

Platformed Empowerment across Pop Markets and the Viral Intimacy and Curated Hybridity of PinkPantheress and Lexie Liu

Yumeng Hu*

Department of Music, School of Humanities, University of Southampton, Southampton SO17 1BJ, United Kingdom

*Corresponding author: goodong79@gmail.com

Abstract: This article advances a comparative hermeneutic account of how PinkPantheress and Lexie Liu orchestrate aesthetic sovereignty and audience connection within institutionally differentiated popular-music platform ecologies. It reconceptualizes empowerment as a situated capacity to author music, calibrate visibility and sustain semiotically recognizable relations with listeners instead of treating popularity as a self-evident measure of autonomy. A comparative qualitative case study examines a purposive corpus of public interviews, artist-controlled audiovisual releases, platform pages and question-and-answer exchanges published between 2019 and 2025. Reflexive thematic and multimodal content analysis identifies two contrasting yet convergent aesthetic dispositifs. PinkPantheress develops viral intimacy through compressed songs, understated self-presentation, domestic production narratives and selective privacy. Lexie Liu develops curated hybridity through bilingual writing, sumptuous audiovisual world-building and controlled movement between Chinese and global cultural references. In both cases, authorship and persona become resources for relational legibility. Platform visibility nonetheless produces infrastructural dependency. Viral legibility can constrict future expectations and cross-cultural legibility can invite reductive exegesis. The comparison proposes platformed empowerment as a negotiated and reversible constellation of creative control, platform affordances and audience recognition. The article contributes a circumspect cross-market framework that refuses to treat artists as national synecdoches or public engagement metrics as incontrovertible evidence of loyalty.

Keywords: Platformization, popular music, gender, authenticity, cultural hybridity, PinkPantheress, Lexie Liu.

1. Introduction

Popular-music careers now unfold through an interlocking set of short-video feeds, streaming services, press profiles, music-video platforms and fan-facing social media. These systems do more than distribute finished songs. They reward particular lengths, hooks, images, narratives and rhythms of disclosure and they convert attention into data that artists and intermediaries must interpret. Platformization scholarship accordingly describes cultural goods as contingent products whose circulation and value are reorganized through programmable infrastructures [1]. It also identifies platformization as a broader penetration of platform logics into cultural practice [2] while work on the platformization of the web explains how external activity is rendered data-ready [3]. For music, this means that artistic identity is produced not only in songs but across interfaces, recommendations, clips, interviews and recurring contact.

This article asks, how do PinkPantheress and Lexie Liu use creative authorship, self-presentation and cross-platform circulation to construct empowerment and audience connection? The cases are deliberately asymmetric. PinkPantheress emerged from the United Kingdom into a global short-form and streaming environment. Lexie Liu works from a Chinese music context while addressing transnational listeners through Mandarin-English songs and internationally legible visual genres. Neither artist stands for a nation. The comparison instead examines how two female pop artists negotiate distinct infrastructures and cultural expectations while retaining a recognizable creative position.

The governing contention is that empowerment in platformed pop is neither an immutable personal possession

nor the automatic consequence of visibility. It is a contingent capacity to render authorship perceptible, curate access to the self and transmute platform attention into a durable artistic identity. PinkPantheress's aesthetic dispositif is described here as viral intimacy. Brief emotionally direct music and understated narration generate proximity as selective privacy circumscribes access. Lexie Liu's strategy is curated hybridity. Bilingual authorship and conceptually opulent audiovisual worlds transform cultural movement into a source of agency. Both strategies solicit recognition yet neither abolishes dependence on platforms, intermediaries or audience expectations.

2. Platformed Music, Gendered Visibility and Cultural Hybridity

Streaming services personalize music through algorithmic individuation [4] while editorial curation continues to organize listening experiences [5]. Research on playlist gatekeeping shows that editorial and algorithmic selection operate sequentially and in combination [6]. the playlist can function as a logistical container [7] and as a personal technology through which listeners narrate everyday life [8]. Subscription models normalize continuous access instead of ownership [9] and datafication can reposition the musician from creator to an object of conglomerate measurement [10]. Although social media and streaming activity can co-evolve [11], the association does not establish that views produce loyalty or career longevity. Digital tools may support independent production [12], yet musicians also become reluctant entrepreneurs [13], mobilizing fans and self-promotion as part of work once separated from musicianship [14]. Kribs's review of Meier describes music's integration

into promotional and branding systems [15]. These tensions make agency visible as a practice of negotiation instead of complete independence.

Platform ecologies also differ. Douyin and TikTok developed through parallel but not identical institutional histories [16]. TikTok's technical and social architecture promotes imitation publics [17] and requires continuous visibility labour [18]. In China, platformization is intertwined with infrastructure and governance [19] while contemporary 'hot song' production adapts compositions across audiovisual platforms [20]. Longer histories of Chinese popular music complicate any simple opposition between local authenticity and global influence. national popular culture is actively assembled [21] and earlier formations such as the dakou generation already relied on redirected global media flows [22]. A cross-market comparison must therefore attend to particular circulation routes instead of treating 'the West' and 'China' as homogeneous containers.

Gender intensifies these demands. Postfeminist media culture often frames autonomy through choice, self-monitoring and individual confidence [23] while popular culture can absorb feminist language without changing structural conditions [24]. Later debates distinguish postfeminism, popular feminism and neoliberal feminism but show their overlap in commercial media [25]. Such discourses also travel unevenly. critiques developed from Western media cannot simply be universalized [26]. Resilience [27], visible feminist style [28] and confidence [29] can become personal obligations. On social media, entrepreneurial femininity requires an apparently effortless combination of labour, taste and self-branding [30].

The relevant question is therefore not whether an artist appears confident, authentic or independent, but how those qualities are made credible. Self-branding and micro-celebrity practices organize attention [31]. celebrity practice depends on seeing and being seen [32]. and visibility can accumulate as a form of capital [33]. Yet maintaining visibility is labour [34]. Audiences tend to value authenticity when self-presentation appears insufficiently strategic [35] and perceived originality, consistency and intimacy contribute to human-brand authenticity [36]. Musicians consequently perform relational labour. repeated communication intended to create affective connection while sustaining a career [37]. Metrics reveal only a partial record of that relation [38]. Fan identification can deepen through social media [39] and parasocial interaction may strengthen brand relationships [40], but engagement is not a transparent measure of attachment. Brand-community practices [41] and consumer-brand engagement constructs [42] are useful sensitizing concepts, not substitutes for qualitative evidence.

To compare culturally mobile pop without reducing difference to marketing style, the analysis combines hybridity and relational perspectives. Hybridity describes the unequal mixing through which cultural forms are translated and contested [43] while global cultural flows are disjunctive instead of smoothly convergent [44]. Relational musicology similarly treats musical meaning as distributed across sound, institutions, technologies and social relations [45]. These approaches support a model in which empowerment emerges from relations among authorship, persona, platform affordances and recognition.

From discovery to durability

A useful distinction follows between discovery, recognition, relation and durability. Discovery is the initial encounter

produced by a clip, playlist, recommendation, search result, press profile or shared video. Recognition develops when later encounters carry sufficiently consistent sonic, visual, linguistic or narrative cues for the artist to be identified as the same creative subject. Relation is the repeated, affective and interpretive connection that can grow around those cues. Durability is the artist's capacity to renew the cycle without allowing the mechanism of first discovery to become the only acceptable form of future work. These stages may overlap, reverse or fail. they are analytical functions instead of a universal career sequence. The distinction prevents a viral event from being mistaken for an enduring audience relationship and prevents repeated exposure from being mistaken for creative control.

Durability also clarifies what 'sustainability' can reasonably mean in a small qualitative study. Environmental, financial, psychological and institutional sustainability would require different evidence. Here the term refers narrowly to career durability. maintaining an intelligible artistic project while varying form, platform and degree of public access. Platformed empowerment contributes to durability when an artist can preserve recognizable authorship across changing interfaces, but it is weakened when one platform-specific trait becomes compulsory. This approach joins relational labour [37] to the caution that social metrics reveal activity without fully revealing meaning [38]. It also treats platform dependence as variable. an artist may be dependent on circulation infrastructures while retaining substantial control over the music, visual language or boundary between persona and private self.

3. Methods

The study uses a comparative qualitative case-study design. The unit of analysis is not each artist's entire career but the public construction of artistic agency across a bounded corpus. Materials were purposively selected to represent four functions. artist narration in long-form interviews. artist-controlled audiovisual releases. platform framing on official music pages. and direct audience address in public question-and-answer exchanges. The corpus contains twelve artifacts published from 2019 to 2025 (Table 1). Platform counts were recorded only as dated contextual observations and were not compared across services because a view, follower, use, comment and monthly listener are not equivalent measures.

Analysis proceeded in three stages. First, each artifact was logged by date, platform, format, speaker and evident production context. Second, reflexive thematic analysis coded recurring constructions of authorship, intimacy, privacy, visual control, linguistic movement and audience address [46]. Coding emphasized coherent interpretation instead of inter-coder agreement, consistent with reflexive thematic analysis quality guidance [47]. Third, a cross-case matrix compared how similar functions were accomplished through different resources. Trustworthiness was supported through a documented corpus, negative-case attention and an audit trail linking claims to captured pages and stable URLs [48]. Qualitative content-analysis procedures were used to distinguish manifest features language choice, interface labels, release format from interpretive themes [49]. Algorithmic culture was treated as an organizing context instead of an autonomous cause [50].

Only public, artist- or publisher-facing materials were analyzed. Usernames and individual fan comments were not reproduced and no audience member's gender, nationality or

motivation was inferred. The study does not claim reception effects, commercial causality or representativeness. Screenshots preserve the accessed interface as research evidence. because third-party images remain subject to publisher policy, Figure 1 should be permission-checked before publication. This limited design trades breadth for traceability and conceptual comparison.

Comparative Logic and Coding Decisions

Case selection followed a most-different logic at the level of public style and a comparable logic at the level of career problem. Both artists are singer-songwriters associated with digitally circulated pop, use more than one public-facing platform and have been framed through questions of authorship and identity. Their public strategies nevertheless differ in scale, linguistic movement, visual density and relations to national-market narratives. This combination makes the cases useful for theory-building. if different aesthetic strategies perform similar relational functions, empowerment should be defined by those functions instead of by a single look, genre or level of disclosure. The analysis therefore compared equivalent questions how authorship is signaled, how access is bounded and how cultural references travel instead of treating non-equivalent platform metrics as matching variables.

The coding frame was both deductive and inductive. Deductive categories came from platformization, authenticity, relational labour, postfeminist visibility and hybridity

research. Inductive codes captured features repeatedly encountered in the corpus, including compression, understatement, pseudonymity, bilingual cadence, symbolic density, interface classification and explicit resistance to branding. Coding was performed at the level of an artifact segment. an interview passage, a visible interface label, a recurrent visual motif or a song/video feature. Interpretive memos then tested whether each code described an observable feature, an inferred strategy or a possible consequence. Claims about strategy were retained only when supported across more than one artifact type. Possible consequences, such as loyalty or market conversion, were excluded unless the corpus could establish them.

A negative-case procedure further disciplined interpretation. Material that did not fit ‘viral intimacy’ or ‘curated hybridity’ was used to qualify each theme. PinkPantheress’s increasingly polished releases prevent understatement from being equated with low production value. Lexie Liu’s direct interview and Q&A participation prevent designed self-presentation from being equated with emotional distance. The resulting concepts are therefore relational tendencies, not fixed personality types. This matters because platform personas change across releases and because the same artifact may simultaneously support intimacy, promotion, experimentation and boundary maintenance.

PINKPANTHERESS COMPLETE SOURCE DETAILS

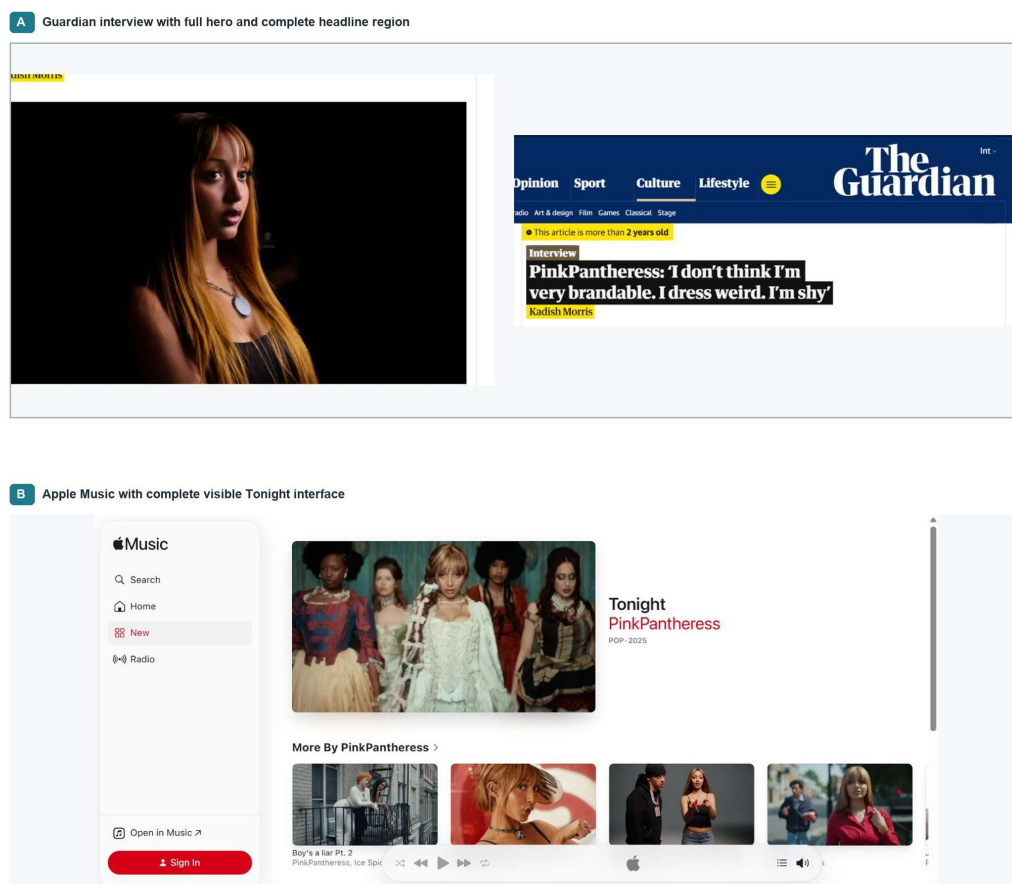
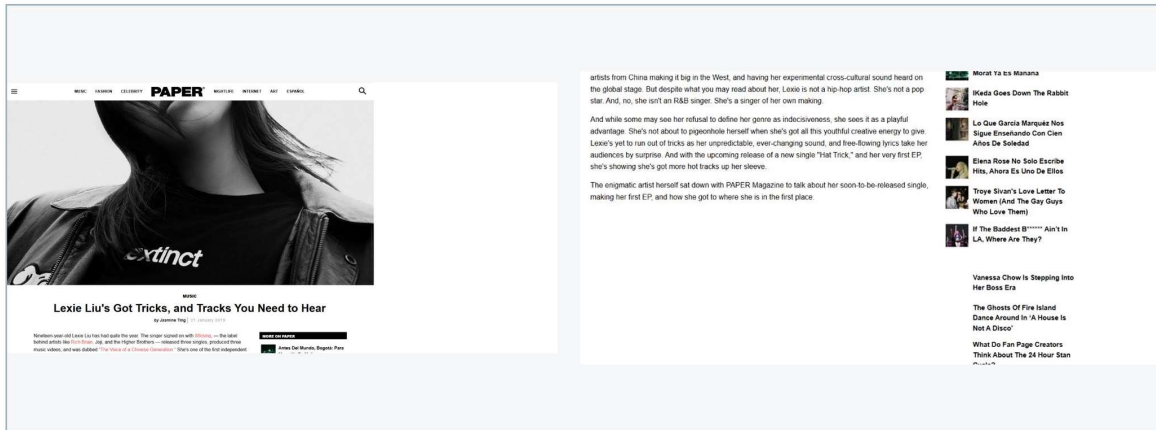


Figure 1a. PinkPantheress corpus sources. complete headline/hero detail from The Guardian and the Apple Music release interface (accessed 3 September 2026). Lower interface banners are omitted from the display. Unedited full-page captures are retained in the source archive.

LEXIE LIU COMPLETE SOURCE DETAILS

C PAPER interview with full hero and complete headline region



D Apple Music with complete visible FORTUNA interface

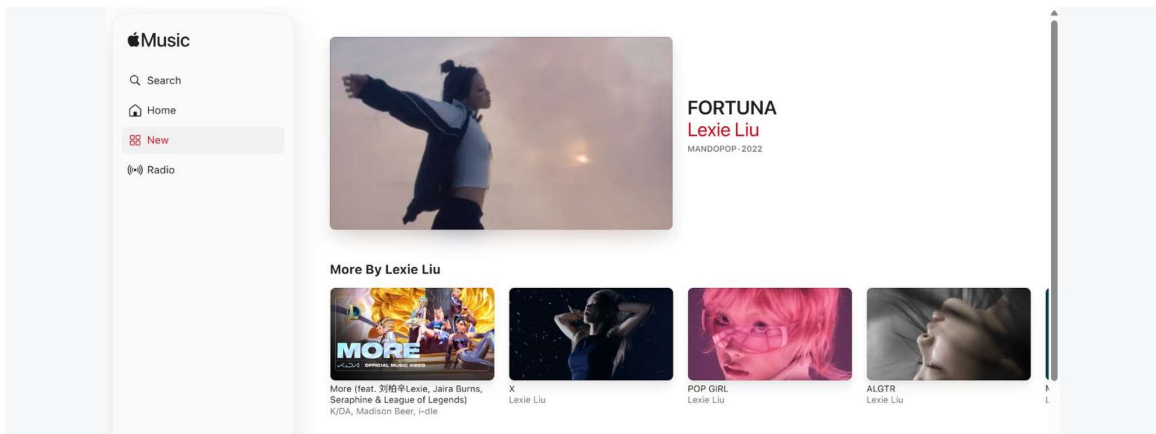


Figure 1b. Lexie Liu corpus sources. complete headline/hero detail from PAPER and the Apple Music release interface (accessed 3 September 2026). Lower interface banners are omitted from the display. Unedited full-page captures are retained in the source archive. Third-party screenshots in Figures 1a–b require a journal reproduction-policy check.

Table 1. Purposive public corpus used for the comparative analysis

Case	Function	Artifacts	Venue	Year(s)
PinkPantheress	Official audio/video	‘Pain’. ‘Just for Me’. ‘Tonight’	YouTube / Apple Music	2021–2025
PinkPantheress	Long-form interview	Guardian profile. Vogue interview	Guardian / Vogue	2023. 2025
PinkPantheress	Platform editorial	Artist spotlight on ‘Just for Me’	TikTok Newsroom	2022
PinkPantheress	Public Q&A	Artist AMA	Reddit r/popheads	2025
Lexie Liu	Official audio/video	‘Manta’. ‘MAGICIAN’. ‘FORTUNA’	Bilibili / YouTube / Apple Music	2019–2022
Lexie Liu	Long-form interview	PAPER profile. Teen Vogue interview	PAPER / Teen Vogue	2019
Lexie Liu	Public Q&A	Artist AMA	Reddit r/popheads	2025

Note. Full URLs and access dates are recorded in the accompanying source log. Counts and user comments were excluded from cross-case comparison.

4. Findings

4.1. PinkPantheress and Viral Intimacy

PinkPantheress’s public persona connects authorship to compression. The short duration and immediately recognizable hooks of ‘Pain’ and ‘Just for Me’ fit short-video

circulation, but their affect does not read as a simple platform formula. Voice, nostalgic samples and emotionally unresolved lyrics produce the impression of a private thought briefly made audible. Interviews reinforce this scale by returning to domestic production, shyness and discomfort with conventional celebrity branding. The resulting intimacy is not unrestricted disclosure. A pseudonym, limited

biographical detail and restrained interview manner create a boundary around the person while allowing the musical voice to feel close.

This combination is best understood as viral intimacy instead of raw virality. The important resource is not the size of a metric but a repeatable relation between concise form, understated persona and listener recognition. A TikTok newsroom feature reported that 'Just for Me' had generated more than 2.2 million video creations by January 2022, but that platform-specific historical statistic cannot be compared with present-day streaming followers or comments. Its analytical value lies in showing how a track became a template for participation. The artist's agency appears in converting that moment into a broader repertoire without abandoning sonic and visual continuity.

The 2023 Guardian profile complicates the celebratory narrative of frictionless platform success. Its headline foregrounds PinkPantheress's claim that she is difficult to brand and the interview presents privacy and awkwardness as active elements of self-definition. Her 2025 Apple Music page for 'Tonight' displays a more polished visual scale, but the artist remains recognizable through controlled colour, styling and an economy of gesture. Development therefore occurs through expansion without total narrative availability. The audience is invited to recognize a sensibility, not to possess exhaustive access to its author.

Viral intimacy nevertheless creates a constraint. Once brevity and immediacy become legible as the artist's signature, experimentation may be judged against the format that first generated attention. Platform circulation can empower by lowering entry barriers and amplifying authorship while also narrowing expectations about song length, disclosure and repeatability. PinkPantheress's selective privacy is thus not the opposite of audience connection. It is a technique for keeping connection compatible with continued authorship.

4.2. Lexie Liu and Curated Hybridity

Lexie Liu's corpus constructs agency through conspicuous authorship and conceptual density. The 2019 PAPER profile introduces an artist working across Mandarin and English and emphasizes creative self-direction. Instead of minimize mediation, her releases make mediation visible. Styling, typography, digital effects, choreography and symbolic narrative are integrated with songwriting. 'Manta', 'MAGICIAN' and 'FORTUNA' do not present cultural mixing as a neutral blend. They stage movement among languages, genres, mythic signs, luxury codes and futuristic interfaces as a controlled artistic problem.

Curated hybridity names this strategy. Bilingual lyrics do more than widen address. They allow cadence, rhyme, semantic ambiguity and cultural reference to shift within the same work. High-concept visuals give those shifts a coherent world. The 2022 Apple Music page for 'FORTUNA', for example, categorizes the release as Mandopop while its imagery uses an internationally recognizable digital-occult vocabulary. The work remains situated but not confined. Agency is expressed through the power to organize translations instead of through a claim to cultural neutrality.

Direct audience address extends that control. Interviews and public Q&A formats offer interpretive cues about songwriting and identity, but the persona remains designed instead of confessional. This differs from viral intimacy's apparent smallness. Connection is built through an invitation to decode an expanding symbolic system. Fans can recognize

recurring motifs, language shifts and visual continuity across releases. The strategy turns aesthetic complexity into relational access.

The risk is corresponding legibility pressure. Cross-cultural artists are frequently asked to explain identity in national or civilizational terms and bilingual work can be reduced to evidence of market ambition. Such readings overlook formal decisions and the uneven infrastructures through which the music circulates. Curated hybridity is empowering when the artist controls how references are combined and sequenced. It becomes restrictive when platforms or publicity demand a simplified story of East meeting West.

4.3. Cross-case Comparison

The two cases converge at the level of function and diverge at the level of form (Table 2). Both make creative authorship central to authenticity, use recurring aesthetic cues to become recognizable and manage the boundary between access and opacity. PinkPantheress creates proximity through compression and understatement. Lexie Liu creates proximity through a coherent world that rewards interpretation. One strategy appears casual and the other elaborate, but both are highly organized modes of relational labour.

Neither strategy is reducible to a national style. PinkPantheress's music draws on transnational samples, genres and audiences even when the career narrative begins in the United Kingdom. Lexie Liu's work engages global genres without ceasing to be embedded in Chinese-language production and platform conditions. The comparison therefore shifts from 'UK versus China' to different pathways through overlapping but institutionally distinct platform ecologies.

Figure 2 synthesizes the result. Platform conditions shape what becomes discoverable. Persona strategies translate discoverability into recognition. Recognition can support creative and career continuity. The arrows are not a causal pipeline. They mark a negotiated process subject to feedback, gatekeeping and changing audience expectations. Empowerment exists where artists can keep redirecting that process especially by preserving authorship and the right to modulate visibility.

4.4. Visibility as Calibrated Access

The cross-case comparison shows that public visibility is better analyzed as calibrated access than as a continuum from hidden to exposed. PinkPantheress can be highly visible while withholding conventional biographical detail. Lexie Liu can disclose creative ideas while routing personal access through an elaborate visual system. In both cases, the key decision concerns what the audience is permitted to recognize. PinkPantheress offers affective immediacy and a legible sonic signature but limits the conversion of that intimacy into exhaustive knowledge of the person. Lexie Liu offers interpretive density and recurring symbols but resists the demand that bilingual work resolve into a simple statement of national identity. Figure 3 represents these as distinct control problems instead of different quantities of openness.

This calibration matters because platform interfaces encourage decontextualization. A short extract may travel without the surrounding song. An image may appear beside algorithmically selected neighbours. An interview headline may become the dominant account of a longer conversation. Recurring cues help repair that fragmentation. PinkPantheress's voice, compressed forms and understated

visual manner can reassemble dispersed encounters into one perceived sensibility. Lexie Liu's language shifts, styling and symbolic continuity can reassemble songs and videos into one authored world. Recognition is therefore an infrastructural resource. it lets audiences connect fragments without requiring every fragment to provide the same information.

Yet recognition becomes restrictive when it hardens into expectation. For PinkPantheress, the risk is that brevity and viral reuse cease to be optional tools and become a test of authenticity. A longer or more theatrical work may then be treated as departure even when it extends the same authorship. For Lexie Liu, the risk is that bilingual and hybrid practice is valued mainly as market crossover, making every aesthetic decision evidence of an East-West narrative. In both cases, platformed empowerment requires the ability to vary the sign while retaining control of the signature. This is why the model ends with reversible instead of permanent empowerment. the relation must be renegotiated with each release, interface and publicity cycle.

The analysis also distinguishes connection from accessibility. Accessibility concerns ease of encounter or comprehension. connection concerns the listener's developing relation to a recognizable artistic project. A concise hook can be accessible without producing connection while a complex video may initially be less accessible but reward repeated interpretation. Conversely, a bilingual lyric may create multiple points of entry without addressing every listener identically. Treating these as separate dimensions avoids the marketing assumption that simplification is the only route across cultural or platform boundaries.

4.5. Temporal Asymmetry and Platform Change

The cases also illuminate a temporal problem in platform research. Interfaces, recommendation practices, audience norms and visible metrics change faster than the careers they mediate. A TikTok statistic recorded in 2022 describes a particular circulation moment. an Apple Music page captured in 2026 presents an interface state instead of the full history of a release. Treating these traces as simultaneous data would produce false precision. The study instead reads them as time-

stamped evidence of how an artist was framed at a particular point. This approach preserves historical change. the platform conditions surrounding an early breakthrough need not be the conditions surrounding a later album, interview or video.

Temporal asymmetry is especially important when comparing artists whose releases follow different rhythms. A burst of user-generated circulation, a concept album developed across several videos and a retrospective interview do not occupy equivalent time scales. Each can contribute to recognition, but they do so through different patterns of repetition and interpretation. The comparative unit should therefore be the function performed by an artifact within a career narrative, not the calendar week in which a metric happened to be visible. This functional equivalence supports comparison without pretending that the cases share identical platform histories.

Platform change also places retrospective pressure on artistic identity. Once a new interface or recommendation format becomes dominant, earlier work may be rediscovered and reframed through it. A song created before a trend can later circulate as trend material. a video designed as part of an album world can be encountered as an isolated recommendation. Artists and teams respond by adding contextual artifacts interviews, new visuals, live versions or linked releases that reconnect fragments to an authored project. Career durability thus includes temporal authorship. the capacity to influence how older and newer materials are related when platforms continually reorder the catalogue. This does not give artists control over circulation, but it expands the means available for contesting platform memory.

For researchers, this requires a versioned evidence practice. Capture dates, page titles, platform labels and stable links should accompany every visual trace while claims should distinguish what the artifact displays from what the analyst infers. Where a count is reported, its platform, unit and observation date should remain attached to it. Where a page has changed, the change should be treated as data instead of silently harmonized with an earlier capture. These procedures are modest, but they improve comparability and make later replication possible even when the underlying interface can no longer be reconstructed exactly.

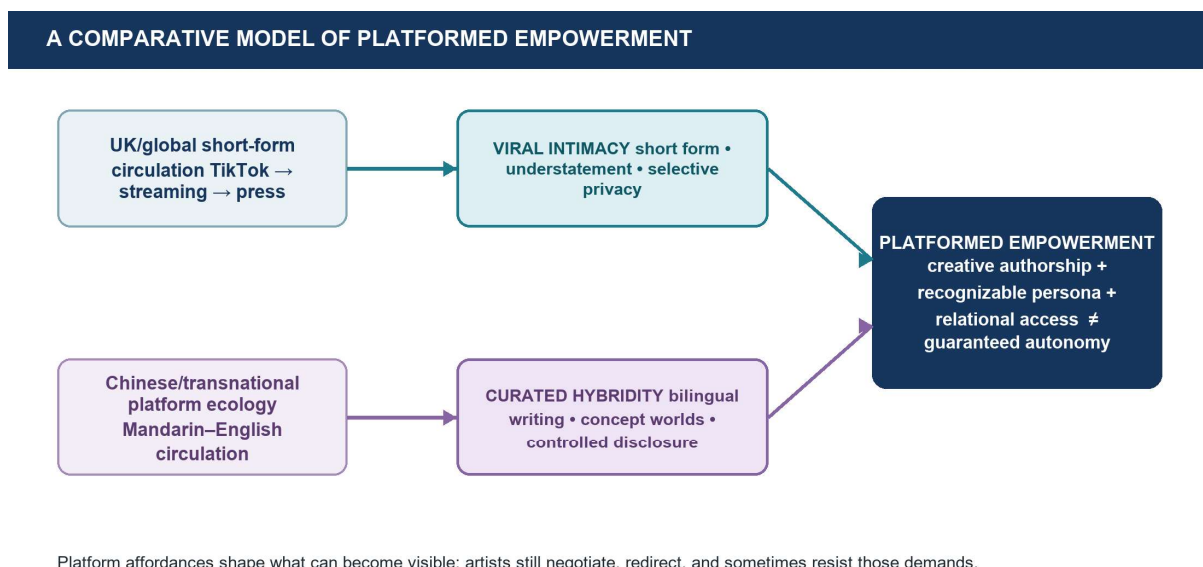


Figure 2. Comparative model of platformed empowerment. Source. author's analysis.

VISIBILITY IS A CONTROL PROBLEM, NOT A SINGLE SCALE

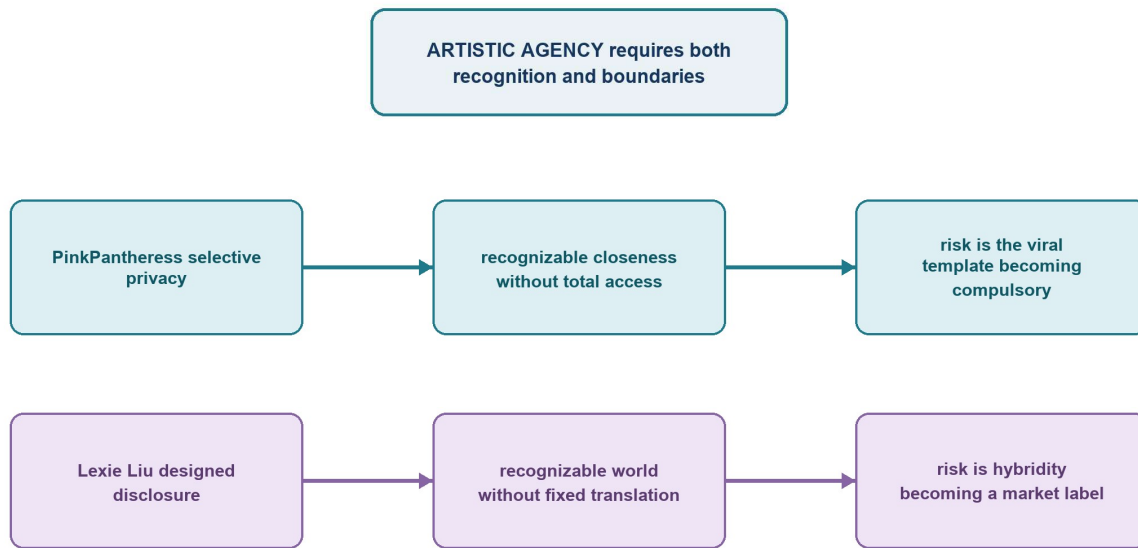


Figure 3. Visibility as a control problem. two routes to recognizable but bounded access. Source. author’s analysis.

Table 2. Cross-case analytical comparison

Dimension	PinkPantheress	Lexie Liu
Primary mode	Viral intimacy	Curated hybridity
Formal resource	Compressed songs, hooks, vocal closeness	Bilingual writing, conceptual audiovisual systems
Persona boundary	Understatement and selective privacy	Controlled disclosure through designed worlds
Audience invitation	Immediate reuse and affective recognition	Interpretation, decoding and motif recognition
Platform risk	Being fixed to virality and brevity	Being reduced to a cross-cultural market narrative
Empowerment condition	Ability to expand beyond the viral template	Ability to retain control over translation

5. Discussion

The comparison refines three axioms commonly attached to digital music. First, visibility is not coterminous with autonomy. Platform affordances can illuminate distinctive work yet the same apparatuses classify, recommend and monetize the resulting identity. An artist may exercise consequential agency inside conditions she did not choose. ‘Platformed empowerment’ names this partial and reversible achievement more precisely than narratives of total liberation or total exploitation.

Second, authenticity is relational and stylistically plural. PinkPantheress’s understatement and Lexie Liu’s baroque world-building may appear antithetical yet each aligns public presentation with perceived authorship. Authenticity here is not an unmediated interior truth. It is a credible semiotic concordance among sound, image, narration and boundary management. Selective privacy can sustain that concordance as persuasively as direct disclosure. Conceptual artifice can sustain it as persuasively as informality.

Third, cross-cultural marketing is most useful when understood as cultural translation instead of demographic targeting. The artists make their work portable through hooks, platform formats, genre references, subtitles, bilingual lyrics and interviews, but portability does not erase context. A

sustainable strategy preserves enough specificity to remain authorial while creating enough points of entry for heterogeneous listeners. This is a creative and relational achievement, not proof that an artist has mastered a market.

For artists and managers, the practical implication is to evaluate platform activity by function. A short-form clip may support discovery. a video may stabilize a visual world. an interview may articulate authorship. and a Q&A may deepen relational access. These artifacts should not be collapsed into one engagement score. Career durability is more plausibly supported by a portfolio of connections and controlled points of recognition than by dependence on a single viral indicator.

The study is limited by its small purposive corpus and reliance on public materials. It cannot establish how listeners interpret the artists, how platform recommendation systems treated individual releases or whether the observed strategies caused commercial outcomes. Future research could combine multilingual audience interviews, longitudinal platform data with harmonized measures and production-side interviews. Comparative work should also examine how labels, management teams and platform governance distribute the capacity attributed here to individual artists.

Implications for Cross-cultural Music Strategy

For cross-cultural strategy, the cases suggest that coherence should be organized around an artistic proposition instead of

a uniform platform persona. The same proposition can be translated into different artifact functions. Discovery artifacts should make a distinctive feature available quickly. recognition artifacts should repeat enough sonic or visual grammar to connect releases. relational artifacts should provide meaningful but bounded access. and reorientation artifacts should demonstrate that the project can change without becoming anonymous. Figure 4 summarizes this cycle. It is deliberately non-linear. a long-form interview may create first discovery while a short clip may reactivate an established relationship.

This functional view changes how evidence should be collected. Teams should compare like with like. completion patterns among short videos, saves among streaming releases, recurring themes in interview responses or the reuse of motifs across official visual materials. They should not combine unlike counts into a single cross-platform score. Qualitative evidence is equally important. Comments may reveal which elements listeners recognize, but they require ethical sampling and cannot establish audience demographics without consent. Interviews and Q&A exchanges can show how authorship is narrated, but promotional settings must be acknowledged. A defensible evaluation therefore triangulates platform traces, artifact analysis and audience research

instead of allowing one visible number to stand for relationship quality.

The framework also cautions against treating localization as cosmetic adaptation. Translation may involve language, timing, genre convention, platform selection, interface metadata and the degree of contextual explanation offered around a release. Lexie Liu's case shows that bilingual practice can be compositional instead of only promotional. PinkPantheress's case shows that globally circulating music may retain a culturally and biographically specific mode of understatement. Strategic translation succeeds when it creates an entry point without erasing the tensions that make the work distinctive.

Finally, career durability depends on optionality. Artists need more than access to multiple channels. they need the practical capacity to reduce, expand or redirect visibility without losing all routes to listeners. A diversified artifact portfolio can distribute that risk. Short-form circulation may initiate attention, streaming and video can stabilize the repertoire, press can articulate authorship and bounded fan interaction can sustain relational contact. The goal is not omnipresence. It is the capacity to decide which mode of presence serves the work at a particular moment.

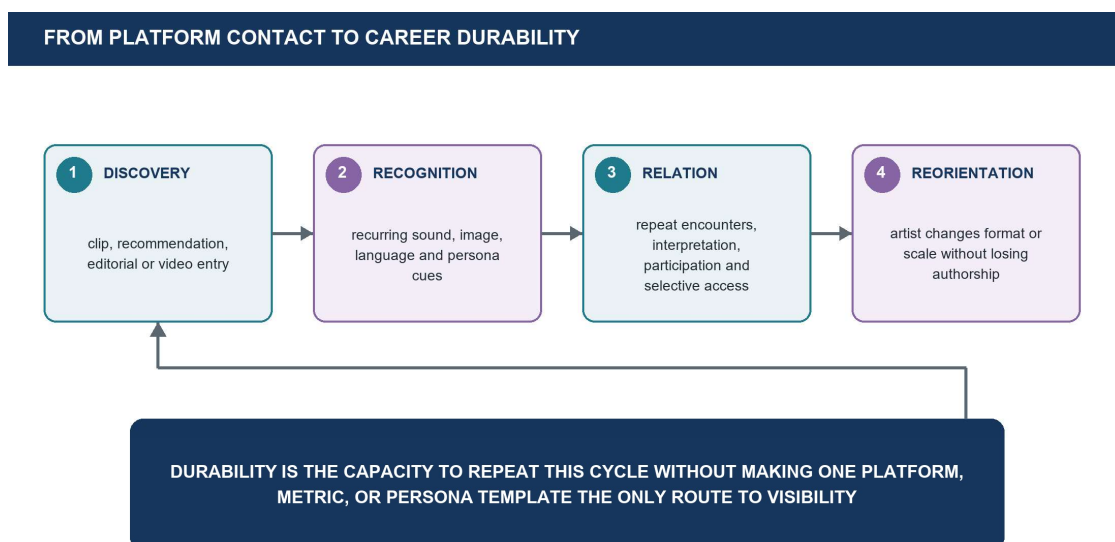


Figure 4. Functional cycle from platform contact to career durability. Source. author's analysis.

Table 3. Analytical propositions and practical implications

Proposition	Claim	Implication
P1	Discovery is not durability	Treat exposure as an entry condition, not proof of loyalty or career sustainability.
P2	Authenticity is relational	Assess alignment among authorship, persona, boundaries and recurring aesthetic cues.
P3	Translation should preserve specificity	Create multiple entry points without reducing cultural difference to a crossover label.
P4	Optionality supports durability	Maintain several artifact functions so one platform format does not become compulsory.

6. Conclusion

PinkPantheress and Lexie Liu demonstrate two routes through platformed pop. viral intimacy and curated hybridity.

Both routes convert authorship, persona and controlled access into recognizable relations with listeners. both are enabled and constrained by platform infrastructures. The comparison therefore relocates empowerment from popularity to

negotiated control over creative identity and visibility. It also replaces broad national representation with a more precise account of situated circulation. For cross-cultural popular-music research, the durable question is not simply how widely an artist travels, but whether she can continue to define the terms on which her work becomes legible.

References

- [1] Nieborg, D. B., & Poell, T. (2018). The platformization of cultural production: Theorizing the contingent cultural commodity. *New Media & Society*, 20(11), 4275–4292. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444818769694>
- [2] Poell, T., Nieborg, D., & van Dijck, J. (2019). Platformisation. *Internet Policy Review*, 8(4). <https://doi.org/10.14763/2019.4.1425>
- [3] Helmond, A. (2015). The platformization of the web: Making web data platform ready. *Social Media + Society*, 1(2), Article 2056305115603080. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305115603080>
- [4] Prey, R. (2018). Nothing personal: Algorithmic individuation on music streaming platforms. *Media, Culture & Society*, 40(7), 1086–1100. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443717745147>
- [5] Morris, J. W., & Powers, D. (2015). Control, curation and musical experience in streaming music services. *Creative Industries Journal*, 8(2), 106–122. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17510694.2015.1090222>
- [6] Bonini, T., & Gandini, A. (2019). “First week is editorial, second week is algorithmic”: Platform gatekeepers and the platformization of music curation. *Social Media + Society*, 5(4), Article 2056305119880006. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305119880006>
- [7] Eriksson, M. (2020). The editorial playlist as container technology: On Spotify and the logistical role of digital music packages. *Journal of Cultural Economy*, 13(4), 415–427. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17530350.2019.1708780>
- [8] Hagen, A. N. (2015). The playlist experience: Personal playlists in music streaming services. *Popular Music and Society*, 38(5), 625–645. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03007766.2015.1021174>
- [9] Arditi, D. (2018). Digital subscriptions: The unending consumption of music in the digital era. *Popular Music and Society*, 41(3), 302–318. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03007766.2016.1264101>
- [10] Negus, K. (2019). From creator to data: The post-record music industry and the digital conglomerates. *Media, Culture & Society*, 41(3), 367–384. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443718799395>
- [11] Watson, A., Watson, J. B., & Tompkins, L. (2023). Does social media pay for music artists? Quantitative evidence on the co-evolution of social media, streaming and live music. *Journal of Cultural Economy*, 16(1), 32–46. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17530350.2022.2087720>
- [12] Hracs, B. J. (2012). A creative industry in transition: The rise of digitally driven independent music production. *Growth and Change*, 43(3), 442–461. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2257.2012.00593.x>
- [13] Haynes, J., & Marshall, L. (2018). Reluctant entrepreneurs: Musicians and entrepreneurship in the ‘new’ music industry. *The British Journal of Sociology*, 69(2), 459–482. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-4446.12286>
- [14] Morris, J. W. (2014). Artists as entrepreneurs, fans as workers. *Popular Music and Society*, 37(3), 273–290. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03007766.2013.778534>
- [15] Kribs, K. (2018). Popular music as promotion: Music and branding in the digital age [Book review of Leslie M. Meier]. *Canadian Journal of Communication*, 43(4), 6–8. <https://doi.org/10.22230/cjc.2018v43n4a3400>
- [16] Kaye, D. B. V., Chen, X., & Zeng, J. (2021). The co-evolution of two Chinese mobile short video apps: Parallel platformization of Douyin and TikTok. *Mobile Media & Communication*, 9(2), 229–253. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2050157920952120>
- [17] Zulli, D., & Zulli, D. J. (2022). Extending the Internet meme: Conceptualizing technological mimesis and imitation publics on the TikTok platform. *New Media & Society*, 24(8), 1872–1890. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444820983603>
- [18] Abidin, C. (2020). Mapping Internet celebrity on TikTok: Exploring attention economies and visibility labours. *Cultural Science Journal*, 12(1), 77–103. <https://doi.org/10.5334/csci.140>
- [19] de Kloet, J., Poell, T., Zeng, G., & Chow, Y. F. (2019). The platformization of Chinese society: Infrastructure, governance, and practice. *Chinese Journal of Communication*, 12(3), 249–256. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17544750.2019.1644008>
- [20] Zhang, Q. (2025). Adaptation and optimisation across audiovisual platforms: Hot song production in the Chinese music industry. *Popular Music*, 44(1), 8–22. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0261143025000297>
- [21] Fung, A. Y. H. (2007). The emerging (national) popular music culture in China. *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, 8(3), 425–437. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14649370701393824>
- [22] de Kloet, J. (2005). Popular music and youth in urban china: The dakou generation. *The China Quarterly*, 183, 609–626. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s030574100500038x>
- [23] Gill, R. (2007). Postfeminist media culture: Elements of a sensibility. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 10(2), 147–166. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1367549407075898>
- [24] McRobbie, A. (2004). Post-feminism and popular culture. *Feminist Media Studies*, 4(3), 255–264. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1468077042000309937>
- [25] Banet-Weiser, S., Gill, R., & Rottenberg, C. (2020). Postfeminism, popular feminism and neoliberal feminism? Sarah Banet-Weiser, Rosalind Gill and Catherine Rottenberg in conversation. *Feminist Theory*, 21(1), 3–24. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464700119842555>
- [26] Dosekun, S. (2015). For Western girls only?: Post-feminism as transnational culture. *Feminist Media Studies*, 15(6), 960–975. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2015.1062991>
- [27] Gill, R., & Orgad, S. (2018). The amazing bounce-backable woman: Resilience and the psychological turn in neoliberalism. *Sociological Research Online*, 23(2), 477–495. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1360780418769673>
- [28] Mendes, K. (2012). ‘Feminism rules! Now, where’s my swimsuit?’ Re-evaluating feminist discourse in print media 1968–2008. *Media, Culture & Society*, 34(5), 554–570. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443712442701>
- [29] Gill, R., & Orgad, S. (2015). The confidence cult(ure). *Australian Feminist Studies*, 30(86), 324–344. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08164649.2016.1148001>
- [30] Duffy, B. E., & Hund, E. (2015). “Having it all” on social media: Entrepreneurial femininity and self-branding among fashion bloggers. *Social Media + Society*, 1(2), Article 2056305115604337. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305115604337>
- [31] Khamis, S., Ang, L., & Welling, R. (2017). Self-branding, ‘micro-celebrity’ and the rise of social media influencers.

- Celebrity Studies*, 8(2), 191–208. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19392397.2016.1218292>
- [32] Marwick, A., & boyd, d. (2011). To see and be seen: Celebrity practice on Twitter. *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies*, 17(2), 139–158. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354856510394539>
- [33] Driessens, O. (2013). Celebrity capital: Redefining celebrity using field theory. *Theory and Society*, 42(5), 543–560. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11186-013-9202-3>
- [34] Abidin, C. (2016). Visibility labour: Engaging with influencers' fashion brands and #OOTD advertorial campaigns on Instagram. *Media International Australia*, 161(1), 86–100. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1329878x16665177>
- [35] Audrezet, A., de Kerviler, G., & Guidry Moulard, J. (2020). Authenticity under threat: When social media influencers need to go beyond self-presentation. *Journal of Business Research*, 117, 557–569. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2018.07.008>
- [36] Moulard, J. G., Garrity, C. P., & Rice, D. H. (2015). What makes a human brand authentic? Identifying the antecedents of celebrity authenticity. *Psychology & Marketing*, 32(2), 173–186. <https://doi.org/10.1002/mar.20771>
- [37] Baym, N. K. (2015). Connect with your audience! The relational labor of connection. *The Communication Review*, 18(1), 14–22. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10714421.2015.996401>
- [38] Baym, N. K. (2013). Data not seen: The uses and shortcomings of social media metrics. *First Monday*, 18(10). <https://doi.org/10.5210/fm.v18i10.4873>
- [39] Click, M. A., Lee, H., & Holladay, H. W. (2013). Making monsters: Lady Gaga, fan identification, and social media. *Popular Music and Society*, 36(3), 360–379. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03007766.2013.798546>
- [40] Labrecque, L. I. (2014). Fostering consumer-brand relationships in social media environments: The role of parasocial interaction. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 28(2), 134–148. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.intmar.2013.12.003>
- [41] Schau, H. J., Muñiz, A. M., Jr., & Arnould, E. J. (2009). How brand community practices create value. *Journal of Marketing*, 73(5), 30–51. <https://doi.org/10.1509/jmkg.73.5.30>
- [42] Hollebeek, L. D., Glynn, M. S., & Brodie, R. J. (2014). Consumer brand engagement in social media: Conceptualization, scale development and validation. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 28(2), 149–165. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.intmar.2013.12.002>
- [43] Kraidy, M. M. (2002). Hybridity in cultural globalization. *Communication Theory*, 12(3), 316–339. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2885.2002.tb00272.x>
- [44] Appadurai, A. (1990). Disjuncture and difference in the global cultural economy. *Public Culture*, 2(2), 1–24. <https://doi.org/10.1215/08992363-2-2-1>
- [45] Born, G. (2010). For a relational musicology: Music and interdisciplinarity, beyond the practice turn: The 2007 Dent Medal Address. *Journal of the Royal Musical Association*, 135(2), 205–243. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02690403.2010.506265>
- [46] Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- [47] Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2021). One size fits all? What counts as quality practice in (reflexive) thematic analysis? *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 18(3), 328–352. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14780887.2020.1769238>
- [48] Nowell, L. S., Norris, J. M., White, D. E., & Moules, N. J. (2017). Thematic analysis: Striving to meet the trustworthiness criteria. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 16(1), Article 1609406917733847. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406917733847>
- [49] Schreier, M. (2012). *Qualitative content analysis in practice*. SAGE. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781529682571>
- [50] Striphas, T. (2015). Algorithmic culture. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 18(4-5), 395–412. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1367549415577392>