

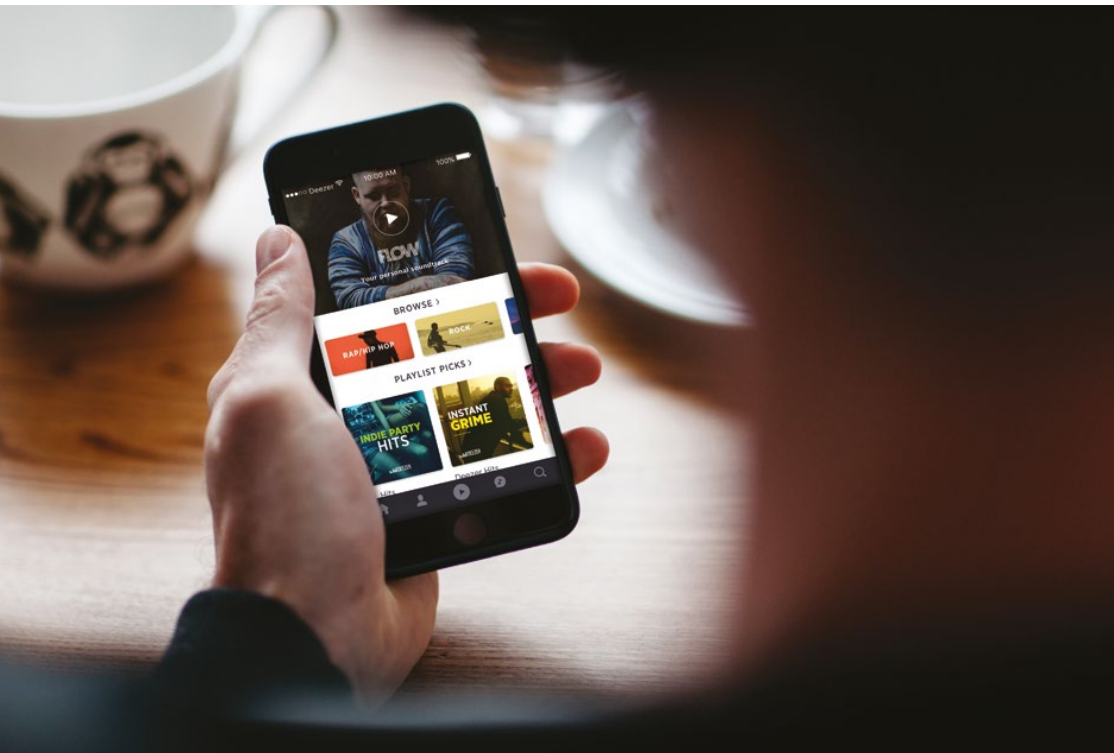
S O U N D S C A P E

FROM THE GROWTH OF YOUTUBE TO THE RISE OF TIDAL, DIGITAL STREAMING IS FUNDAMENTALLY CHANGING THE WAY WE CONSUME MEDIA. IT'S A TECHNOLOGY AKIN TO TODAY'S SMARTPHONE-OBSSESSED SOCIETY, GRANTING USERS INSTANT ACCESS TO MILLIONS OF ALBUMS, VIDEOS AND FILMS, FOR A SMALL MONTHLY SUBSCRIPTION. **DANIELLE DE WOLFE** REPORTS

It was only a matter of years ago that the music industry looked upon the word 'digital' as something parasitic. It became a term associated with illegal downloading and online piracy – at its height, a concept even hailed as the death of the music industry. But it appears feelings towards the innovation have since undergone a marked change, in part thanks to the rise of legal audio streaming services such as Spotify, Apple Music and Deezer, alongside the changing habits of millennials around the world.

When it comes to music streaming, Daniel Ek is the man holding the cards. Recent weeks have seen the Spotify chairman and CEO crowned the most powerful person in music by *Billboard* magazine, an accolade previously held by Universal Music Group CEO Lucian Grainge. What began as a simple idea developed in Ek's Stockholm apartment in 2005 quickly grew into a platform that would help revolutionise the public's listening experience. "Founded in Sweden, the home of The Pirate Bay, we believed that if we could build a service which was better than piracy, then we could convince people to stop illegal file-sharing, and start consuming music legally again," remarked Ek in an interview with *Torrentfreak*, a copyright specialist publication.

And it seems to be working. Newly released figures from the British Phonographic Industry (BPI) show a dramatic rise in the public's demand for music, a trend that has seen the total number of audio streams increase by more than 500% since 2013. "You can't ignore what streaming services like Spotify and YouTube do for our potential audiences," states Jeff Smith, Head of BBC Radio 2 and BBC 6 Music. "With younger audiences, it's that much harder for radio stations to get a share of listening. What are younger audiences doing? Are they listening to Spotify? Are they watching Netflix? They're all competing for share of ear." And with audio streaming now accounting for more than a third of all music consumption, what is it about online services that holds such appeal to millennials?



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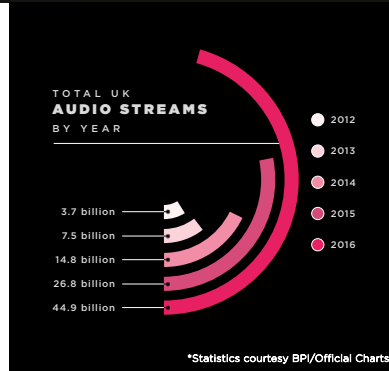
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A young woman streaming music with Brag's wireless smart earphones, a Chord Electronics amplifier

One theory points towards a generation accustomed to instant gratification. In a world containing an infinite number of apps, poised and ready to cater to your every whim – Tinder for dating, Deliveroo for food, Uber for transport – the youth of today are confronted with a multitude of options at the swipe of a touchscreen. “At the heart of it is convenience,” agrees Smith. “I find it myself, particularly if I have a track in mind. I go to Spotify to listen to it – sometimes even over our own database here at the BBC, because it’s very well researched and very well developed.”

New forms of technology are granting us direct access to a broader range of music than ever before, with a catalogue containing over 30 million songs at our fingertips. In part, it’s the speed with which technology is changing that dictates the demographic it attracts. Millennials growing up in the digital age have a completely different relationship to technology from that of their predecessors. “Young people assimilate information far faster than older generations,” notes Chord Electronics founder, John Franks. “It’s a generational thing. My generation just can’t take in the data: it’s far too fast for me.”

In many respects, the sheer scale of these catalogues, alongside the speed with which the data can be searched, is where music platforms come into their own. “Spotify is fundamentally a great search box,” remarks Smith. “You’ve got to be into the music and you’ve got to know what you want to get out of it to begin with... Streaming services are very much like record shops. You go in looking for something you’ve heard before and quite often you accidentally fall upon something. This is why they’re making great play of the playlist concept – in that you can go into a playlist and fall upon a new record.”



The option to subscribe to, curate and share playlists is a key selling point for millennial music fans. Making playlists available both online and offline is not only the height of convenience but something that appears to encroach on an area usually dominated by radio stations. “I do think radio and streaming can run side-by-side,” insists Smith. “The joy of radio – particularly great music radio – is that you don’t know what you’re going to get next... What we’re doing at Radio 2 is utilising these playlists by running them overnight.”

WHAT ARE YOUNGER AUDIENCES DOING? ARE THEY LISTENING TO SPOTIFY? ARE THEY WATCHING NETFLIX? **THEY’RE ALL COMPETING FOR SHARE OF EAR**





AMAZON HAS STARTED UP
A PHYSICAL BOOKSHOP
THAT'S THE COMPANY THAT
CREATED THE KINDLE

"They can be consumed with the BBC Music app and it's a response to the fact there are new audiences out there that want different listening experiences."

Yet despite the industry's seemingly steady move towards all things digital, the vinyl revival surges on. In 2016, sales of the format broke the 3 million units barrier – a figure not seen since the heady heights of 1991. It's a distinct fork in the road, one that extends far beyond the confines of the music industry and acts as a possible nod towards a renewed desire for the tangible.

"I was reading this morning that Amazon was starting up a physical bookshop in New York because 'books are back' – and that's from the company that created the Kindle," remarks Smith exuberantly. "I think radio is back and CDs could be back too. People think things are going to go away but I think there's definitely something to be said for ownership."

Only time will tell whether the rise in physical sales proves to be more than simply a short-term resurgence. It's a subject that divides opinion, much like the ongoing debate regarding streaming service payouts and the royalties received by artists. As with any industry, there are winners and losers. However, the much-needed monetary injection provided by Spotify and its 40 million paid subscribers can only be a positive thing for an industry that needs all the help it can get. @

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