offer workshops for artists, to try and educate our Limpopo artists. I don't mean those brushing over subjects kind of workshops. They make money from those events, but the artists don't earn a thing. I think if there could be graduates, things could be better because a person who went to school for it would put passion before income.

(Interview, Rita D, 2017)

Her comment also highlighted the issue of corruption within the structures that are supposed to push the matter of skills development. After her negative comment on Limpopo government structures of the arts, she presented an idea of having people who studied the trade to be those who can be used in pioneering the industry growth instead of using people who are just there for money. A traditional gospel singer, Naphy M, said that if artists receive some sort of support or sponsorship from the government or an industry trade association, things could get much better, as they now struggle to find producers like Mr Mike of Misho Recording Studio who has a good reputation. Because he does not work full time in his studio but has to work as a security guard to make ends meet, artists have to search for him and wait to get help with music production after a while. Naphy M said: "We now have to wait until Mr Mike is off from work and this is not good but there is nothing we can do as we cannot record and pay him every

day” (Interview, Naphy M, 2018). It shows that a family man like him cannot solely rely on music for a living, and for him to survive there should be some form of support so he can generate enough income to invest back on his business.

In this section Vhembe music practitioners offer clear solutions to challenges faced by the local music scene. These industry insiders offered different solutions to the challenge of the struggling local music industry ranging from skills development and financial resources, to government support. According to most of the above comments, government should be more involved in assisting the development of the local Vhembe music industry. Skills development through workshops or academic programs was raised as one of the fundamental issues and a key hindering factor to Vhembe artists building viable music businesses. In every business to prosper, capital is a necessity; hence Vhembe artists mostly emphasized the issue of government support as other business enterprises are not keen to invest in music.

#### **5.14. CONCLUSION**

This research has looked at the music industry in Vhembe with interviews from more than [twenty] local artists and music industry insiders from abroad. With the advent of the internet and new modes of producing, listening to and purchasing music, some in Vhembe struggle to keep up. Many lack basic skills to participate in the digital economy, and others cannot afford the high cost of data in order to conduct proper business online. Many struggle to understand how to have a professional presence online and promote market and sell ones music, while simultaneously protecting ones intellectual property rights online.

For the majority of the musicians, artists and business people interviewed in this research, digital technology has changed the value chain of the music industry, and the result is that the new technologies – to the extent it can be afforded – is not used to its full potential, but is used mostly for recording albums or studio productions. On the other hand, Vhembe artists are missing the power of digital tools to market and sell music effectively (which includes distribution and streaming) for lack of training and resources - despite being aware of the impact of successfully using digital marketing to building a music career.

All of the subject in this study have embraced the introduction of digitalization because it helps reduce recording costs and has broken a kind of monopoly that existed previously as the



industry has sprung wide open to everyone. Some pitfalls of digitization includes poorly produced music (because of cheaper, faster solutions, that shortcuts the professional review process) and presently dominates the local music scene, compromising the quality professional musicians are expected to produce. So, some celebrate the ease at which music can be produced and disseminated, while others complain that the quality of the music suffers as a result; oversaturating an already noisy digital market place, drowning out viable products and services – or, overwhelming artists who do not know where to turn for appropriate exposure and to monetize their creations. This further perpetuates the challenges for local musicians who frequently withdraw from the industry, giving up a long held desire to make a living in the music industry, leaving a lot of untrained, casual musicians who think it's fun but are not necessarily motivated to conduct legitimate music business online.

Yet, with most of the productions and album releases, it is clear from this research that the majority of Vhembe artists – new or veterans - do not know how online marketing, distribution and licensing works, or how the process of monetization functions. This is why all of the subjects interviewed in this research – many of them once famous local artists - spoke of the necessity of training programs and workshops. They all realize that the music industry has shifted from physical distribution to digital, and is slowly gaining popularity locally amongst the technology-able, and soon that change will completely replace the previous compact-disc era and recording habits from an early time, like it has already done in most overseas markets.

(With more specific reference to Limpopo province where Vhembe district is found) On the point about the state of the local industry all interviewed here agree that the local industry is in a state of crisis; and there is no professional music industry due to the fact that there is no value chain infrastructure to support musicians. All of the artists and music industry participants interviewed for this research are independent, and finance their own production, marketing, distribution and sales. They cannot afford to hire personnel to take on other roles such as PR, artist management, or a marketing and distribution team, which obliges local Vhembe artists to handle every aspect of making a living via music, from writing and composing to performing and producing, marketing and distributing – they end up as a one-stop-shop, doing everything, stretching themselves thin.

This research did not uncover one local publishing company in Vhembe, necessary for ensuring proper music administration in all platforms of music usage. The reason for not uncovering any



publishing company is because during the time of the research there was none and still there is no established music publisher in Vhembe. This leaves artists to self-publish, yet most do not know what music publishing entails. These challenges contribute to keeping the local music industry under the bridge and behind global norms. Black Coffee said that teamwork yields success, to underscore that “it takes a village” to make a living off of music. They know that with proper structure and knowledgeable personnel, local industry can compete with the rest of the world provided such structures embraces properly produced products. Lastly, the artists and music professionals interviewed here seem to blame the government for showing less interest in the music sector in terms of ensuring investment in order to build a professional industry, but if this could be addressed then the province of Limpopo at large where Vhembe district municipality is found could compete with the rest of the country and even the global market place.

In this paper, the author did not write much about subscription audio streaming as none of the artists interviewed seemed to understand how it works. And that is on top of considering the fact that most people are more familiar with Soundcloud which is a free one for listeners.

## **6. CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **6.1. INTRODUCTION**

This chapter discusses the recommendations and summarizes the findings of this study, predicated upon the discussions and analysis derived from interviews, which provided the

scope of this research along with possible solutions to the challenges for the Vhembe music industry.

## **6.2. SUMMARY OF THE RESEARCH**

The purpose of the study was to look at the extent to which Vhembe artists are using digital technology in the production, marketing and distribution of music. It has also addressed the economic crises faced by local artist who survive through music as their only career. The study was mainly conducted in Vhembe district (amongst Levenda speaking artists) but some of the information was gathered from music practitioners from other parts of the world for reference sake.

Chapter one addressed the introduction, problem statement, rationale of the study, aims and objectives, and guiding questions. Chapter two reviewed information on digital technology, its impact on the local Vhembe music industry, and how artists respond to or utilize it. With input from local artists and music businesses as well as interviews in South Africa and abroad, and research into current trends, the author was able to establish a thesis. The research shows that digitalization opened the gates of the confined universe of music, which was previously controlled by three major record labels (Sony Music Entertainment, Universal Music Group and Warner Music Group), into a small ecosystem where artists suddenly had the freedom to chart their own music destiny. But this came with perils, which the industry is still working out. This chapter also discussed the 2018 survey by The International Federation of the Phonographic Industry (IFPI) on how the digital music market is doing globally and also in South Africa. This survey asserts that music streaming is set to become the future method of music distribution and sales, and selling physical albums is going extinct. As a result of research conducted with local artists and businesses, it is clear that it is just a matter of time before this change fully takes place here in Vhembe, as digital natives - the younger generation, is already embracing digital practices. Chapter three contains the research methodology, data collection methods, the study population and sampling methods for choosing subjects.

The study was conducted in Vhembe district where participants were selected according to their different roles in the music industry. The sample consist of twenty (20) individuals; producers, sound engineers, singers and artist managers. Some of them are from other provinces or abroad, and their information was used as a reference and comparison for how

other communities use digital technology tools in the music industry. Structured interviews were conducted with unstructured questionnaires, depending on the responses to fundamental questions, which were organized into codes and themes for later presentation. All participants were informed about the objectives and plans for the study and participated willingly. In chapter four, presentation, discussion and analysis of data and findings was carried out.

This study uses the actual names of participants with their permission, except for a random study population of music fans whose opinions were gathered from unplanned focus group.

### **6.3. RECOMMENDATIONS**

This part addresses the recommendations identified from the literature review in chapter two and the study findings in chapter four. As an active musician and a cultural entrepreneur the researcher also draws some of his experiences into the recommendations. Traveling to trade shows such as Midem (2016, 2017 and 2018), CMJ Music Marathon in New York City (2015) and South by South West (2016, 2017 and 2018) opened his eyes to new trends and music industry innovations. His engagements with different music industry leaders and upcoming artists gave him insight on how the music industry operates from the perspectives of major and independent music practitioner in this digital era. The researcher met and engaged with many music technology innovators who shared new innovative technology and possible future music production trends such as Hum-On music application addressed in this paper.

Considering the fact that the traditional music value-chain practice is gone, the researcher realised that Vhembe is not immune to such positive and negative wave of change driven by digital technology; hence, he believes that artists in Vhembe district should harness this new trends. In his engagement with Rob Stone, co-founder of (a Hip-Hop magazine based in New York) named Fader Magazine at CMJ Music Marathon (2015), the researcher addressed the possibilities of African music taking over the global commercial limelight. Stone agreed to that fact and stated that they have even started including African artists in their issues of the magazine. It is now very clear that the world of entertainment is keen to explore African content. The researcher also witnessed that in these music conferences, panel of discussions and music performance showcases hosted by South African delegates receive great support from international music industry drivers. Some of the artists even got collaboration deals with artists from abroad. Dr Bone who also had a showcase in some of these events got signed by

Warner Music South Africa, while Moonchild Sanelly stroke international collaborations with artist such as Gorillaz, Wizkid and Diplo. Many artists are now internationally known from attending these conferences. Makhadzi, Takie Ndou and Malondolo are some of the artists from Vhembe district who have attended some of these events, although there are no reports of collaborations or international deals. Unlike artists from other parts of South Africa and other African countries who travel with their managers, Malondolo and Makhadzi went to Midem without music managers. This could be the reason of them not maximising their chances on the opportunity. It is clear that with time, local artists can also reach the international level if they adhere to some of the recommendation made in this study.

#### **6.4. Music production**

Considering all the responses on whether local music production meets international standards, it is very clear that more work needs to be done to improve the quality of local productions. Due to the fact that there is no regulation, like for other industries, on who gets in, anyone - regardless of whether they are talented and have skills or not - can jump into the music industry whenever and however they want. This leaves the industry flooded with badly produced music, among other repercussions.

One recommendation is for artists to use proper recording studios with proper basic or pro-infrastructure tools, instead of chasing for cheap production means. If musicians can only afford doing a full production at a local or less professional studio, they can take the music for final mixing and mastering at a professional studio to produce high-end quality, provided the audio can be properly tracked. This is better than starting and finishing products in a shady facility. The impact of Pro Tools HD systems or Tascam digital studio mixers can add a tremendous impact on a low budget recording.

Artists and musicians should be taught that recording their music using a simple computer microphone (“mic”) input will only serve to kill their career, as it will sound cheap and amateurish, and not serve to break the music out to international or national markets. Many people, especially the younger generation who follows *Ven-rap* and other electronic commercial music like House and *Manyalo*, are unable to tell the difference between good or bad quality.

Music professionals recommended that artists hold a peer-to-peer judged critical listening sessions before releasing music, using professional sound systems rather than computer speakers, for both recording and mixing. The input from fellow musicians and artists could yield positive outcomes and help ensure that quality products go to the public. Although many will find this approach old school and not take that route, those who plan on a music career are advised to take their craft seriously by ensuring they have quality products recorded from professional studios. The quality of ones recorded work and presentation of one's portfolio, could make or break ones reputation; unless the goal is simply to end up circulating music around local villages. For song writers, team composition is also recommended, as that will help fill most of the missing elements in a song. Young producers and sound engineers should take an apprentice to improve their skills.

Songwriters should not insist on singing if they do not have the voice for it. Their songs could be better used by those artists who need their skills, and in turn may not be capable songwriters. Many singers cannot write lyrics to the music they compose. They should seek lyricists and songwriters who can handle that role.

There are lots of keyboard players and other instrumentalists who were trained in Churches. They may have talent but may also not be formally trained, therefore, they could start out composing or producing original music, rather than relying on downloaded beats online, which is currently a trend, especially for untrained creative people. Singing over other people's music could be perceived as a sign of not being able to compose or produce; besides, it may also be plagiarism and intellectual property theft. To archive all of the local talent, there should be a database or websites, listing people with different skillsets, mapped to a system that could connect the talent to people that are seeking a specific skill set. This could be a simple membership system or organized via University or, a professional trade association, for example. However, there are many tools online for promoting and finding talent. This could also be listed via a relevant government site or in job listing boards and similar websites.

## **6.5. Marketing and promotion**

Marketing is the only way to build product and brand name awareness. Only products and services that are well marketed sell well. There are many songs that are poorly produced, with little creative or professional input, but because of robust marketing, they become one-hit-

wonders. Not everyone can market a product; marketing is a specialized skill that requires a professional that is well acquainted with its principles and methods. It needs a person who follows marketing trends and understands consumer behaviour with a skill to match that with specific products. It does not necessarily mean one has to have a formal education in marketing, but this job requires skill and patience, and it takes time to navigate through all the PR, social media and marketing channels, and to enhance and maintain the brand in a highly competitive field. There are many ways local artists can apply themselves to market their music effectively with results. Some artists think putting music on Soundcloud and posting statuses on Facebook is marketing – if it is not being branded and monetized, then it is simply being shared. There has to be a strategic and consistent plan.

A few recommendations for local artists – especially in the case where there is a lack of skills, capital and time, for reasons discussed earlier – include:

First, considering the fact that many artists do not have resources to acquire marketing and promotion skills, organizations like Nambi dza Devhula which is a Vhembe artist cooperative, could organize training in collaboration with marketing graduates from colleges like Vhembe FET. The artists could train or apprentice or intern with the graduates to acquire their practical marketing skills. Artists who really take their career seriously could pay for this training by donation money each month for marketing graduates to run their social media sites, upload their content online and ensure that they reach every platform possible.

Depending on the amount needed to fund such activities, including unlimited data for Wi-Fi, and a small stipend for such students; R100 a month can go a long way if collected in a group. Nambi Dza Devhula website or social media page could be used to profile artists and link them to relevant online stores and streaming services. This kind of a platform could be designed for artists whose production meets what could be defined as professionally produced music. If transformed from a cooperative to a registered non-profit organization, Nambi dza Devhula could apply for specialized funds from institution such as National Lottery and The Small Enterprise Development Agency (Seda) to fund their facility as well as internet services, building on different government and private funding for music initiatives.

Secondly, if Nambi dza Devhula is not able to serve in this function, artists who have other careers on the side, can combine resources and implement the same concept, using someone's

space, or form their own cooperative, so that they can keep abreast of trends and are never left behind when new marketing trends emerge. Like Black Coffee said, this is called investing back into their business – and the community. Joining forces, these artists could invest a fixed amount of money per month to hire a public relations person, who could act as their PR representative – or even a Publicist, while they are busy working in full time jobs outside the music industry. For example, ten artists could invest R500 a month, they could raise R5000 which if they give it a period of six months could rise to R30 000 to start with. It is like playing a *stoakfell*<sup>15</sup> that never pays back in cash but in services. If they invest R1000 each month, it means their money doubles. As a team, they can make it happen, and this team work could be an important, empowering exercise, considering some of the points they mentioned in the interviews in this research, that local Vhembe artists are not moving forward because of lack of teamwork. Such team investments could be an encouraging factor because it creates a form of commitment or obligation and trust. This money could be invested in PR and to help build their brands. It is a very small amount compared to money invested by record labels on a single artist. A portion of music income (whether it is CD sales or live performance) could be invested back to the joint project. Creating a cooperative like (Nambi dza Devhula music cooperation) could be the most effective way to build the local industry as local business people do not believe in music investments at this stage.

Lastly, a team of industry individuals could form and fund an establishment based on their respective areas of expertise, pooling their collective skills and resources. This team could identify one or two, or even three artists (but not too many to handle); record them and offer a full service from beginning to end, to brand each individual, starting with everything that goes into a quality production and ending with a campaign which leads to their music trending on all marketing platforms. For example: Emanuel Mamphogoro (Thohoyandou, Sibasa) is a great sound engineer with classy studio facilities, Honey Mutele or Benjamin Morel (Thohoyandou) are great producers, Hendrik Nematili (now lives in Johannesburg) owns a professional sound and lighting company, Gabriel Tshisikule and his wife Denga (now lives in Johannesburg) are internationally connected and own professional video equipment, and Rita D specializes in marketing and PR. Gathering such forces and skilled industry experts behind one or two artists could have tremendous impact. There could be a lot of challenges on the



financial front, but that could be handled through mutual cooperation as well as consultations with a financial expert, and working towards a common goal. All big records labels and music companies are built on big teams of individuals with a common goal and it is natural that there will also be conflict, but together as a group these professionals could bring a lot of good to the local music community.

## **6.6. Distribution**

Distribution infrastructure is essential to get music to the masses. It requires creative methods to make people aware of new music and to get them to buy music. After music has been marketed and promoted, it has to become easily accessible to consumers, in order to build brand loyalty. The following section offers suggestions for how local artists can effectively distribute physical and digital music.

### **6.6.1. Physical Distribution**

Distribution of music is problematic for local artists. Because there is still a physical music market in Vhembe for the sale of CDs, Vhembe artists could organize themselves and rent some retail space in Thohoyandou, Limpopo. The advantage is that they would have more control over how their CDs are promoted and sold locally, rather than relying on unethical or dishonest shop owners who may steal from them, or worse: close down and take their music with them. For example, a portion of Bil Sound Music Shop (in Thohoyandou) could be a starting point as the shop sells music instruments, and if the proprietor agrees to an arrangement with artists, there could be an area for the sale of CDs added. Aspiring music professionals can use posters, radio commercials and social media awareness campaigns to direct consumers to the shop, and even promote the music to local taxi drivers to deliver to people in areas outside of the city who may not have access to music stores, but could purchase the music using systems like e-Wallets.

Artists can still do street promotions and sales but these distribution tactics have the potential to ensure that those who cannot access music easily can go to the shop or call from a taxi rank or anywhere around town to get the CD delivered to them. because These days, people demand convenience, and it is easy to market to the significant group of the local population who in the informal economy use local taxi networks to get home after work or shopping.

In order to successfully promote physical goods, especially with competition from digital music platforms, robust and professional CD packaging should be seriously considered, as music consumers should be able to differentiate between pirated CDs sold in the streets for R10 referred to as *ma1010* and an original CD. Those who have access to the technology should use the replication method of pressing rather than burning CDs using a home computer, as this will ensure the best disc quality. The digital economy has arrived and is taking over the local music market, but in Vhembe, it will still take a while to fully replace demand for CDs, as many middle age people or the yet older generation still prefer CDs as they believe digital is complicated and avoid computers and the internet.

#### 6.6.2. Digital distribution and streaming

Neither artists nor consumers can ignore the digital era that is upon us. Whether one likes it or not, all of us will have to join the trend sooner or later. The internet took us by storm and the digitalization of music production and distribution has radically changed how people think about, access and consume music.

Regardless of physical CD sales at the local level, digital is the only way to reach a (much) broader market. For those local musicians who are not familiar with technology tools and solutions can be identifying individuals who know how to open online store accounts to sell their music. This could also be facilitated by the local Nambi dza Devhula Cooperative to ensure transparency and honesty, as some who are simply promoting music may not be the rightful owner and be tempted to market the music in their own names instead of the actual artist's name. Some artists have been taken advantage of when people they have trusted to represent them or help sell and license their music have opened accounts without artists consent, or, without the artist realizing their music is being monetized but the royalties have gone to the person who registered, and not themselves.

Artists can cover their own distribution costs and the fees needed to join distribution platforms or streaming services, while they jointly pay someone to curate and monitor their accounts. This allows the artist to focus on producing music instead of multitasking with marketing, promotion, distribution, licensing and scheduling performances, which may rob them of their creative time.

Equally important is to register ones songs and music with the appropriate music organizations in order to necessary documentation for each released song. Artists should acquire The International Standard Recording Code (ISRC) codes for their songs from The Recording Industry of South Africa (RISA), and The ISWC (International Standard Musical Work Code) codes from the South African Music Rights Organization (SAMRO), for easy tracking of their music online, because many artists just post their music without such codes which makes it difficult to monetize it.

Platforms such as Ven-rap Digital Store developed by a Ven-rap artist called Bomo, could develop a mobile app for artists to promote and sell music. Music can be purchased through airtime or music-bundle can be introduced and purchased same as people purchase data-bundles, video bundles (on Vodacom) or Idols bundles (on Telkom Mobile) with airtime. Music bundles can be used to buy songs from the music-app for offline listening. This could aid in reduction of piracy because many still want to buy music legally but a lack of access to simplified online purchase method lead them to illegal website where music download is just a click of a button. This could be archived through partnerships with network service providers such as MTN, Vodacom, Cell C and Telkom Mobile.

Nambi dza Devhula music organization could develop a music library of music catalogue, to include artist biographies and contact details, with links to their music, since most artists cannot afford to build or maintain a professional website. Artists can have a segment in the website including a profile, music and contacts (either the organization contacts or artists' personal contact depending on the possible business method.

Direct e-Wallet sales and WhatsApp file transfer which only requires the app and Wi-Fi, could be encouraged as one of the method to boost music sales for those who want the music but are not able to access it because of distance. Those are people working in far distant land who might want the music without having to go online as many of the middle age people are not familiar with online stores. They mostly have WhatsApp are able to use many money transfer methods. Sy Ntuli attested that the method works for him.

Although not explored to a greater extent in this research, video streaming has also been suggested as one of the best marketing tools for music because people want to see and hear the artist. Visuals have been used to sell audio music in all forms of dissemination. The industry

makes significant investments to produce high quality music videos. Local artists are highly recommended to start investing in quality music videos as the local standard is very poor. Technology has made it much easier to produce a good or standard quality video cheaper rather than ever before. Local video producers should be proposed to produce professional music videos with talented directors. The introduction of DSLR (digital single-lens reflex camera cameras) to video production industry prompted this new transformation. Today, a number of videographers in Vhembe own high resolution cameras, which are capable of doing what use to be archived with a big budget. Artists can also invest in production cameras/technology, as a group to pool resources, or an individual, which would enable them to capture their content anytime even if they do not have cash to hire a video production company. Such content, depending on the quality, can easily be streamed – and even monetized - on YouTube or other platforms, to keep fans posted on their latest activities.

#### 6.6.3. Skills development programs

Lack of access to professional tools, experts, and knowledge about the business of the music industry; including how to build a professional portfolio and marketing plan, came up as primary challenges for local Vhembe musicians to advance. In his master class podcast streaming on YouTube with Oprah Winfrey, Tyler Perry said that after many attempt to stage a successful show, he realized that he needed marketing experts for promotion because doing it himself yielded no positive results. It was only when he performed at the House of Blues in Atlanta when he got the show sold out and it was then the beginning of his empire. This proves that with proper infrastructure and a team of task driven personnel, success is attainable. Such strive and victory is exemplary to all who are in the entertainment industry all over the world.

Many locally in Vhembe agree that the government should intervene to help transform the Limpopo art sector, because artists and the few professionals, who make a living from music or other sectors, cannot do it alone. It is costly and there is modest professional infrastructure, if it is not lacking entirely in most areas of the region. Places like Thohoyandou Town hall owned by the local municipality can be made easily available to performing arts organizations, to create a House of Blues kind of environment where many artists can be discovered.

Consumers are not educated on the opportunity cost to artists for pirating their content; and in any case, many cannot afford to purchase music, or, they do not have the means to subscribe

or use legitimate digital sources. Most of the local subjects interviewed here agree on this; hence the suggestion of a local music-app could be a viable tool to simplify purchase. Such can be archived with the assistance of government entities such as Department of Small Business Enterprise, Department of Sports Arts and Culture or Department of Trade and Industry.

The Limpopo/South African- Department of Sports Arts and Culture should have a mandate to assist in growing the art sector more especially the digital economy initiatives, but it is the responsibility of people in the sector to facilitate that growth into business entities. Many citizens are disappointed in the local/national government, and believe the government has the responsibility to intervene in support of the industry, to help local communities build viable industry sectors, in order to compete locally and even globally. Music is and can be a significant economic contributor, that simultaneously preserves and promotes culture, brings people together over a common theme, and brings happiness to people's lives. Who can live without music? Without music, what kind of a culture or society do we have? Without music, what would movies, TV, advertising, video games, flights and entertainment in general be like? Music is both a commodity and an art form; it is digital and it is a physical product. Many cannot imagine a life without music – yet, this sentiment does not translate into a thriving industry in most Limpopo regions (in general), as compared to Gauteng, North West, Natal and Western Cape provinces.

The digital economy presents a lot of opportunities as well as unique challenges. It is clear that local Vhembe artists need training in basic business skills, information on how to use the Internet to promote and monetize, and also protect their intellectual property; and there is a lack of institutions and facilities in Limpopo/Vhembe for artists to develop these skills. The government can help address these matters with funding, grants, training and workshops, in public-private partnerships. This tie-in well with its (government) mandate to meet-up with forth industrial revolution in all its respective economic endeavours.

One recommendation is for artists to organize and create their own workshops where a need is identified. Instead of pointing fingers at unqualified government officials and politically motivated individuals who do not prioritize art, they should regularly gather for knowledge-sharing sessions in small and large groups, to combat the spirit of individualism and inspire the development of well-rounded professionals. There are a lot of professionals with skills and knowledge on different aspects of the music industry in Vhembe district who may be willing

to contribute to discussions and meetings with the community, in order to help develop artists and a more professional music industry locally. They can even stream some of these workshops online and discuss how acquired knowledge can apply locally.

These gatherings could contribute to building community spirit and help local artists grow and discover each other's strong points and skillsets. If there is a special trend or newly developed technology, the group could encourage the selection of individuals who have passion for technology and research to educate the group on how to access and use such trends or tools. It takes a nation with a common mission to build an empire. The same goes for building a viable and enduring music industry.

Most of the known local artists in Vhembe started with a small amount of capital and big dreams, and they all worked very hard to navigate professional networks and build their music careers in a highly competitive industry. All this can be achieved if individuals get local support, by identifying potential partners from these knowledge sharing sessions, public-private resources and other supporting institutions.

Resources and learning should necessarily be focused on the digital economy and gaining skills to market and monetize via internet platforms such as YouTube. Workshops and training can be used as a basis to discuss how artists can apply what they hear to the local economy. Univen School of Music can endorse the programs as it is the only music institution locally. Graduates of the music school can help curate the informal or formal programs and the School of Music facilities may sometimes be used as a gathering place with permission from the university authorities. This would also benefit the music students as it would give them an opportunity to see how things work in the profession, and how they can steer their careers into the music ecosystem. These gatherings should be held on free or small subscription fees to ensure commitment and manageability. Topics could range from producers forums, to marketing and distribution forums, artist forums, to instrumentalists forums and also supporting industry forum such as the video production industry or those who organize the events.

In terms of production and performance skills, the local community is encouraged to build a professional database of instrumentalists and engineers available for hire (using the latest privacy and security tools to protect identities and personal information. Those groups should

also meet for empowerment sessions. Deals can be done at these empowerment and networking sessions.

There are other local organizations such as the Vhalondoti Cultural Clan (VCC) who can offer their facilities as a platform to facilitate music industry training workshops on a regular basis as they have resources and also are registered as Non-Profit Organisation. Trainees could pay a small fee to cover the expenses of trainers if there are no government funds or sponsorships.

As an outgrowth of these networking and professional development sessions, professional bands could be formed between local artists to develop a robust live music scene. Programs like Jazz by The Cycle in Thohoyandou organized by a singer Muofhe, could be a platform to showcase local talent, rather than waiting for invitation to Royal Heritage Festival (in Thohoyandou). This could be funded by programs like Concert Africa and National Arts Council (N.A.C). Such sessions can be captured on camera for analysis and professional samples can be streamed on YouTube for educational purposes.

The same concepts apply to music producers who themselves could meet and discuss trending industry gadgets production trends without fear of losing customers from one to the other, because the mentality of holding back acquired knowledge amongst local industry insiders, is generally prompted by such irrational fears in a struggling local economy with strong competition for acknowledgement. Artists and producers alike should be confident it is not about aggrandizing the individual but the building of a bigger dream for the entire region.

It should be noted that these kinds of platforms are vulnerable to be used as political vehicle or to address personal differences, but if professionally facilitated they might yield great success in developing local talent and building local institutions, inviting the professional community to the region. Some may feel that they do not want to mingle with others avoiding the spirit of competition, but fear of competing does not outweigh the need for cooperation and a professional local industry, along with the general perception that there is no active industry in Vhembe; and such beliefs have been proven to be true by evidence identified in this research.

#### 6.6.4. Music piracy



Music piracy is a virus blamed on the presence of modern technology, more especially the internet and the evolution of the digital economy. The sad reality is that despite all the effort made to end it, this virus cannot be killed as it evolves with every new method of distribution or technological advancement. The only way to deal with it is by building awareness and encouraging the fans to buy from legitimate sources that benefit the music creators. This should also come with a convenient method of accessing and purchasing music as suggested above, because if people have to struggle to find or acquire the music they like, they will likely resort to piracy instead. The power lies with consumers, provided they can conveniently access the music.

#### 6.6.5. Government involvement

With all the frustrations artists have shown towards the South African/Limpopo/Vhembe local government's neglect of the arts sector, the most prominent frustration is the price of data bundles. It is hindering progress for most small business in the country, and if this problem is not addressed soon, South Africa will not be able to fully compete in the global business structures. Independent Communications Authority of South Africa (ICASA) must end the data price rip-off monopoly and provide competitive rates, perhaps on a sliding scale basis, but most network service providers stubbornly turn a deaf ear on people's outcry to reduce the price of data. Government should mandate ICASA to enforce policies that ensure fair amount of data purchase rather than counting on the service provider's pity.

The education system should have music classes in their school curriculum facilitated by qualified teachers or outsourced ones. Such programs are mostly if not only found in high class schools. A program called Artists in School by the University of Venda supported by National Department of Arts and Culture does send artists to teach art at schools. But, only few schools benefit from the program and the program is not only concentrated to music but all forms of arts. If concentrated programs can be developed with an aim to identify and nurture special talent, the local music industry can grow significantly with time. All students deserve equal opportunities. Therefore, those who wish to be civil engineers should do their Mathematics and Science degrees, while those who wish to be musicians should attend music classes and receive practical skills starting with the primary and basic education levels, to prepare for and avoid struggling or dropping out at University level. Our government should take a lead in ensuring that such development programs are well funded and successfully facilitated. Meaning, the

Department of Arts and Culture (DAC) and the Department of Basic Education (DBE) should work hand in hand to ensure that such programs are sustained. With ever changing government administration through cadre deployment system and allegations of corruption leading to the looting of state resources in different levels government departments, such programs' funding sustainability is not guaranteed. Finally, the University of Venda should bring back a fully accredited degree program with music business and sound engineering courses as this has always been the only institution with music in the region.

## **6.7. CONCLUSION**

Lack of knowledge and skills is the main contributing factor to less participation in digital technology economy for Vhembe artists. Isolation or individualism contributes to the lack of knowledge sharing as all or most industries survive through team efforts, not individualism. It is clear that more needs to be done and in the recommendations in the research, a number of suggestions have been presented for how improvements can be made in support of the local music industry, including who should drive the movement for change or development.

Technology has changed the entire business model of the music industry value-chain, and has provided all sorts of opportunities to fully participate - but such participation requires a team of skilled or knowledgeable individuals, regardless of the size.

In terms of music production there is a lot of international standards that should be met to compete locally and globally. Local products only need professional marketing and distribution to put Vhembe on a global map.

Although technology brought a lot of good things such as easy access to music recording, easily accessible marketing and distribution platforms, it is also blamed for killing the music industry, especially for record sales which used to be the strong hold of the industry. Many believe the current digital business models only or mostly benefit few record labels along with those associated with it, while the rest are left outside. Now the doors are open and all including risk takers can claim a share. This study focused on how Vhembe artists and other supporting role players can claim a space and build careers in music using digital technology.

Presented below is a map indicating where Vhembe is situated in Limpopo Province. The map was downloaded from <https://www.google.com/search?q=vhembe+district+map>.

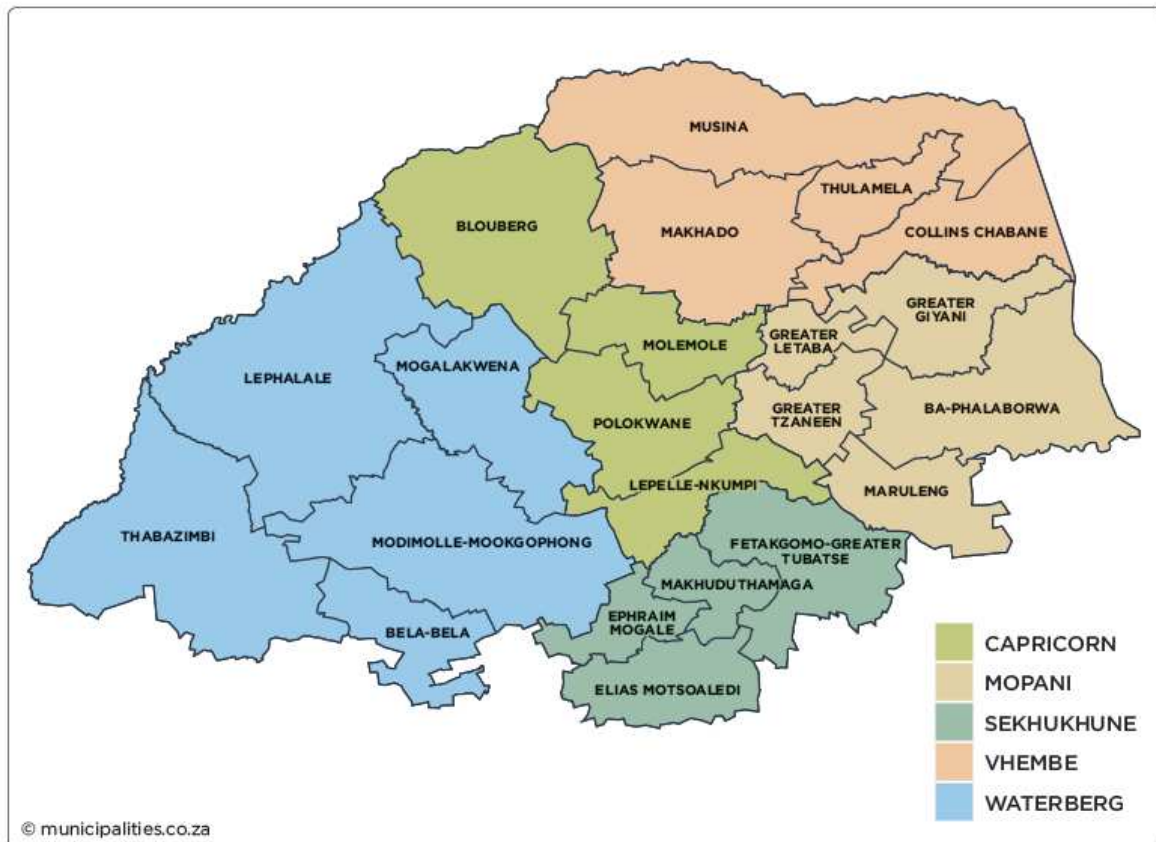


Figure 10: Limpopo Province map.

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