

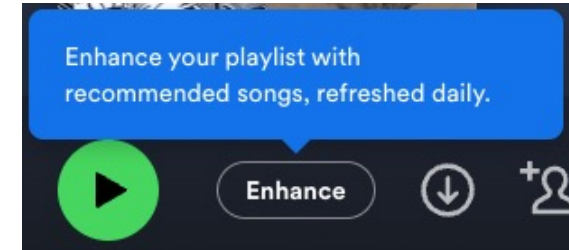
***Dutch Music Artists' Outlook on***  
***Strategy, Creativity, and Music Streaming Platform Influence***  
***During and After the COVID-19 Pandemic***

Karlijn Dinnissen  
Utrecht University

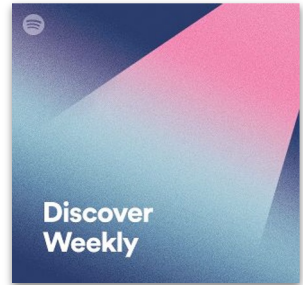
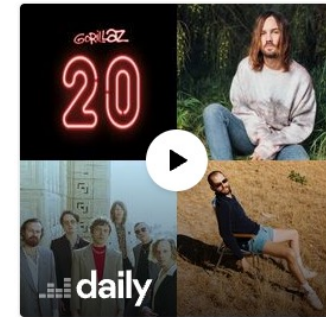
IAML 2023  
Cambridge, United Kingdom

# Music streaming and recommendation

- Music **streaming services** are a major resource for music consumption
- Music **recommender systems** impact which music is shown to users, and ultimately listened to

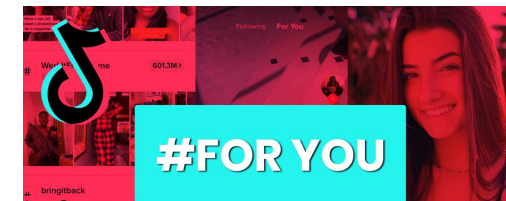
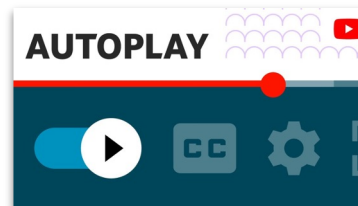


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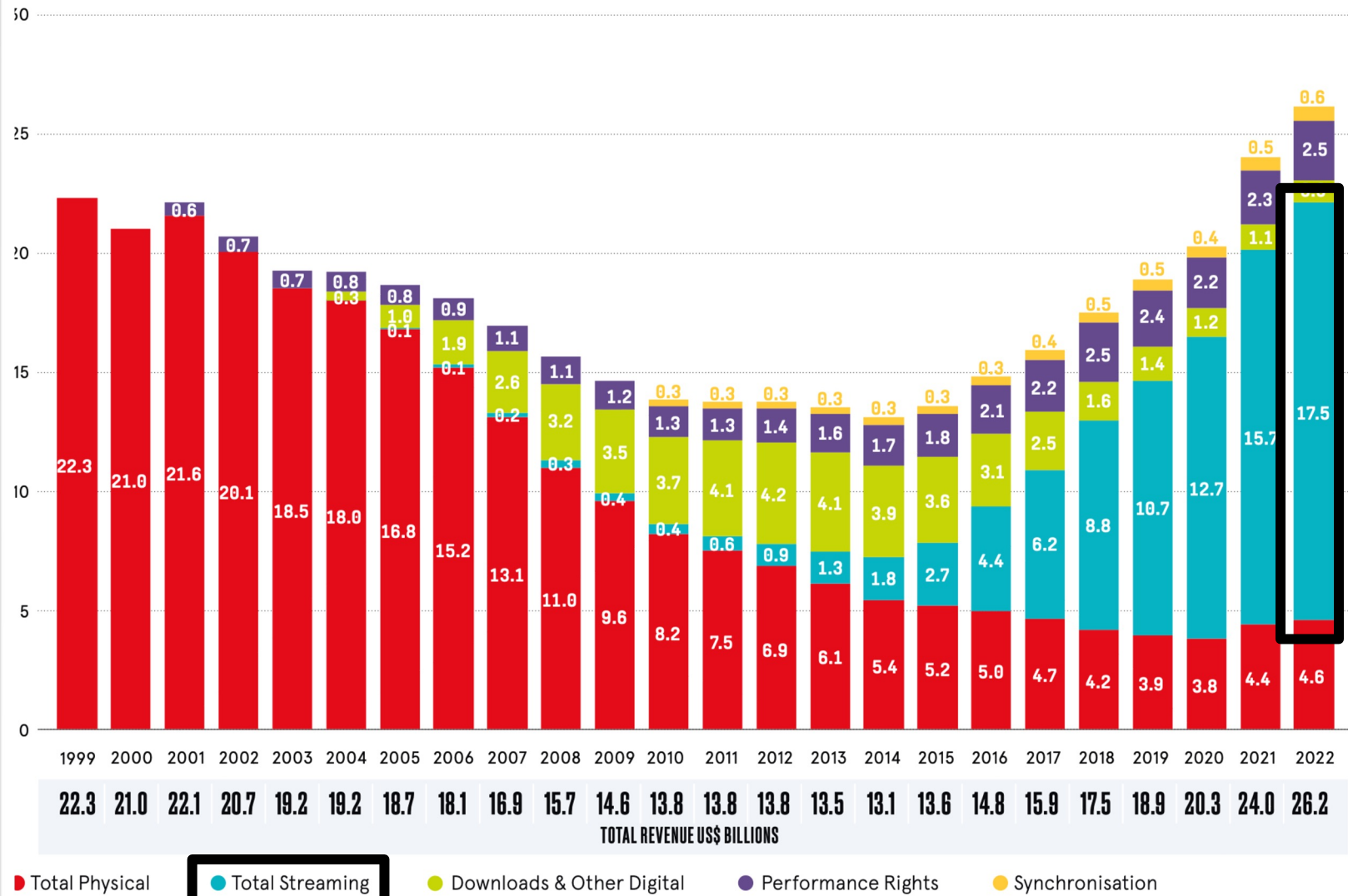


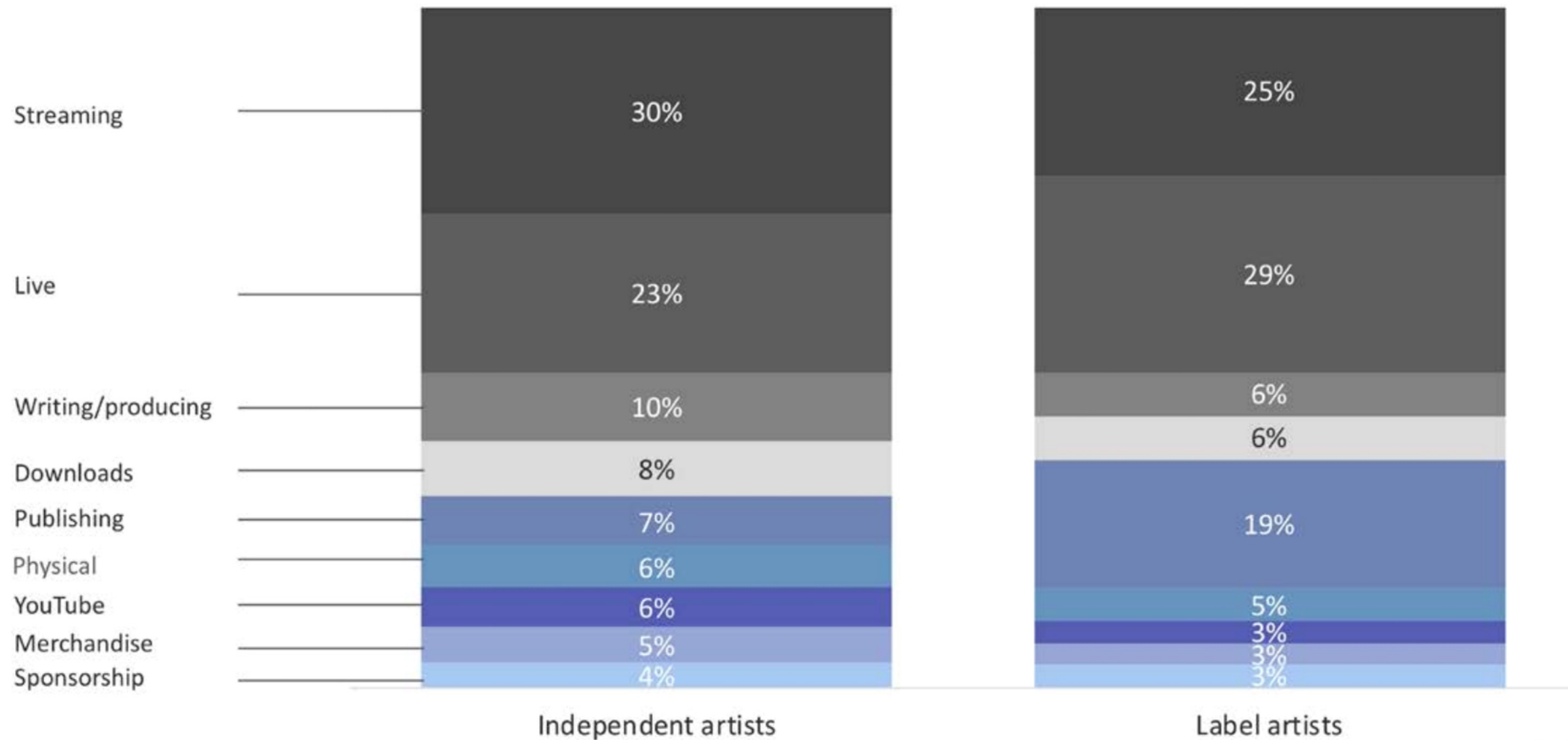
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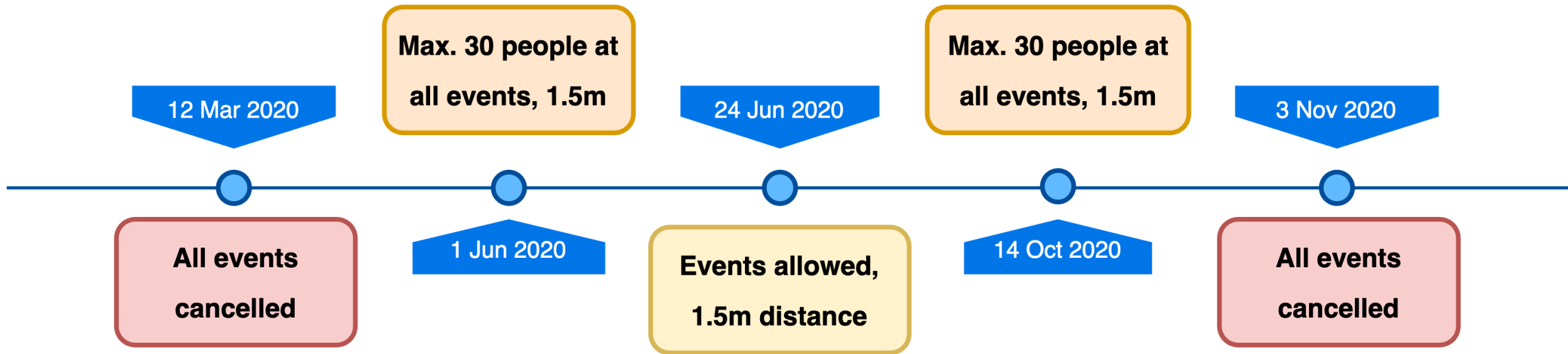


Question asks: What share of your music income comes from each of these sources?

Source: MIDiA Research / Amuse Artist Survey (04/19) n = 254



# COVID-19 timeline cultural sector in The Netherlands, 2020



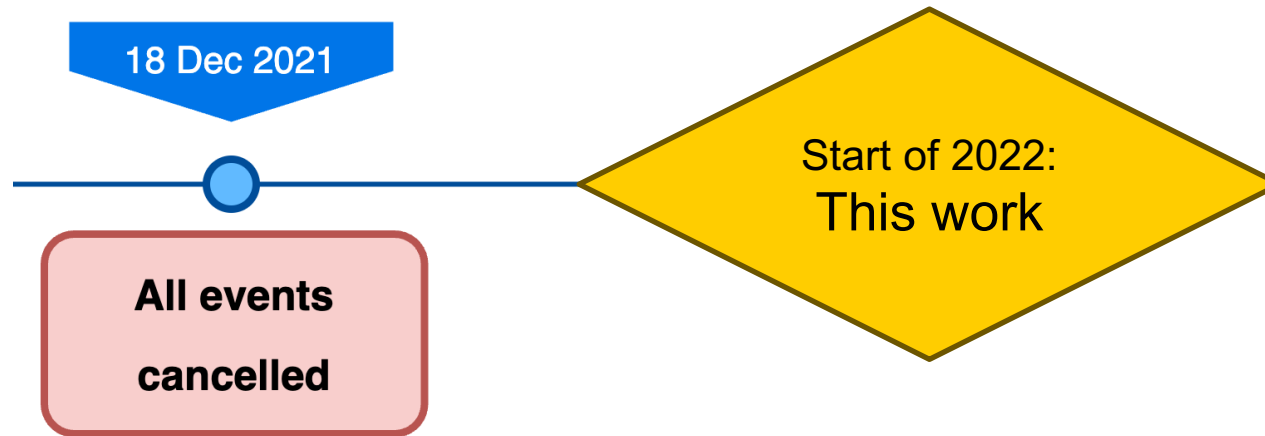
<https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/onderwerpen/coronavirus-tijdljn/>

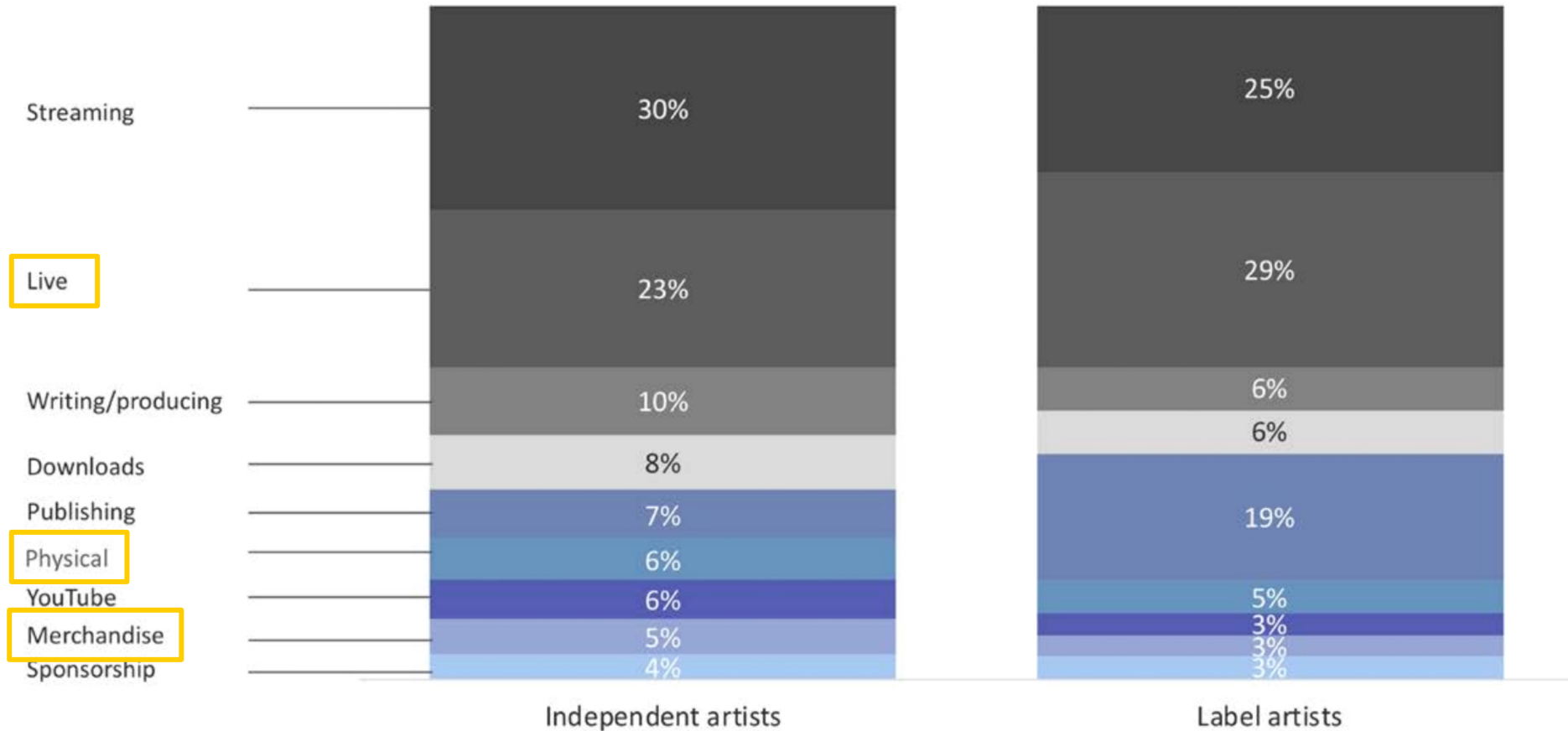
# COVID-19 timeline cultural sector in The Netherlands, 2021



<https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/onderwerpen/coronavirus-tijdlijn/>

# COVID-19 timeline cultural sector in The Netherlands, 2022





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Culture

## Musicians will lose two-thirds of their income in 2020

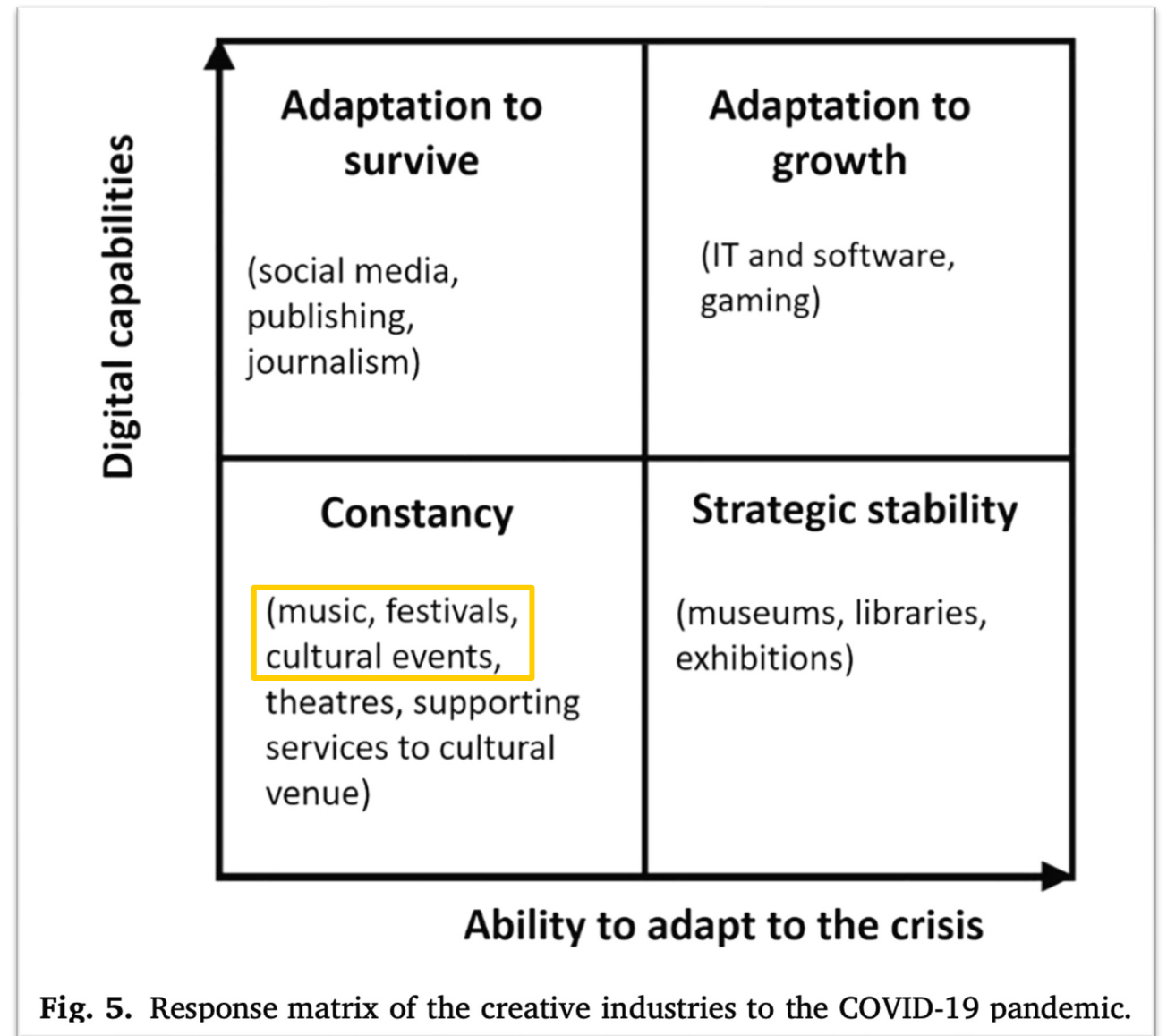
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<i>Music channel by type</i>	<i>COVID-19 impact</i>	
	<i>Music spending (in euros)</i>	<i>Music consumption (in hours)</i>
<b>Total Music Market</b>	–	+ / –
<b>Live Music</b>	–	–
<b>Recorded Music</b>	+ / –	+ / –
Premium Streaming	+	+
Free Streaming	n/a	+
Physical	–	o
Digital Downloads	+	+
Radio	o	–
Online Radio	+	+

Note: + = positive; o = neutral; – = negative; n/a = not applicable.

- BBC (2020) Musicians will lose two-thirds of their income in 2020.
- Denk, J. et al. (2022) The impact of COVID-19 on music consumption and music spending. PLoS One.

Setting up livestream shows could have enabled artists to keep in touch with fans and audience, but...



- Taylor et al. (2020) COVID-19 and the UK Live Music Industry: A Crisis of Spatial Materiality. The Journal of Media Art Study and Theory.
- Khlystova, O. et al. (2022) The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the creative industries: A literature review and future research agenda. Journal of Business Research.

How has the COVID-19 pandemic impacted Dutch music artists'

- i) Strategy;
- ii) Perception of how important music streaming is in their career;
- iii) View on music streaming services?

# Full paper

Discusses on a broader level

- **1.** What do artists consider to be fair in music streaming platforms and embedded recommender systems?
- **2.** Which role do artists envision for music streaming platforms with regard to fairness, diversity, and transparency of their recommender systems?

Impact of COVID-19 was one of the focuses



Dinnissen, K. & Bauer, C. (2021). Amplifying Artists' Voices: Item Provider Perspectives on Influence and Fairness of Music Streaming Platforms. UMAP '23.

# *Method*

# Method

Continuation of [1], who interviewed 9 Spanish-speaking music artists

- **Participants:** 14 Dutch diverse artists / artist pairs
- **Form:** Semi-structured interviews (avg. length 52 minutes)
- **Questions:** 12 base questions, room for additional input
- **Analysis:** Qualitative Content Analysis, deductive & inductive coding

[1] Ferraro, A. et al. (2021) What Is Fair? Exploring the Artists' Perspective on the Fairness of Music Streaming Platforms. INTERACT '21.

# Here, zoom in on COVID-19 related questions

Since March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted the cultural sector

- Has the **role of streaming services** in your life as an artist changed since the first lockdown in 2020?  
If so, in what way?
- Has your **attitude towards streaming services** and the recommender systems they incorporate changed since this period?  
If so, in what way?

# Participants

Code	Age	Gender	Audience reach	Genre
P1	26–35	Male	Local	Hip-Hop
P2	26–35	Male	National	Rock/Pop
P3	26–35	Male	Local	Rock, Punk, Metal
P4a	26–35	Male	(P4a) Local	(P4a) Hardcore,
P4b			(P4b) National/ Local	Rock, Blues (P4b) Indie, Metal, Cl. Rock
P5	26–35	Male	International	Dance
P6	18–25	Non-binary	Local	Pop
P7a	46–55	(P7a) Female	National	Alt. Pop
P7b		(P7b) Male		
P8a	56–65	Female	N/A	Folk, World
P8b				
P9	18–25	Non-binary	Local	Rock, Pop, Folk
P10	26–35	Male	Local	Neoclassical
P11	36–45	Female	Local	80's Alt. Synthpop
P12	18–25	Female	Local	Metal
P13	26–35	Female	(Inter)national	Indie-pop Alt.
P14	36–45	Male	National	Many



# *Results*

# Main results

- Artists' strategy
- Importance of music streaming in artists' career
- Artists' attitude toward streaming services

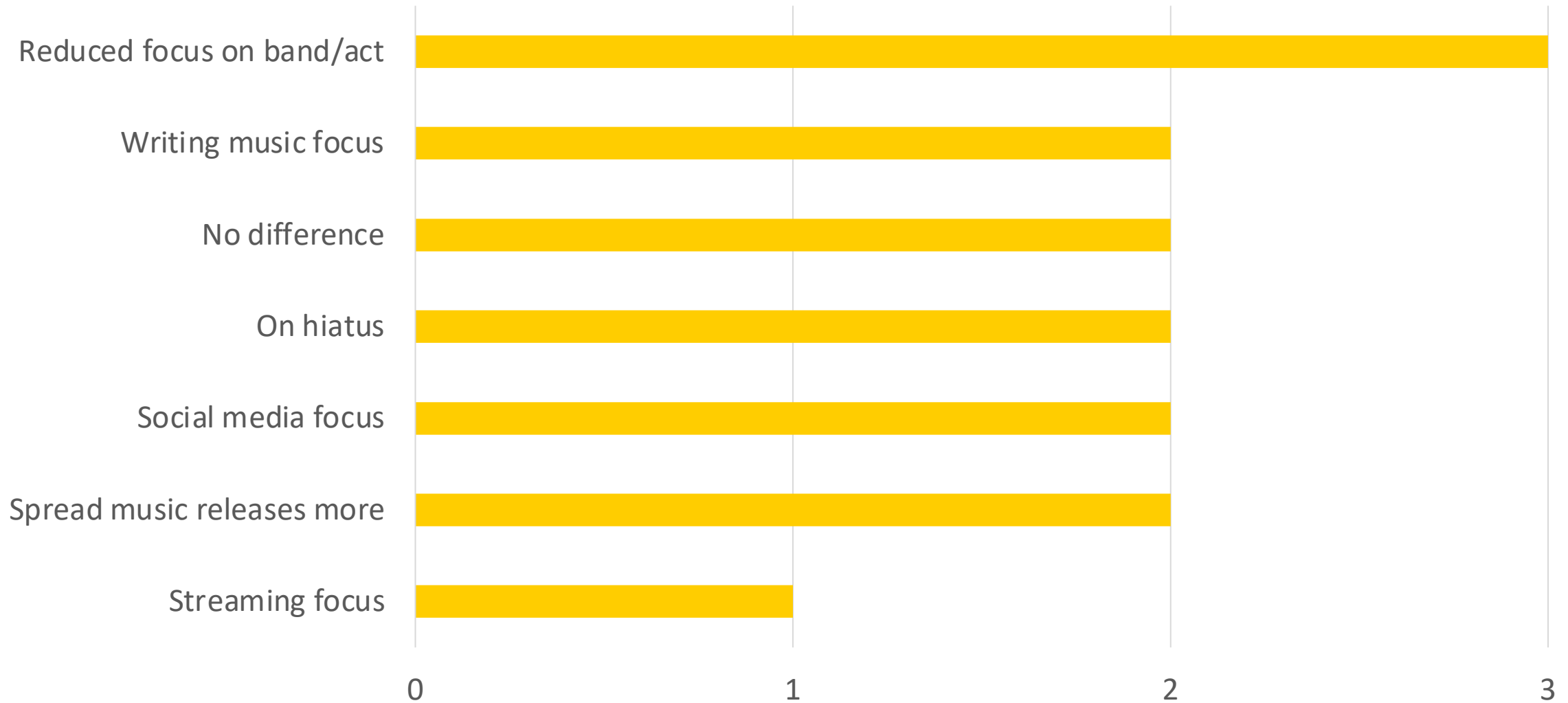


# Main results

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## Artist strategy during COVID (beginning 2022)



## Strategy: hiatus

On hiatus completely

“We could have just continued, [...] released something new and [used] Spotify to really present it, [...] but we didn’t. Which is actually quite a shame, when I think about it now, because we did absolutely nothing. But yeah, everyone has other things to do, too.” (P3)

## Strategy: reduce focus

Reduced focus on band / act

“People say [...]: ‘this is the perfect time to write new music’[...] But when you don't know what your future will look like, where it's going... you're not in that vibe of: ‘Oh, I'm going to release all kinds of sick music’. In that respect, I’ve really been on hiatus.” (P11)

## Strategy: social media

Social media focus: upsides

“We are something that primarily exists online. Because in this Corona period, it has not been possible to form a physical fanbase. So we’re mainly working on finding people online who like [our] type of music, [...] primarily on Instagram and Facebook.” (P6)

Social media focus: downsides

“With social media, at some point there is no more content to be posted. Another photo from the studio, another photo of the rehearsal room...” (P2)

## Strategy: write

Writing new music focus

“We were like: OK, now it’s time to make the album we really want to make... worked out to perfection. And for the moment, we leave the rest” (P12)

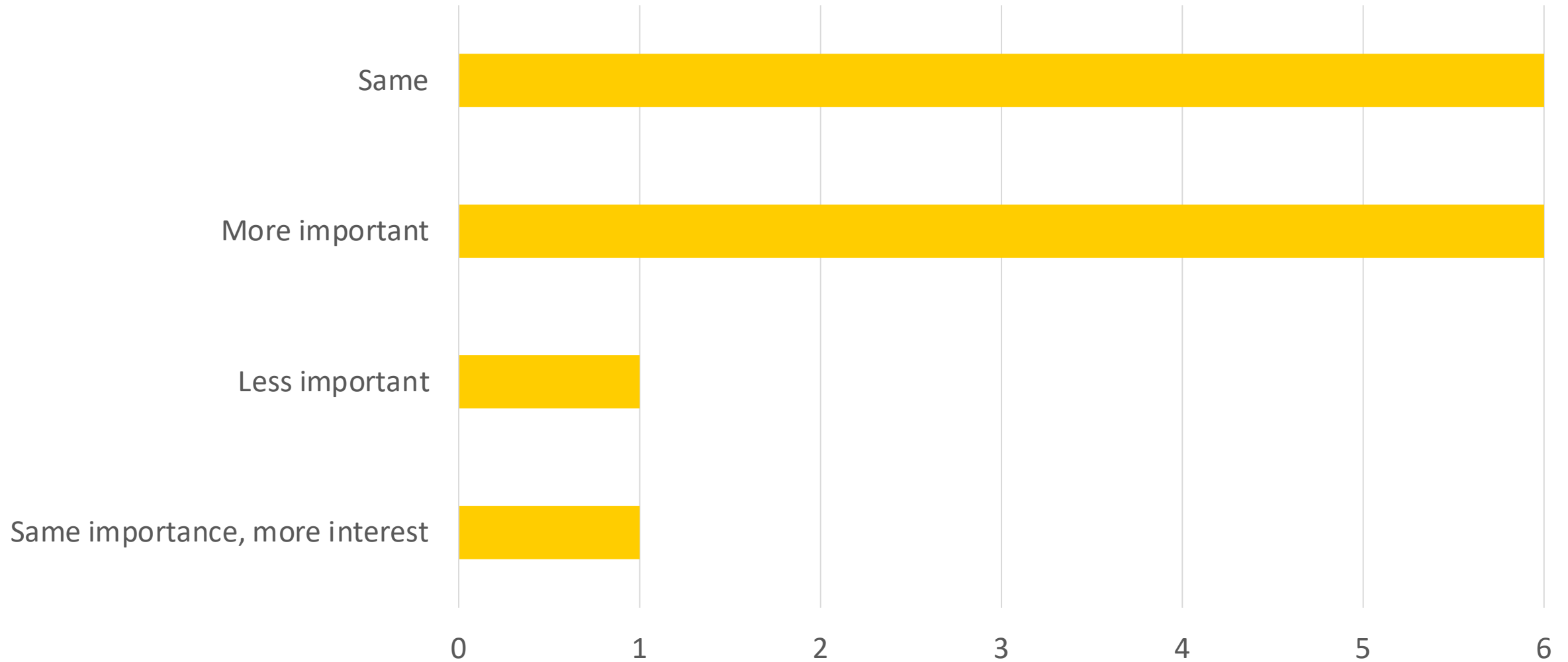


# Main results

- Artists' strategy
- Importance of music streaming in artists' career
- Artists' attitude toward streaming services



## Importance of streaming services in music career since COVID-19



## Streaming more important

“You are much more dependent on how the algorithm treats your albums, compared to where you play or who you talk to.” (P6)

“It was always the basis anyway. Whether you’re picked up by media, or whether you get booked for certain festivals, has to do with how many streams you have. [...] But now it is, in fact, the only thing left.” (P1)

## Streaming equally important

- Mostly smaller acts
- Members from bands that were on hiatus reported no perceived change in importance for them

“No, [it hasn’t changed]. Our band is way too small for that.” (P8a)

- Others: role is the same, but more interest

“It's sort of an experiment we're doing, so in that sense, it's just interesting to see what happens.” (P14)

## Streaming less important

P12, whose band was focusing on writing, reported that streaming was less of a focus for them for that reason

# Main results

- Artists' strategy
- Importance of music streaming in artists' career
- Artists' attitude toward streaming services



# Attitude toward streaming services

Thankful (N = 1)

“Normally, the bulk of our income comes from live shows, and streaming income is a nice addition. But [it is currently still] enough for me to live off of and so... I'm very grateful for streaming in that regard.” (P5)

# Attitude toward streaming services

Neutral (N = 7)

- Attitude did not change or artist was unsure



# Attitude toward streaming services

Hesitant or negative attitude (N = 6)

- Generally, these were artists who also perceived higher importance of streaming

“It can be quite nerve-racking! Because you have no control [...] anymore.” (P6)

“I think that subconsciously we feel like: ‘Should we focus more on that?’ Which is not nice at all. It is very far removed from [...] what you actually want to do... But yeah, it is the only platform.” (P7a)

“I struggle with the fact that it influences the creative process.” (P9)

## Impact streaming services on creative process (1/2)

- 5 artists mention current emphasis on hits
- Accessible songs are added to curated and algorithmic playlists more often
- Some artists keep this in mind when deciding which song to release as a single
- Songs themselves might even be adapted:

**“[Artists] know, ‘if I make something like this, it will get on that playlist, and each song will earn me 1,000 euros per month.’ [...] But of course that is the opposite of how art and music actually started out.” (P7a)**

## Impact streaming services on creative process (2/2)

- Some: able to ignore pressure to conform their music, because they have sources of income outside of music
- For P5, the situation is different:

“If you do release a record that has more depth, you notice that it does [...] relatively bad on Spotify. [...] I don't want my career to suffer. [...] And that is annoying.” (P5)

*Final remarks*

# Take-aways

1. Artists coped differently with COVID-19 related changes in the music industry
2. They generally deemed music streaming services to be equally or more important in their career
3. For about half of the artists, their attitude toward streaming services became more adverse or misgiving during COVID-19



## Some open questions

- 9 out of 14 artists / artist pairs did not live 100% off of music-related jobs  
→ How did that impact their points of view?
- None of the interviewed artists invested in setting up livestream shows  
→ Why?
- Influence of streaming services on creative practices  
→ How to study this phenomenon?



Khlystova, O. et al. (2022) The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the creative industries: A literature review and future research agenda. Journal of Business Research.



# Future work

**Additional interviews / surveys** to research status quo

- Long-term impact on the music industry?
- Long-term impact on artist strategies?
- Long-term impact on income?
- Study perception of digital performance spaces
- Include participants from, e.g., other countries and cultures, other genres

**Address known issues** for artists by improving design, development and evaluation of streaming services

- Lack of transparency
- Lack of control
- Harmful biases





**Utrecht  
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Sharing science,  
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