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## Understanding the Digital Transformation of the South African Music Industry: A Multidisciplinary Approach

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Sakhiseni Joseph Yende<sup>1</sup>, Lindokuhle Precious Hlatshwayo<sup>2</sup>, Thandiswa Koliti<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of African Language Studies, University of the Western Cape, Cape Town, South Africa

<sup>2</sup>Department of Social Work, University of the Western Cape, Cape Town, South Africa

**Abstract:** The South African music industry is undergoing a significant transformation driven by digital technologies that are reshaping how music is created, distributed, and consumed. These developments present unique challenges that demand a holistic understanding of legal, business, and technological dimensions. This article explores the impact of digitalisation on key areas such as legislation, contracts, and business practices in the South African context. To provide a structured analysis, the study draws on three theoretical lenses: legal theory, which addresses complexities around copyright, contract law, and intellectual property rights; business theory, which examines evolving revenue models and market dynamics influenced by digital consumption; and technology theory, which considers the role of digital platforms in transforming music production, distribution, and marketing. The research employed a qualitative methodology, using a critical desktop literature review to investigate how piracy and illegal downloading are affecting the industry. This approach enabled a deep engagement with existing academic sources and provided a foundation for exploring current policy gaps. The study adhered to PRISMA guidelines, following a systematic process of searching, screening, and analysing literature across major databases. The findings highlight the pressing need for stronger legal frameworks, more adaptive business strategies, and greater investment in technological infrastructure. Addressing these areas is crucial for the sustainability and growth of the South African music industry in the digital age. In conclusion, the study emphasizes the need to align policy and practice with digital innovation, the industry can better support its artists and stakeholders in a rapidly evolving landscape.

**Keywords:** intellectual property; contracts; digital era; legislation; music industry piracy

### CORRESPONDENCE

Email:  
sakhiseniyende@gmail.com

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### Introduction

In recent years, the music industry has experienced profound changes due to the rapid advancement of digital technology. These changes have not only revolutionised how music is created, distributed, and consumed but have also had a profound impact on the legal, contractual, and business aspects of the industry (Chen, 2021; Nyathi & Maguraushe, 2023; Towse, 2020). This transformation is

particularly pronounced in South Africa, where the music industry is grappling with the challenges and opportunities presented by the digital era. The digital revolution has fundamentally altered the way music is produced, distributed, and consumed. Digital platforms such as streaming services, social media, and online stores have transformed the music landscape, making it easier for artists to reach a global audience. However, these changes have also raised complex legal and contractual issues, particularly regarding copyright protection, licensing agreements, and revenue sharing (Chen, 2021; Nyathi & Maguraushe, 2023; Towse, 2020). Despite these challenges, the digital era has also introduced a range of unprecedented opportunities for artists and music industry professionals in South Africa. One of the most significant developments is the democratisation of music distribution (Yende, 2024). Digital platforms such as YouTube, Spotify, Apple Music, and SoundCloud have enabled artists—particularly independent and emerging musicians—to bypass traditional gatekeepers like record labels and distributors (Ntshangase & Mbewana, 2025; Yende, 2024). As a result, artists can now publish their music directly to a global audience with minimal upfront costs, thus levelling the playing field in an industry that was previously dominated by large commercial entities.

In addition to expanded reach, digital technologies have opened new revenue streams. Artists can now earn income from streaming royalties, digital downloads, and online merchandise sales, which supplement traditional earnings from live performances and physical album sales (Ntshangase & Mbewana, 2025; Yende, 2024). Some platforms also enable direct fan support through crowdfunding, membership models, or tipping features, allowing artists to build more personal and financially sustainable relationships with their audiences (Mbhele, 2021; Ntshangase & Mbewana, 2025; Yende, 2024). Moreover, social media platforms have become powerful tools for marketing and audience engagement. Artists can promote their music, interact with fans, and build a strong online presence without the need for expensive promotional campaigns (Ntshangase & Mbewana, 2025; Yende, 2024). Data analytics tools provided by digital platforms further enable musicians to track audience demographics, streaming patterns, and geographic reach, empowering them to make informed decisions about marketing strategies and tour planning. These innovations suggest that, while the digital era presents new legal and economic challenges, it also provides dynamic tools for growth, creativity, and independence within the South African music industry (Ntshangase & Mbewana, 2025; Nyathi & Maguraushe, 2023).

However, alongside these opportunities, the digital era has also brought new challenges for the South African music industry (Mashau, 2022). Several studies (Chen, 2021; Nyathi & Maguraushe, 2023; Towse, 2020) have engaged and explored various aspects of music law, contracts, and business models, both globally and within specific regions. For example, Nyathi and Maguraushe (2023) explores the issues on the rise of digital piracy and illegal downloading has posed a significant threat to artists' livelihoods, Chen (2021) enlightens on the call for stronger copyright protection and enforcement measures while Towse (2020) deals with the complex and ever-changing nature of digital contracts and licensing agreements has made it difficult for artists to navigate the digital landscape effectively. Although, these studies have been conducted in different contexts, but they still provide a context upon which the South African music law, contracts and business in the digital era can be understood. It is prudent to acknowledge that the existing literature have dealt with music law, contracts, and business, however, the existing literature highlights several gaps in the understanding of South African music law, contracts, and business practices in the digital era (Chen, 2021; Nyathi & Maguraushe, 2023; Towse, 2020). These include a lack of comprehensive analysis that integrates legal, contractual, and business aspects, as well as limited research on the impact of digital technologies on music consumption and revenue streams in South Africa. Additionally, there is a need for updated research that considers recent developments and trends in the industry, such as the rise of streaming platforms and the increasing importance of data analytics.

Therefore, this article is motivated by the need to fill the existing gaps in the literature and provide a comprehensive analysis of South African music law, contracts, and business practices in the digital era. Therefore, it is inevitable that by addressing these gaps, this article aims to contribute to a better understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing the South African music industry and provide insights that can inform policymaking and business strategies in the sector. The following questions were developed to understand the South African Music Law, Contracts and Business in the digital era.

1. How have digital technologies and online platforms affected the legal framework of the South African music industry?
2. What are the key challenges faced by South African musicians in negotiating and understanding digital-era contracts?

3. How do South African music businesses adapt their strategies in response to the changing landscape of digital music consumption?

The digital era has profoundly transformed the music industry, reshaping how music is created, distributed, consumed, and monetised. Digital technologies, particularly streaming services and social media platforms have revolutionised the way music is accessed and shared by listeners (Chen, 2021; Nyathi & Maguraushe, 2023). For instance, streaming services like Spotify and Apple Music have made it easier for consumers to discover and listen to a vast catalogue of music, changing the traditional model of music ownership. This shift in consumer behaviour has had a significant impact on the industry's revenue streams, with streaming now accounting for a major portion of music industry revenue globally (Drott, 2021; Nyathi & Maguraushe, 2023). Moreover, the digital era has brought about new challenges and opportunities for artists and music industry professionals. One of the key challenges is the issue of copyright protection in the digital age. With the ease of digital copying and distribution, artists face the risk of unauthorised use of their work. This has led to debates and discussions on the need for stronger copyright laws and enforcement mechanisms to protect artists' intellectual property rights (Chen, 2021). On the other hand, the digital era has also created new opportunities for artists to reach a global audience without the need for a traditional record label. Independent artists can now distribute their music directly to fans through online platforms, enabling them to have more control over their music and career (Rolston et al., 2015). Additionally, digital platforms offer new revenue streams for artists through avenues such as streaming royalties, digital downloads, and online merchandise sales, providing them with alternative sources of income (Arnold 2022; Kamara II, 2018; Simon, 2019).

The South African music industry faces unique challenges and opportunities in the digital era. One of the major challenges is the limited access to digital infrastructure and high data costs, which can hinder the ability of artists and consumers to fully engage with digital platforms (Goga et al. 2019). Additionally, piracy remains a significant issue in South Africa, with illegal downloading and streaming of music depriving artists of potential revenue (Forere, 2023). Despite these challenges, there are also opportunities for growth in the South African music industry. The digital era has opened up new possibilities for artists to connect with fans and promote their music globally. Social media platforms, in particular, have become powerful tools for artists to engage with their audience and build a loyal fan base (Acevedo Jr, 2023). Furthermore, digital platforms offer a more democratic environment for music distribution, allowing artists from diverse backgrounds to showcase their talent and reach a wider audience (Khanom, 2023). While the digital era has brought about significant challenges for the music industry, it has also created new opportunities for growth and innovation. By embracing digital technologies and adapting to the changing landscape of the industry, the South African music industry can continue to thrive and evolve in the digital age.

### **Theoretical framework**

The South African music industry, like its global counterparts, is undergoing significant transformation due to the pervasive influence of digital technologies. These shifts have redefined how music is created, distributed, consumed, and monetised (Yende, 2024). To fully grasp the complexities of this evolving landscape, an interdisciplinary theoretical framework is necessary—one that draws on legal theory, business theory, and technology theory. Together, these frameworks offer a comprehensive lens through which to analyse the structural and operational changes within the digital music economy. Legal theory provides a critical foundation for understanding the regulatory environment governing the music industry. In the South African context, legislation such as copyright law, contract law, and intellectual property rights (IPR) frameworks play a decisive role in shaping how music is protected, shared, and commercialised (Wikström, 2020). Copyright law, for instance, defines the ownership of creative works and outlines the mechanisms through which artists can claim royalties and control the use of their content. The Copyright Amendment Act of 2019 is a recent legislative effort to update protections for musicians in response to digital exploitation (Nyehita, 2017). By applying legal theory, this study situates artists' struggles within broader institutional and rights-based debates, particularly around fair use, licensing, and enforcement in digital contexts.

Business theory complements this by offering insight into the economic structures and commercial practices underpinning the industry. The shift from physical sales to digital distribution has catalysed the emergence of platform-based business models, such as subscription streaming services and direct-to-consumer marketing strategies. Business theory, including concepts like platform economics and value co-creation, is essential to understanding how revenue is generated, shared, and contested in a digital environment (Fleischer, 2017).

These theories help interrogate how artists negotiate their place within a value chain increasingly dominated by data analytics, algorithmic curation, and audience engagement metrics. Technology theory further enriches this analysis by unpacking the impact of innovation on production, dissemination, and consumption. Digital tools have lowered barriers to entry for music creation and distribution, empowering independent artists. Yet they also introduce new challenges, such as digital piracy and monopolisation by global platforms. Technology theory provides a framework to explore how technological infrastructure shapes industry dynamics, and how artists must adapt to remain visible and financially viable in algorithm-governed spaces (Wikström, 2020).

Together, these theoretical perspectives enable a holistic and critical understanding of the digital transformation of South Africa’s music industry. Rather than treating legal, business, and technological elements as separate domains, this framework emphasises their intersectionality and mutual influence. Applying these theories throughout the analysis allows for deeper insights into how institutional policies, commercial imperatives, and digital innovations collectively shape the experiences of musicians and other stakeholders in the contemporary music economy.

## Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research approach, complemented by a critical desktop literature review, to explore piracy and illegal downloading policies in the South African context. The rationale for this method was to gain a comprehensive and critical understanding of the evolving landscape of intellectual property rights in the digital era (Bešlagić, 2022). A structured review of existing literature enabled the identification, analysis, and synthesis of relevant data, ensuring methodological rigour and reliability. To guide the review process, the study adhered to the PRISMA guidelines (Page et al. 2021), promoting transparency, clarity, and reproducibility. The literature review process unfolded in three key phases: searching, screening, and analysis.

### Phase 1: Searching

The search targeted high-quality, peer-reviewed empirical studies published between 2014 and 2024, ensuring that the data reflected both foundational and recent developments. Databases consulted included Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, and Google Scholar, chosen for their relevance to education, law, and the social sciences. Boolean operators (‘AND’, ‘OR’) were used to combine keywords such as: “*Intellectual Property*”, “*Contracts*”, “*Digital Era*”, “*Legislation*”, “*Music Industry*”, “*Piracy*”.

### Phase 2: Screening

A systematic screening process was conducted based on predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria (see Table 1).

**Table 1.** Inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Criteria Type	Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Scope of Study	Focuses on piracy, illegal downloading, digital legislation, or music industry in South Africa	Studies not focused on South Africa or unrelated to digital piracy/music legislation
Type of Study	Empirical studies with qualitative or mixed methods approaches	Theoretical or conceptual papers lacking empirical data
Language	English	Non-English publications
Availability	Full-text available online	Abstract-only or inaccessible full-text documents
Publication Date	Published between 2014 and 2024	Published before 2014
Relevance	Relevant to intellectual property, digital contracts, or music legislation	Studies focusing on unrelated industries or general internet use

The initial search yielded 450 articles (Figure 1). After removing duplicates, 150 unique records remained. Following a title and abstract review, 150 articles proceeded to full-text screening, of which 40 met all inclusion criteria and were selected for the final analysis.

### Phase 3: Analysis

The final set of articles was analysed using thematic analysis, as outlined by Clarke and Braun (2014). The six-phase process included.

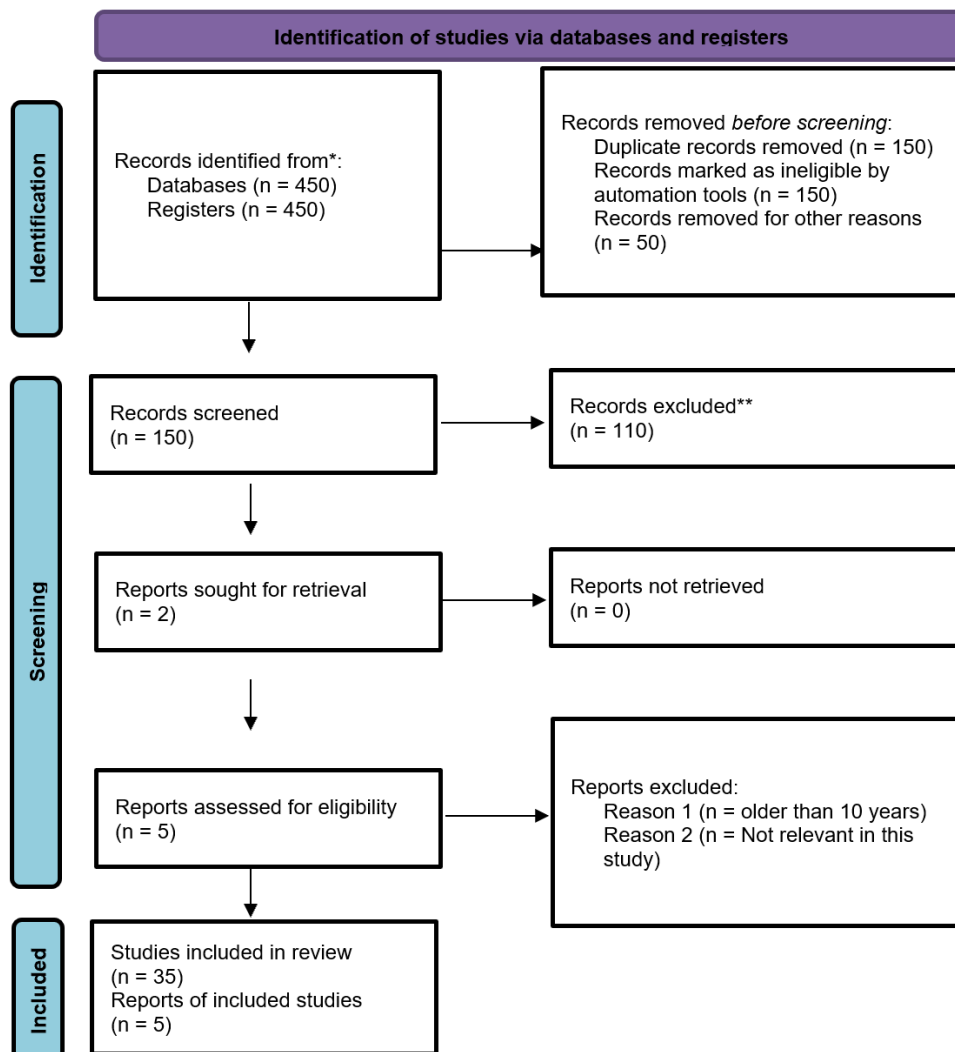
- i. Familiarisation with data.
- ii. Generating initial codes.

- iii. Searching for themes.
- iv. Reviewing themes.
- v. Defining and naming themes.
- vi. Producing the report.

This process enabled the identification of recurrent patterns, challenges, and strategic responses within the South African music industry. Key themes that emerged included.

- The Influence of Digital Technologies on South African Music Legislation.
- Negotiating Digital-Era Contracts: Challenges for South African Musicians.
- Adapting Music Business Models to Digital Consumption Trends in South Africa.

To minimise researcher bias, methodological triangulation was employed, as recommended by Fusch et al. (2017). This involved cross-validating findings using multiple sources, including academic journal articles, government policy documents, scholarly books, and databases such as Sabinet, Sage Journals, ResearchGate, EBSCO, ProQuest, and Semantic Scholar. Overall, the adopted methodological framework was considered appropriate for exploring the phenomenon under study. It enabled the development of evidence-based insights, critical discussions, and informed recommendations.



**Figure 1.** PRISMA 2020 flow diagram (2020).

## **Findings of this article**

The main findings of this research can be divided into three categories namely: Influence of digital technologies on South African music legislation negotiating digital-era contracts: challenges for South African musicians and adapting music business to digital consumption trends in South Africa.

### ***Influence of digital technologies on South African music legislation***

The influence of digital technologies on South African music legislation has been profound, reshaping the legal framework that governs the music industry in the country. With the advent of digitalisation, music has become more accessible and widespread, leading to new challenges and opportunities for artists, rights holders, and policymakers. This essay explores the impact of digital technologies on South African music legislation, focusing on copyright law, contract law, and intellectual property rights. Copyright law is a crucial component of South African music legislation, as it protects the rights of creators and ensures they receive fair compensation for their work. In the digital era, copyright law has had to evolve to address new forms of distribution and consumption, such as online streaming and downloading. The Copyright Act of 1978, which governs copyright in South Africa, has been amended several times to keep pace with technological advancements. For example, the Copyright Amendment Act of 2019 introduced provisions to protect the rights of authors and performers in the digital environment, ensuring they receive royalties for online use of their work (Copyright Amendment Bill, 2018).

One of the key challenges of digital technologies for copyright law is the ease of unauthorised copying and distribution of music. Digital piracy, or the illegal downloading and sharing of copyrighted material, has been a major concern for the music industry worldwide, including in South Africa. The Copyright Act has provisions to address piracy, including criminal penalties for copyright infringement. However, enforcing these provisions in the digital environment can be challenging due to the global nature of the internet and the anonymity it provides to infringers (Peukert et al. 2017; Ntshangase & Mbewana, 2025; Yende 2023). Contract law is another area of South African music legislation that has been affected by digital technologies. In the digital era, musicians often enter into contracts with record labels, streaming services, and other industry players to distribute their music online. These contracts can be complex and difficult to navigate, especially for artists without legal expertise. The Electronic Communication and Transactions Act [no.25 of 2002] (2002) provides a legal framework for electronic contracts, including those related to the music industry. However, ensuring that these contracts are fair and transparent remains a challenge (Electronic Communication and Transactions Act [no.25 of 2002], 2002). Intellectual property rights, which encompass copyrights, trademarks, and patents, are also affected by digital technologies. In the music industry, trademarks are used to protect artist names and logos, while patents can be used to protect new technologies related to music production and distribution. The Intellectual Property Laws Amendment Act of 2013 introduced amendments to South Africa's intellectual property laws to bring them in line with international standards. These amendments include provisions for the protection of digital works and the enforcement of intellectual property rights online (Intellectual Property Laws Amendment Act 28 of 2013, n.d.).

Digital technologies have had a significant impact on South African music legislation, reshaping the legal framework that governs the industry (Mbhele, 2021; Yende, 2024). Copyright law, contract law, and intellectual property rights have all had to evolve to address the challenges and opportunities presented by the digital era. While these changes have brought new complexities and challenges, they have also opened up new possibilities for artists to reach audiences and distribute their music in innovative ways. As technology continues to evolve, South African music legislation will need to adapt to ensure that artists' rights are protected and that they receive fair compensation for their work in the digital environment.

### ***Negotiating digital-era contracts: Challenges for South African musicians***

Negotiating contracts in the digital era presents unique challenges for South African musicians, stemming from the evolving nature of the music industry and the complexities of digital distribution and monetisation. This essay explores the challenges faced by South African musicians in negotiating digital-era contracts, focusing on issues such as rights management, revenue sharing, and contractual transparency. One of the key challenges for South African musicians is navigating the complexities of digital rights management. In the digital era, music can be distributed and accessed through a variety of platforms, including streaming services, online stores, and social media. Each of these platforms may have its own requirements and terms for licensing music, making it difficult for musicians to manage their rights effectively. Additionally, the global nature of the internet means

that music can be distributed internationally, further complicating rights management for musicians (IFPI, 2021). Another challenge is ensuring fair revenue sharing in digital-era contracts. With the rise of streaming services, musicians often receive a fraction of a cent per stream, leading to concerns about the sustainability of the music industry. South African musicians may face additional challenges in this regard, as the music market in South Africa is relatively small compared to other countries, making it difficult to generate significant revenue from streaming alone. Negotiating contracts that ensure fair and transparent revenue sharing is crucial for musicians to earn a living from their music in the digital era (IFPI, 2021). Contractual transparency is also a challenge for South African musicians negotiating digital-era contracts. Contracts with record labels, streaming services, and other industry players can be complex and difficult to understand, especially for artists without legal expertise. Ensuring that contracts are clear, transparent, and fair is essential for musicians to protect their rights and interests in the digital era (IFPI, 2021). Negotiating contracts in the digital era presents unique challenges for South African musicians, stemming from the evolving nature of the music industry and the complexities of digital distribution and monetisation. Rights management, revenue sharing, and contractual transparency are key issues that musicians must navigate to ensure they receive fair compensation for their work and can continue to create music in the digital era. Addressing these challenges requires collaboration between musicians, industry stakeholders, and policymakers to develop solutions that protect the rights and interests of musicians in the digital age.

### ***Adapting music business to digital consumption trends in South Africa***

Adapting music business to digital consumption trends in South Africa is crucial for the industry's growth and sustainability in the digital era. This article explores how the music industry in South Africa is adapting to digital consumption trends, focusing on the shift towards streaming services, the rise of social media as a marketing tool, and the need for innovative business models. Accordingly, one of the key trends in digital music consumption in South Africa is the rise of streaming services (Ramnandan & Mbhele, 2023). Platforms like Spotify, Apple Music, and Deezer have gained popularity among South African music listeners, offering a convenient and affordable way to access a vast library of music (Froehlich, 2023). The music industry has responded to this trend by making its music available on these platforms and by promoting streaming as a primary mode of music consumption. This shift has led to changes in how music is marketed, distributed, and monetised, with artists and record labels focusing more on streaming metrics like streams and playlist placements (IFPI, 2021).

According to Nyagadza (2022), social media has also emerged as a powerful tool for marketing music in South Africa. Platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter allow artists to connect directly with their fans, share their music, and promote upcoming releases. Social media has become an integral part of the music industry's marketing strategy, enabling artists to reach a wider audience and build a loyal fan base (Karim & Suriyanti, 2022). Additionally, social media influencers and online personalities have become important tastemakers in the music industry, with their endorsements and recommendations influencing music consumption trends (IFPI, 2021). This was supported by Inffluor (2024) who mentions that Influencers are becoming tastemakers in the music business, promoting their favourite new songs, putting together dancing competitions, and providing behind-the-scenes looks at the lives of performers. Effective music marketing tactics allow artists and companies to leverage the creativity, audience reach, and influence of influencers to promote their music and generate viral moments. The optimisation of influencer marketing, the use of email marketing, social media campaigns, contests, and the production of visual content to support music marketing campaigns all depend on data-driven marketing initiatives. Innovative business models are also emerging in response to digital consumption trends in South Africa (Botelho et al., 2021). For example, some artists and record labels are exploring direct-to-fan distribution models, bypassing traditional distribution channels and selling music directly to consumers through platforms like Bandcamp and Patreon. This allows artists to retain more control over their music and earn a larger share of the revenue (Bender et al., 2021). Similarly, live streaming concerts and virtual events have become popular ways for artists to connect with fans and generate revenue in the absence of live performances (IFPI, 2021). Adapting music business to digital consumption trends in South Africa requires the industry to embrace streaming services, leverage social media for marketing, and explore innovative business models. By embracing these trends, the music industry in South Africa can capitalise on the opportunities presented by the digital era and ensure its continued growth and relevance in the digital age.

## Discussions

The findings of this study reveal the multifaceted challenges facing South African musicians in the digital era and underscore the need for a more integrated application of legal, business, and technology theories. These theoretical perspectives, when actively applied rather than descriptively outlined, offer a deeper understanding of the structural barriers and opportunities present in the evolving music industry landscape. From a legal standpoint, the study highlights the inadequacy of existing legislative frameworks in protecting the rights of artists operating in digital spaces. The persistence of outdated copyright laws and limited enforcement mechanisms has left many musicians vulnerable to exploitation. Legal theory, particularly that which emphasizes the role of institutions in regulating market behaviour and protecting creators' rights (Levit & Verchick, 2016), becomes highly relevant here. It allows us to interpret the recurring issue of unfair digital contracts not merely as isolated incidents but as systemic outcomes of an insufficiently adaptive legal system. South African musicians often enter into licensing agreements with global platforms without fully understanding their legal implications, leading to inequitable royalty distributions and loss of control over their intellectual property. Therefore, legal theory informs the need for stronger, context-sensitive legal interventions. Policymakers should revise the *Copyright Amendment Bill* to reflect digital realities and establish accessible legal advisory mechanisms to support independent musicians, particularly those in under-resourced communities. Business theory, especially models of platform economics and value creation in networked markets, helps explain the shifting commercial logic of the music industry. As the traditional record label model gives way to decentralized, platform-based music distribution, musicians are compelled to act as entrepreneurs—developing their own brands, engaging directly with audiences, and diversifying revenue through merchandise, live streaming, and social media (Tang & Lyons, 2016). However, the study's findings show that many South African artists lack the financial literacy and entrepreneurial skills needed to succeed in this environment. Business theory thus highlights the importance of equipping artists with tools to adapt to volatile digital markets. Industry stakeholders, including RISA and SAMRO, can play a critical role by offering training in digital entrepreneurship and financial management South African Music Rights Organisation (SAMRO) (2021). Additionally, public-private initiatives should establish creative incubators and provide micro-financing opportunities to support innovation and sustainability among local artists.

Technology theory offers a crucial lens through which to understand how digital platforms both empower and marginalise artists. While technologies such as YouTube, TikTok, and Spotify have opened new avenues for exposure, they also reproduce global inequalities through algorithmic biases and opaque data practices (Kretschmer & Peukert, 2017; Peukert et al, 2017; Yende, 2024). Technology theory challenges the assumption that digital tools are neutral and instead encourages critical engagement with how they shape cultural production and access. The findings demonstrate that while some artists have successfully used these platforms to build audiences, many others are hindered by the dominance of international content and lack of visibility. This calls for local interventions, such as the implementation of digital content quotas to promote South African music and the development of homegrown platforms that prioritise local creators. Furthermore, policymakers should offer tax incentives and innovation grants to support the creation of artist-owned digital infrastructures, ensuring greater equity in the digital music ecosystem. Applying these theories in an integrated manner enriches our understanding of the South African music industry in transition. Legal theory points to the need for regulatory reform and institutional support; business theory identifies gaps in entrepreneurial capacity and market adaptation; and technology theory exposes the structural constraints of globalised digital platforms. Together, they provide a robust analytical foundation for policy interventions and strategic planning. The digital transformation of the music industry, while offering immense potential, must be guided by inclusive and context-specific frameworks that ensure equitable access, fair compensation, and sustainable growth for all stakeholders involved.

Based on the findings of this article, three key recommendations can be made to address the challenges faced by South African musicians in the digital era. Firstly, there is a need for enhanced legal support and education for musicians to navigate the complexities of digital-era contracts. This could include providing access to legal resources and training to help musicians understand their rights and negotiate fair contracts with industry players. Secondly, there should be greater collaboration between musicians, industry stakeholders, and policymakers to develop and implement innovative business models that capitalise on digital opportunities. This could involve creating platforms for direct-to-fan distribution, exploring new revenue streams, and leveraging social media for marketing and promotion. Lastly, there is a need for continued investment in technological infrastructure and digital literacy programs to ensure that musicians have the tools and skills needed to thrive in the digital

environment. By implementing these recommendations, the South African music industry can better adapt to digital consumption trends and create a more sustainable and inclusive ecosystem for musicians and stakeholders.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, this article has illuminated the multifaceted challenges South African musicians face as they navigate the complexities of the digital music industry. From negotiating ambiguous and often exploitative digital-era contracts to adjusting to shifting modes of music consumption, artists must constantly adapt to a rapidly evolving landscape. The digital transformation has disrupted traditional industry models, placing new demands on musicians to understand legal, business, and technological dynamics that affect their careers and creative outputs. However, within these challenges also lie significant opportunities for innovation, autonomy, and growth. A central insight emerging from the discussion is the urgent need for legal and regulatory frameworks that reflect the realities of the digital age. South African musicians require robust, enforceable legal protections to safeguard their intellectual property and ensure equitable remuneration in digital markets. Legal reforms must aim to simplify and update copyright and contract laws, while also establishing institutional support—such as legal advisory services and rights education—that empowers artists to navigate contracts with greater confidence and agency.

Equally important is the strategic use of digital platforms and technologies. Streaming services, social media, and influencer-driven campaigns are not merely marketing tools but essential components of today's music economy. These technologies allow for direct engagement with audiences, broader market reach, and the creation of alternative revenue streams. Musicians who actively adopt and leverage these platforms can build sustainable careers independent of traditional gatekeepers. This underscores the need for digital literacy and entrepreneurial training, enabling artists to thrive in a competitive and increasingly platform-driven environment. The South African music industry stands at a pivotal moment. With the right combination of responsive policies, equitable industry practices, and artist-driven strategies, the sector can transition into a more inclusive and resilient digital economy. This article emphasises that by addressing systemic challenges—particularly those related to legal clarity, business innovation, and technological engagement—South African musicians can harness the full potential of the digital era. In doing so, they not only protect their creative rights but also contribute meaningfully to the cultural and economic revitalization of the industry.

Despite the valuable insights provided by this article, there are several limitations that should be acknowledged. Firstly, the article's focus on South Africa's music industry may limit the generalisability of its findings to other contexts. The music industry is diverse and complex, and the challenges faced by South African musicians may differ from those faced by musicians in other regions. Secondly, the article's reliance on qualitative research methods and desktop literature review, limited the analysis of this article. While these methods were appropriate for exploring the nuanced challenges faced by South African musicians, they may not have captured the full range of issues faced by the industry. Lastly, the article's scope was limited to examining the impact of digital technologies on South African music legislation, contracts, and business practices. While this provided valuable insights into these specific areas, it may have overlooked other important factors influencing the industry, such as cultural and social dynamics. Overall, while this article has provided valuable insights into the challenges faced by South African musicians in the digital era, further research is needed to fully understand the complexities of the music industry and to develop strategies that address these challenges effectively.

## Declarations

**Interdisciplinary Scope:** This study draws on legal, business, and technology frameworks to provide an interdisciplinary analysis of the South African music industry in the digital era.

**Author Contributions:** All authors read and approved the final manuscript. Yende conceptualised the study, led the qualitative research design, conducted the data collection, initial analysis and interpreting the findings, and drafted the original manuscript. Hlatshwayo contributed to the refinement of the research framework, reviewed and edited manuscript drafts for intellectual content. Koliti conducted the critical desktop literature review and contributed to the final revision of the manuscript.

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