Songwriting in the Postdigital Age: Using TikTok and Instagram as Online Informal Learning Technologies

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Abstract : In times of ubiquitous digitalization and the increasing entanglement of humans and technologies in musical practices in the 21st century, it is to be asked, how popular musicians learn in the (post)digital Age. Against the backdrop of the increasing interest in transferring informal learning practices into formal settings of music education the interdisciplinary research association »MusCoDA – Musical Communities in the (Post)Digital Age« (University of Erfurt/University of Applied Sciences Clara Hoffbauer Potsdam, funded by the German Ministry of Education and Research, pursues the goal to derive an empirical model of collective songwriting practices from the study of informal lelearningf songwriters and bands that can be translated into pedagogical concepts for music education in schools. Drawing on concepts from Community of Musical Practice and Actor Network Theory, lelearnings considered not only as social practice and as participation in online and offline communities, but also as an effect of heterogeneous networks composed of human and non-human actors. Learning is not seen as an individual, cognitive process, but as the formation and transformation of actor networks, i.e., as a practice of assembling and mediating humans and technologies. Based on video stimulated recall interviews and videography of online and offline activities, songwriting practices are followed from the initial idea to different forms of performance and distribution. The data evaluation combines coding and mapping methods of Grounded Theory Methodology and Situational Analysis. This results in network maps in which both the temporality of creative practices and the material and spatial relations of human and technological actors are reconstructed. In addition, positional analyses document the power relations between the participants that structure the learning process of the field. In the area of online informal lelearninginitial key research findings reveal a transformation of the learning subject through the specific technological affordances of TikTok and Instagram and the accompanying changes in the learning practices of the corresponding online communities. Learning is explicitly shaped by the material agency of online tools and features and the social practices entangled with these technologies. Thus, any human online community member can be invited to directly intervene in creative decisions that contribute to the further compositional and structural development of songs. At the same time, participants can provide each other with intimate insights into songwriting processes in progress and have the opportunity to perform together with strangers and idols. Online Lelearnings characterized by an increase in social proximity, distribution of creative agency and informational exchange between participants. While it seems obvious that traditional notions not only of lelearningut also of the learning subject cannot be maintained, the question arises, how exactly the observed informal learning practices and the subject that emerges from the use of social media as online learning technologies can be transferred into contexts of formal learning

Keywords : informal learning, postdigitality, songwriting, actor-network theory, community of musical practice, social media, TikTok, Instagram, apps