



**MALMÖ UNIVERSITY**  
FACULTY OF CULTURE  
AND SOCIETY

# Social and Cultural Practices around Using the Music Streaming Provider Spotify

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*A qualitative study exploring how German Millennials use Spotify*

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## Abstract

Over the last years, the music industry has been disrupted by music streaming services which shifted the focus from owning music to accessing it. While the previous research focuses on the economic aspects, the social and cultural consequences remain largely unexplored. Existing research from an audience perspective is often focusing on one particular practice around music streaming and is mainly coming from and focusing on northern EU-countries. However, a broader contemplation of the sociocultural practices around music streaming is still missing.

This thesis examines which sociocultural practices have emerged among urban and middle class Millennials in Germany when using the market-leading streaming provider Spotify and which affordances and gratifications these are based upon. The study is based on ten semi-structured interviews with German Millennials aged between 20 to 30 years. Three of these study participants are using a free Spotify account and seven the premium version. By conducting a thematic analysis against the theoretical background that interlinks practice theory, affordance theory and uses and gratifications theory, the practices are described and examined based on the underlying affordances and gratifications.

The study found sociocultural practices around the themes *social setting*, *listening mode*, *Spotify networks* and *music collection* and outlines the underlying affordances and gratifications. During individual listening situations, users engage in the practices of mobile listening and mood management, while listening in social settings focused around navigating the group dynamics and the creation of context-sensitive playlists. The users also aim to create an unstructured and undisrupted music flow but are mainly listening in a passive manner while carrying out other activities. Due to social norms and privacy issues, the participants either reject the network function or build only small networks through which they were sharing and discovering music as well as creating playlists with friends. Lastly, users were building, organizing and maintaining individual music collections.

Keywords: Music Streaming, Spotify, Practices, Affordances, Uses and Gratifications, Millennials

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## 1. Introduction

Within the last years, the music industry has been substantially disrupted by music streaming services, which provide people with a new format of music listening. One of the first companies and today's market leader in this field is the Swedish streaming service Spotify (Fleischer & Snickars 2017, p.137; Bundesverband Musikindustrie e.V. 2017, p.37). The development towards an industry where music becomes access-based instead of being bought (Geoff 2016, p.47) has sparked heated debates about the economic aspects and whether it damaged or saved the music industry (Wallis 2014, p.162). The extent to which such an innovation is disrupting the existing market is influenced by achieving an association to cultural, political and social norms (Wikhamn & Knights 2016, p.47). However, the cultural aspects that come along with this development and in particular the audience perspective in this rather new research field remains to a large extent unexplored (Johansson et al. 2017, p.19). This topic needs to be explored since music streaming became an established format and is closely entangled with the everyday life of many people, which could hold sociocultural consequences.

This thesis is placed at an intersection of creative industries, new media and audience studies and aims to contribute to an understanding of how people use Spotify by utilizing a qualitative approach with semi-structured interviews. In particular, this study explores which social and cultural practices of streaming music on Spotify have evolved among German Millennials, and what underlying motivations can be found for their usage. The thesis is based on the following primary research question:

*RQ 1: Which sociocultural practices of streaming music on Spotify have evolved among urban and middle class Millennials in Germany?*

The analysis of the data collection is framed by the fields of practice theory, affordance theory, and the uses and gratifications theory in order to approach the analysis of the practices in greater detail. Since the first research question is rather descriptive, the thesis will be furthermore guided by the following two sub-questions in order to analyze the practices in greater detail:

*RQ 2: What perceived affordances are the identified practices based upon?*

*RQ 3: What are the underlying gratifications that shape the practices of music listening on Spotify?*

This thesis is divided into eight sections: In the subsequent chapter, the reader gets introduced to the context of the thesis, in particular to the concept of music streaming, the features of Spotify, as well as its role in the music industry and the German society. The third chapter provides a literature review of the research landscape around the practices of music streaming and around other formats of digital music listening from an audience perspective. The fourth chapter presents the theoretical framework of the thesis. Subsequently, an overview of the methodology will be provided in section five before presenting the findings in chapter six. The thesis will progress with a discussion of the findings and an outlook on future research agendas in chapter seven and end with a conclusion in chapter eight.

## 2. Context

### 2.1 What is streaming?

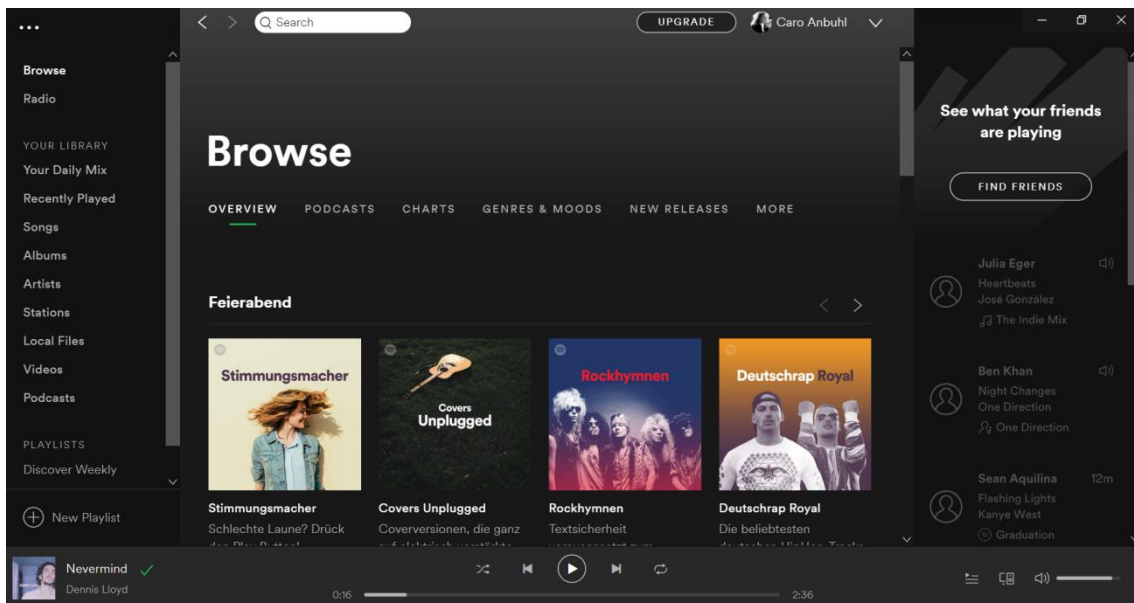
In a technological sense, the term *streaming* refers to a data transferring process in which the simultaneous transmission and reproduction of a file is made possible without producing a permanent copy of the file on the device of the user. According to Marshall, there are three types of streaming providers: First of all, there are *streaming radios* such as Pandora, which are often more specialized and personalized than the broadcast radio, but are still non-interactive (Marshall 2015, p.178). Then there are so called *locker services* like iTunes, that provide the users mobile access to their MP3 collections (Marshall 2015, p.178). Finally, there are *on-demand streaming provider* like Spotify, where users interactively choose the music they want to listen to from the whole music library of the provider (Marshall 2015, p.178). As these forms of streaming show, the format of streaming is causing a shift away from ownership towards accessing music (IFPI 2017, p.12). These are often based on a so called freemium business model where a restricted version is offered for free while the upgraded version needs to be paid (Mäntymäki & Islam 2015, p.2). Instead of centering the music consumption around physical carriers, unauthorized music acquisition and consuming music as goods, we moved towards the legal acquisition of digital music, which is experienced as a service (Nag 2017, p.20).

### 2.2 Spotify and its Features

The Swedish on-demand streaming provider Spotify was established in 2006 as a start-up business and is seen as the global market leader today (Fleischer & Snickars 2017, p. 134). They are a globally acting media company (Fleischer & Snickars 2017, p.135), which offers more than 35 million songs to their 71 million subscribers (Spotify). Even though the music streaming market is characterized by many competitors, and a low threshold to change the provider, Spotify is likely to maintain its dominant position (Riesewijk 2017, p.6 ff.). The business model combines operations that are similar to a broker on the markets of advertising, technology, music and finances, which Vonderau termed the *Spotify Effect* (Vonderau 2017, p.3 f.). On the 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2018, Spotify entered the New York Stock Exchange through a direct listing (Ek 2018). As a result, the company is now even closer entangled with the financial markets.

Fleischer and Snickers found that Spotify developed in three phases: They started off with the image of being easy to use and not pushing recommendations on their users. In 2010, they took a social turn by establishing a partnership with Facebook that allowed friends to see what one is listening to (Fleischer & Snickars 2017, p.138). After the users complained about the lack of privacy, Spotify took a curational turn and focused more on expert-curated music and algorithm-based recommendations (Fleischer & Snickars 2017, p.139). Vonderau also determined that the redesigned version is structured around feelings and specific situations due to the playlists that are curated by Spotify (Vonderau 2017, p.3). Spotify is owning and using the analytical software *The Echo Nest* that classifies songs in order to provide the users with personalized recommendations (Prey 2017, p.5). Based on the behavior of the user, Spotify generates a dynamic *Taste Profile* (Prey 2017, p.6) with context-sensitive algorithms that create a constantly evolving user identity (Prey 2017, p.7). The collection of user data, which is necessary for such a recommendation based service, has raised concerns about user profiling and the adherence to EU data policies (Vonderau 2017, p.3).

Spotify is providing a variety of features and possible actions to its users, which I want to present shortly in this section. The premium version of Spotify offers the advantages of a listening experience without advertisements, an offline listening mode and enhanced audio quality. However, it should be noted that this description refers to the version of Spotify that the participants used during the time of the interviews, and that the design can change quickly. In April 2018, the free and mobile version of the Spotify app has been redesigned and is now offering 15 on-demand playlists while the rest of the music still needs to be played in shuffle-mode. During the time of the data collection, this version was not published yet so that the free account users could not listen to specific songs in the mobile application. The following screenshot displays the interface of Spotify.



**Graphic 1: Interface of Spotify**

The bottom of the interface contains a menu over which the currently played song can be seen and regulated. It contains buttons to play, skip and repeat a song, to shuffle a playlist or watch the queue of upcoming songs. In addition, the users can connect other devices and regulate the volume of the music. The header of the interface contains a search field that can be used to search for songs, albums or artists. The profile section allows the user to turn on the private listening mode, access the account setting and log out. In the free version, the header also includes a button that leads to the Spotify homepage where users can upgrade to the premium version.

The menu on the left hand side contains four main sections, which comprise *Browse*, *Radio*, *Your Library* and *Playlists*. The *Browse* subpage is providing the users with recommended songs in the form of curated playlists, as well as podcasts. In the *Radio* mode, Spotify is choosing which songs are played but the user can modify the radio station according to their personal taste. *Your Library* contains all saved songs, artists, podcasts, and videos, and is in addition providing a list of recently played songs and a *Daily Mix* based on the user's behavior. Users with a paid premium version are also capable of downloading the songs to listen offline. The *Playlist* section lists all saved and created playlists but is also providing an algorithm based playlist named *Discover Weekly*, which provides the user with 30 new songs each week and belongs to the mostly used functions of Spotify (Prey 2017, p.5).

Users have the possibility to follow other users or artists so that their activities will show up in the feed, which is positioned on the right side of the interface. When an account is connected with Facebook, the friends can also see the current activities there. If users do not want to display their activities on Spotify or Facebook, they can turn on a private listening session.

Next to the users, artists can also create a profile, which is structured into four subpages: The *Overview* page displays the five most popular songs, a section where merchandising articles can be bought, and a listing of all singles and albums of the artist. The *About* section includes a biography about the artist, the number of monthly listeners and follower, as well as in which geographical areas the artist is popular. The other subpages display *Related Artists*, and a page where *Upcoming Concerts* are displayed.

### **2.3 The Role of Music Streaming in the Music Industry**

In 2016, the German music industry reached a total turnover of nearly 1.6 billion Euros (Bundesverband Musikindustrie e.V. 2017, p.6). Among this revenue, the CD remained the most profitable product, while the streaming revenues accounted for the second biggest share (Bundesverband Musikindustrie e.V. 2017, p.6). Music streaming thus needs to be considered as a co-existing medium in the broader music ecology of the user (Johansson et al. 2017, p.163). In comparison to other countries, physical artifacts for music play a more important role in Germany. The overall German population can be seen as late adopters of new technological developments, which is also the case with adopting music streaming as new mode of music consumption (Bundesverband Musikindustrie e.V. 2017, p.7). A study about the usage of digital content in 2013 showed that the greatest underlying motivations to purchase music legally are the legal certainty and the intention to financially support the right holders (Bundesverband Musikindustrie e.V. et al. 2013, p.5).

The year 2016 was a tipping point for streaming in different regards: Streaming providers reached the milestone of 100 million paid subscriptions on the global market (IFPI 2017, p.10). The use of streaming services on smartphones should thereby be considered as the main force in the recovery of the international music market (Nag 2017, p.20). In Germany, 4.5 million paid subscriptions outnumbered the free accounts

for the first time (Bundesverband Musikindustrie e.V. 2017, p.8). Additionally, the number of streamed songs in Germany reached an all-time high of 36.4 billion streams in 2016 (Bundesverband Musikindustrie e.V. 2017, p.17). As a consequence, the streaming revenues surpassed the ones of downloads on the German music market (Bundesverband Musikindustrie e.V. 2017, p.9). Taking a closer look at the users of streaming services, it is noteworthy that considerably more men are paying for the premium subscription than women (Bundesverband Musikindustrie e.V. 2017, p.29), namely 64% of music revenues are produced by male listeners (Bundesverband Musikindustrie e.V. 2017, p.30). The fee-based, as well as the free subscription models have their highest percentage of users in the age group of 20 to 29 years (Bundesverband Musikindustrie e.V. 2017, p.33). As it will become more obvious in the method section, the sample for this study is made up of this specific age group.

## 2.4 Controversies

Next to all the positive developments around streaming, it is also posing new challenges for the industry in the form of stream ripping and the value gap. Stream ripping refers to a practice of illegally creating a file out of a streamed song or video, which can then be listened to offline on different devices and shared with other people (IFPI 2017, p.37). According to the Global Music Report, it is currently the most common form of illegal music downloads worldwide (IFPI 2017, p.37). It is also very common in Germany, where every second young adult between 16 and 24 years downloads music via ripping (Bundesverband Musikindustrie e.V. 2017, p.37). This practice is especially associated with the video platform YouTube, which is also showing a particularly high value gap (Bundesverband Musikindustrie e.V. 2017, p.3). The value gap describes the discrepancy between the revenue that music services receive and the amount that they return to the music industry (IFPI 2017, p.25). While the revenue per year and user is estimated to be lower than 1 U.S. dollar for YouTube, Spotify users are estimated to produce revenue of around 20 U.S. dollars (IFPI 2017, p.25). However, there is a persistent criticism that Spotify lowers the value of music and artists receive inadequate royalties, which led different artists to withdraw their music from Spotify (Marshall 2015, p.177).

Besides stream ripping and the consequences of the value gap, the uprising of streaming is also influencing the music industry and our listening habits in cultural terms. For example, the German Federal Music Industry Association states that the releases of new single tracks is still the highest in the category Pop with 100.000 new songs in 2016, but is declining due to shrinking revenues in the downloading sector (Bundesverband Musikindustrie e.V. 2017, p.18). So while the number of released singles is shrinking, there are also debates about whether music streaming is destroying the album as a listening format and replaces it with the mode of playlists (Forde 2017). Songs are also increasingly composed to fit the format of Spotify (Forde 2017) in order to keep the listeners for at least 30 seconds because the songs is only counted in the statistics after that time (Léveillé Gauvin 2017, p.10). However, if a song is skipped, that mostly happens within the first 20 seconds of a song (Léveillé Gauvin 2017, p.3), which means it is not occurring in the statistics. While the composition of pop music in general has undergone a shift towards a more attention grabbing music style (Léveillé Gauvin 2017, p.7), these mechanisms are promoting a further standardization of music composing (Forde 2017).

### **3. Literature Review**

In this section, I want to provide an overview of the existing research landscape around the practices of music streaming. There have been several research projects that consider the economic side of streaming and its impact on the development of the music industry on a macro-level. However, the audience perspective in this field remains a rather unexplored field so far. Additionally, most of the existing research was published within the last two years by researchers from northern EU countries such as Norway. This underlines the need for more diverse research on the one hand, and shows the temporal relevance of this topic on the other hand. Due to the recent development of streaming services like Spotify and the limited amount of previous research on this format, the literature review additionally draws on the findings of practices that emerged around other formats of digital music consumption, such as the listening via MP3 players and iPods. These studies should also be considered relevant for this topic, since they researched aspects that are important to understand the streaming via Spotify.

#### **3.1 Choosing Streaming as Format**

One broader research approach is exploring why people choose streaming as a format and how streaming services are used in relation to other formats of acquiring music, such as physical music copies, legally and illegally downloaded music files, as well as live music.

On an individual level, the adoption of music streaming as a format is based on the different characteristics of on-demand access when compared to ownership and the accompanying disconnected financial transactions (Geoff 2016, p. 47). From a psychological perspective, this is leading to lower perceived risks in terms of finances, performance failure and social judgment for purchasing decisions (Geoff 2016, p.49). In addition, streaming services provide their users with an enhanced discovery potential (Geoff 2016, p.49), the opportunity to fulfill their nostalgia desire, as well as emotional engagement through music (Geoff 2016, p.51 ff.). The motivation to pay for the service is mainly determined by the motivation to express ones appreciation for the artists (Baym 2010, p.180). Liikkanen and Aman researched interaction practices with digital music and found that YouTube and Spotify were considered as the main

resources for music consumption (Liikkanen & Åman 2016, p.366). The participants of their survey perceived YouTube as more sharable and Spotify as more faithful (Liikkanen & Åman 2016, p.360 f.), and often utilized YouTube to complement the library of Spotify when it was perceived as incomplete (Liikkanen & Åman 2016, p.367).

Furthermore, there are a few studies that research the behavior of music streaming users in regards to music piracy and peer-to-peer networks. Nowadays, a lot of these studies can be partially considered as outdated, although they still provide useful insights into the motivations that underlie these practices. For instance, Nguyen et al. found that music streaming has no impact on CD sales (Nguyen et al. 2014, p.323), a finding, which can be clearly contradicted today. They also propose that streaming services are functioning as a discovery tool for music because they found a positive impact of music streaming on the sector of live music (Nguyen et al. 2014, p.323, 325). Maasø argues that we experience an *eventization of listening*, which implies that not only music events but also happenings from other areas of our everyday life influence the listening patterns on a micro- and macro-level (Maasø 2017, p.12). Wlömert and Papies found, that free music streaming services function as a substitute for other channels, which results in decreased expenditures but also in increased net revenues (Wlömert & Papies 2016, p.324).

Furthermore, Hagen conducted a study on how people make sense of music streaming (Hagen 2016). She found that music streaming can be understood through commonly used metaphors for the Internet, which include the streaming service as a tool, place and way of being (Hagen 2016, p.4-7). In addition, she proposes the metaphor of *lifeworld experiences* in which music streaming is perceived as context-sensitive and users can negotiate their self-identity (Hagen 2016, p.9).

### **3.2 Playlists, Collecting and Exploring Music**

Music streaming as a new format has led to new possibilities and new participatory practices around the exploration, organization and collection of music by an empowered audience (Baym 2010, p.178 f.), which poses questions about social practices around music collections (Arditi 2017b, p.12). The reviewed literature suggests that these practices are to a certain extent drawing on habits from previous

formats (Nag 2017, p.27) and that similarities to the interaction with other digital music listening formats can be found.

Nowadays, a lot of people seek for music discoveries not only offline through media outlets, concerts and their social environment, but also online via digital tools and are experiencing music streaming services as exploration tool in this process (Kjus 2016, p.133). The need to discover new music can even be considered as an important motivation to become a user of such streaming services (Geoff 2016). However, the access to such a high quantity of music titles, which leaves million of songs without significant numbers of listeners (Vonderau 2017, p.2), creates a “paradox of choice” for the users (Geoff 2016, p.49 f.). In order to simplify the decision making processes behind finding suitable music, users tend to listen to music they are already familiar with (Geoff 2016, p.50). Another practice is to play music randomly via the shuffle function, which is often accompanied by a mode of distracted listening (Hagen 2015, p.633).

Streaming providers try to approach the issue by organizing music in playlists or recommend similar music to the user based on algorithms (Geoff 2016, p.50). Some users do not approve of the editorial decisions behind the playlists and the targeted recommendations because they have experienced unsuitable suggestions that disturbed their musical identity (Kjus 2016, p.134). So while users perceive inappropriate recommendations as problematic, they are also feeling discomfort when the algorithm is providing very precise suggestions (Prey 2017, p.10). The debate about the effectiveness of algorithms may be grounded in the fact that the underlying mechanisms are not visible for the users, so they cannot comprehend why certain suggestions are being made (Prey 2017, p.11). However, listening to playlists has become popular (Nag 2017, p.31) and accounted for one third of listening time in 2016 (Geoff 2016, p.51). Geoff suggests that playlists will become the dominant listening format due to the little psychological energy that is required for the underlying decision processes (Geoff 2016, p.51).

According to another study by Hagen, users have developed a variety of practices in regards to playlists (Hagen 2015). While some users create static playlists, others

prefer a dynamic structure and continuously edit their playlists (Hagen 2015, p.362), or like to curate playlists together with other users (Nag 2017, p.29). In addition, some users tend to constantly create completely new playlists, which they only use temporarily (Hagen 2015, p.633). The possibility to split up predetermined structures (McCourt 2005, p.251), such as the order of songs on an album, enables the user to create individual categories, but it is also common to import or remake such orders without individualizing adjustments (Hagen 2015, p.634). Playlists which have been created by users are often context-sensitive and are closely connected to the users' everyday lives in terms of daily routines, social events and feelings (Hagen 2015, p.637) and thus often function as a customized soundtrack (Nag 2017, p.27). These highly individualized curation practices create unique composites so that users experience an individual listening mode (Andersson 2010, p.63). When music is chosen by a user, they show more intense and positive emotions, as well as a higher liking and familiarity than when compared to randomly sampled music (Liljeström et al. 2012, p.587 ff.).

Since it is not possible to actually collect music in streaming services in a traditional sense, users turn to software interfaces as symbolic substitutes (Burkart 2008, p.257). The value of a digital music collection is created through the self-reflection (Burkart 2008, p.248) and the effort that the users invest in this collection. Through the process of personal expression (McCourt 2005, p.252), playlists inherit a symbolic value for the user (Kibby 2009, p.428). Compared to the collection of physical music artifacts, the digital files do not have a physical presence and lack the accompanying emotive contexts (McCourt 2005, p.250). At the same time, the sense of ownership is perceived as more intense and intimate through the practices of sampling and collecting music (McCourt 2005, p.251). The digitized access fulfills the need of compact music collections while the ability of immediate customization make the collecting process more convenient for the users (McCourt 2005, p.251). This leads McCourt to the conclusion that music is collected in terms of utility and not aesthetics (McCourt 2005, p.251). Kibby suggests that we should understand music collections as archive and as participatory practice at once (Kibby 2009, p.428). Nag on the other hand implies that the music collection as a sign system becomes blurred through the establishment of streaming services (Nag 2017, p.32).

These presented practices around discovering, collecting and exploring music show that the user is often pro-active and the experience thus depends on the technical knowledge that a user has acquired (Andersson 2010, p.64). This active engagement is what Andersson calls a calculated mode of consumption (Andersson 2010, p.64), which could potentially deepen the digital divide among music audiences (Andersson 2010, p.68).

### **3.3 Social Practices – Online and Offline**

Music streaming services often offer a social dimension where the users can connect with each other. These features often include the possibility to follow other users and share what one is listening to. The previous research indicates that users view their profile as a kind of product, which needs to be maintained in order to achieve the pursued self-presentation (Silfverberg et al. 2011, p.4). However, a tension between the desire to interact socially with other users on the one hand, and the need for privacy and social norms on the other hand, was determined (Silfverberg et al. 2011, p.6; Hagen & Lüders 2016, p.654). Users have developed different practices to cope with this conflict: While users that share their complete music listening timeline act as a kind of “music missionaries” and see the interaction as a catalyst for upcoming social interaction (Hagen & Lüders 2016, p.649), others share selected music as a gift or act of friendship. However, some do not share their music preferences at all, because it is considered as something personal and they prefer a face-to-face setting (ibid.). Next to sharing, different practices have developed around following other users: While strong ties between the users are created by social and music homophily, weak ties are normally the result of having different tastes in music (Hagen & Lüders 2016, p.652). Liljeström et al. also found that listening together with a close friend or partner is leading to more intense emotions than individual listening experiences (Liljeström et al. 2012, p.587). Users, who did not engage in following, received recommendations through other communication channels (Hagen & Lüders 2016, p.652). Arditi argues that file sharing is based on the same cultural logic as the creation of mixtapes, which is characterized by the social component of listening and discussing music together (Arditi 2013, p.413). Even though there are different types of users and practices, all of them demonstrated that they were aware of the social component (Hagen & Lüders

2016, p.654) and thus felt the desire to regulate their self-presentation by maintaining a presentable profile (Hagen & Lüders 2016, p.654; Silfverberg et al. 2011, p.8). Users of Last.fm thought of themselves as having the ability to interpret another person's personality based on their account, but at the same time disliked this interpretation process because they often assumed to be judged for their taste in music (Silfverberg et al. 2011, p.5). Contrasting to this perception, Prior and Nag found that the strict classification of music into genres is partially dissolving due to the impact of new technologies on music listening behaviors (Prior 2013, p.188) and the wish to discover new music beyond the usual genres (Nag 2017, p.30).

### **3.4 Music Listening – Anytime & Anywhere**

Two very dominant characteristics of streaming are the access to a large library of music and the geographical independence if long as the user has purchased the premium account in order to be able to listen offline. These possibilities have sparked a discussion about what value the music holds when it is omnipresent and what practices have evolved around the mobile listening of music, not only in terms of streaming but also prior to that in regards to MP3 players.

The subscription to a music streaming provider is evoking an unending consumption of music, which makes it a continual process instead of the previous one-time event (Arditi 2017a, p.7). For many people, music is accompanying their everyday lives in a variety of activities and social situations (Nag 2017, p.26), which can result in a weaker and less emotional connection to the music (Nag 2017, p.26). However, Liljeström et al. describe that musical emotions are the result of a complex interplay between the listener, the music and the situational context (Liljeström et al. 2012, p.580). Already in the mid 2000s, the users that were confronted with such immense music libraries and increased listening time developed new practices (Fleischer 2015). Fleischer suggests that these self-reflective practices aim at the cultivation of a postdigital sensibility and comprise a “No music day” (Fleischer 2015, p.260 f.), the reemergence of a cassette culture (Fleischer 2015, p.261 f.), and a mass materialism in the form of the perceptible sub-bass in dubstep music (Fleischer 2015, p.263 f.).

Technologies like the MP3 player made music listening while travelling to another place popular (Prior 2013, p.188). However music streaming users are only capable of

unrestricted use when they subscribed to the premium access. The free version does not offer the possibility to stream offline, so that these users tend to turn to other forms of access (Aguar 2017, p.14).

The reviewed literature presents different approaches to what practices and motivations underlie mobile music listening. Bull represents the point of view that mobile listening is a non-interactive mode that is constructing a privatized listening experience (Bull 2005, p. 344, 350). This is leading to a disjunction between the individual who is listening to music and the surrounding people and is for example used to create a barrier against possibly upcoming conversations (Bull 2005, p.353). In addition, mobile listening is used to create narratives around the everyday environment and routines, which he termed “biographical travelling” (Bull 2005, p.349). Beer on the other hand is advocating for a new perception of mobile music listening and introduces the term “tuning out” (Beer 2007, p.858 ff.). He states that users are aiming for social distancing and distraction by altering the surrounding environment through the integration of music but that they do not fully escape into a private and sealed off bubble (Beer 2007, p.858).

### **3.5 Literature Review – Summary**

The literature review shows that practices around music streaming are often based on habits from previous formats and demonstrate similarities to other forms of digital music listening. The possibility of unending music consumption and the wide choice of music are promoting distracted listening behavior via playlists as main consumption mode. On the other hand, users are considered as proactive, curating their own music collections, and navigating the tensions between the need for social interaction and privacy. Users are considered aware of social norms and expectations but are at the same time resolving previous boundaries by becoming open to a variety of genres. In addition, a lot of studies stress that music streaming is a context-sensitive activity so that not only the action itself but the situation as a whole needs to be considered.

Overall it can be said that extant research around music streaming is mostly focusing on investigating one specific function of a streaming provider or particular practices in an in-depth manner. However, there seems to be a gap in analyzing the use of a music streaming platform in a more comprising approach, where the variety of practices is

explored. This is why this thesis aims to explore sociocultural practices around using Spotify with a more holistic approach.

## 4. Theory

This chapter presents the theories that are used as a framework for the following analysis of this study, which comprise the theory of affordances, practice theory and uses and gratification theory. At first, the theory of affordances, as developed by Gibson (1966), will be introduced and extended with the help of the more recent framework of cultural affordances by Reckwitz et al. (2002), and the approach by Norman (2013). In order to be able to identify the sociocultural practices around using Spotify, the main concepts of practice theory by Bourdieu (1977), Schatzki (2002) and Couldry (2013) will be described. Lastly, the key concepts and theoretical assumptions of the uses and gratification theory, as well as a gratification typology will be introduced.

### 4.1. Affordance Theory

The affordance theory is a concept that initially comes from the field of psychology and has been developed by Gibson in order to understand the processes of visual perception (Gibson 1966, 1986). However, it has also been applied to a variety of other disciplines, such as media and communication studies and design research, and was further developed by different scholars in order to address perceived shortcomings or adjust the theory to more specific fields.

Gibson defines the term *affordances* as follows: “The affordances of the environment are what it offers the animal, what it provides or furnishes, either for good or ill.” (Gibson 1986, p.56). As the definition shows, there is an interaction between the subject or agent and the environment. Affordances are in particular offered by surfaces, objects, places and other persons (Gibson 1986, p.57 ff.). Although the environment consists of a variety of affordances, only a part of them is grasped by the agent (Gibson 1966, p.23). They can be perceived as positive or negative by an individual but may not be characterized in the same way for all agents (Gibson 1986, p.59). The discrimination process of deciding which affordance to interact with implies an economical perception that is capable to sort and process only the relevant information quickly in order to act upon the affordances (Gibson 1966, p.268). This discrimination process is shaped by previous experiences and learning processes of the agent, which accumulate over time (Gibson 1966, p.26). However, an agent can also be

confronted with inadequate information, which are normally resulting from reduced stimuli (Gibson 1966, p.288). As a consequence, the perceptual system tries to make sense of the presented information by *hunting*, as Gibson describes it (Gibson 1966, p.303). In the case of this thesis, Spotify as well as the everyday surroundings of the participants are considered as environments that provide the participants with affordances to act upon.

The problem of inadequate information and how humans handle these, has been an important topic in the approach of Norman (2013), who has further developed the concept of affordances for the field of design research and in particular interaction design (Löwgren & Reimer 2013, p.25). Similarly to Gibson, Norman defines affordances as potential interactions between individuals and their environment, of which only some are perceived by the agent (Norman 2013, p.19). However, he is also introducing a new concept to the approach, which he calls “signifiers” (Norman 2013, p.19). Signifiers can be understood as signs that indicate what action can be carried out and how it is supposed to be done. They therefore need to be perceivable by the respective individual in order to fulfill their purpose (Norman 2013, p.19). In the case of Spotify, signifiers can be understood as the different design elements that imply where to click to carry out a certain activity. For instance the play-button is an obvious signifier for starting the music, since the rightward oriented arrow is a well known symbol from other media formats.

In addition, Ramstead et al. developed the concept of *cultural affordances* based on Gibson’s theory (Ramstead et al. 2016). Their framework is aiming at explaining how individuals adopt cultural knowledge by adding the concept of an explicitly cultural affordance, which they define as: “The kind of affordance that humans encounter in the niches that they constitute.” (Ramstead et al. 2016, p.3). These can be distinguished with the help of two sub-categories: While *natural affordances* are engaged with on the basis of natural information that are understood through phenotypical and encultured possibilities (Ramstead et al. 2016, p.3), the *conventional affordance* refer to the engagement based on social norms and practices in culturally shaped sets of expectations (Ramstead et al. 2016, p.3). When a variety of cultural affordances is merged, they build what Ramstead et al. call a *coordinated affordance*

*landscape*, which is based on shared expectations within a certain community (Ramstead et al. 2016, p.14). The assumption that local cultural ontology is installed in the agents by patterned practices (Ramstead et al. 2016, p.14), emphasizes the necessity to use practice theory and affordances as one merged theoretical lens for the data analysis.

## 4.2 Practice Theory

The term practice theory is misleading in so far as it does not refer to a single theory but should be rather considered as a school of thought or as an approach that can be used as theoretical framework for qualitative empirical research (Reckwitz 2002). This approach is often associated with the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, who shaped this field through his works, such as “Outline of a Theory of Practice” (Bourdieu 1977). However, practice theory has been developed by a variety of scholars (Nicolini 2017, p.24). I will shortly outline Bourdieu’s approach to practice theory, before turning to the concepts of Schatzki (Schatzki 2002) and the practice approach of Nick Couldry, which he developed for the field of media studies (Couldry 2013).

Bourdieu’s theory of practice is based on three major concepts that he termed *field*, *capital* and *habitus* (Bourdieu 1977). The interplay between these three dimension constitute the formation of practices (Bourdieu 1977). Schatzki understands practices as “[...] temporally evolving, open-ended set of doings and sayings linked by practical understandings, rules, teleoaffective structure, and general understanding.” (Schatzki 2002, p.87). This approach stresses the dynamic dimension of practices without neglecting that they are embedded in and shaped by broader structural systems. Couldry is refining the previous practice approaches for media studies as a part of a larger theoretical model that aims to explain media experiences in everyday life through a social theory (Couldry 2013, p.18). He defines practices simply as “something humans do, a form of action” (Couldry 2013, p.48). However, more importantly, he applies the concept to media by suggesting that media should be considered as a “vast domain of practices” (Couldry 2013, p.56).

Practices are taking place in certain spaces, which Bourdieu termed as *fields*. These social fields are the outcome of autonomization processes, which form a microcosm (Bourdieu 2006, p.67). Every social field is shaped by a *doxa*, which regulates the field

through implicit social norms and builds the foundation for the development of practices (Bourdieu 2006, p.66). Similarly to Bourdieu's concept of the field, Schatzki argues that the interplay between practices and order create a *site* where the social life of the practice carriers take place (Schatzki 2002, p.123). An agent's capability to enter such a field and the position one can achieve is determined by the second concept of Bourdieu's theory, the *capital* (Bourdieu 2006, p.67). In general, Bourdieu distinguishes between the economic, social and cultural capital, which make up the symbolic capital of an agent.

The third concept of the so called *habitus* shapes the appropriateness and consistency of practices even more than social norms do through past experiences, that influence the present behavior of an individual (Bourdieu 2006, p.54). Additionally, the internal dispositions of the agents allow them to act according to the specific logic of the organism (Bourdieu 2006, p.55). Schatzki furthermore argues that practices are inherently connected to specific objects (Schatzki 2002, p.106) while Couldry stresses that media practices need to be understood as an articulation of media-related and non-media-related practices (Couldry 2013, p.63). Schatzki distinguishes between a simpler form of *dispersed practices* that refer to a single action and the more complex *integrative practices* where a number of activities and emotions can be merged together (Schatzki 2002, p.88). When various practices are combined, they are stabilizing habits of individuals that construct how we live (Couldry 2013, p.26) and can reinforce power structures through the reinforcement of certain categories (Couldry 2013, p.75).

### 4.3 Uses and Gratifications Theory

The uses and gratification approach is strongly associated with Blumler and Katz. It aims to explain the choice of mass media by looking at the uses that a medium can offer and the gratification that users experience when utilizing a specific medium (Blumler et al. 1973). It should be acknowledged that the approach of focusing on the relation of media use and human needs holds similarities to the above discussed field of practice theories. However, the uses and gratification approach is focusing on the individual level, while the field of practice theory emphasizes the broader social context (Couldry 2013, p.51). In particular, the research within this field is focusing on:

“ [...] (1) the social and psychological origins of (2) needs, which generate (3) expectations of (4) the mass media or other sources, which lead to (5) differential patterns of media exposure (or engagement in other activities), resulting in (6) need gratifications and (7) other consequences, perhaps mostly unintended ones.” (Blumler et al. 1973, p.510).

The research in this field is based on a few common assumptions: First of all, the audience is considered as active and their mass media consumption as goal-oriented (Blumler et al. 1973, p.510). Furthermore, the empirical data within this research field is often based on statements from individuals, which imply that the audience is also considered self-aware to such an extent that they can reflect on their media use (Blumler et al. 1973, p.511). The approach also stresses the importance of exploring the audience's preferences without judging the cultural significance of a certain medium (Blumler et al. 1973, p.511). Lastly, it needs to be considered that media do not only compete with each other but also with other sources of gratification (Blumler et al. 1973, p.511). The uses and gratification approach also assumes that social factors are shaping the media-related needs of individuals by: offering easement to conflicts, providing information to issues, complementing sparse situations, reinforcing values from social situations by consuming similar media content, and the urge to keep up with the expectations of a certain community through media consumption (Blumler et al. 1973, p.517).

Uses and Gratification Theory is distinguishing between two kinds of gratifications: The sought gratifications, that refer to the gratifications that a user is expecting to receive from a medium before the actual usage, and obtained gratifications which is referring to the actual experiences that a user made by using the medium (Palmgreen & Rayburn 2016, p.157). This leads to the assumption that if the obtained gratifications are in congruence with or even exceed the sought gratifications, the user will utilize this medium recurrently (Palmgreen & Rayburn 2016, p.159).

When conducting research from a uses and gratifications perspective it should be considered that every medium is characterized by a specific combination of contents, attributes and exposure situations, which results in different degrees of suitability to

gratify a need (Blumler et al. 1973, p.514). In the process of analyzing the media attributes, immanent qualities as well as the perceived attributes should be considered (Blumler et al. 1973, p.516). This stresses the importance of combining the fields of uses and gratification with the affordance theory in order to understand how the characteristics of the medium and the underlying motivations of the practices are related to each other. Additionally, Sundar and Limperos call for a combination of these two theories because it adds technology-related needs to the framework of social and psychological dimensions within the uses and gratification approach (Sundar & Limperos 2013, p.521).

The research in this field has yielded a variety of audience gratifications typologies for different types of media. Sundar and Limperos found substantial similarities between the gratifications that are offered by traditional and new media, which implies that there are certain core motivations for different type of media use (Sundar & Limperos 2013, p.507). However, Ruggiero found that new media are characterized by three new attributes when compared to traditional media, which are namely interactivity, demassification and asynchronity (Ruggiero 2000, p.15 f.). These characteristics can also be found among music streaming services, since the users can interact with the platform and with other users, can actively select content and can save and download songs in order to listen to them later on. Due to the changing interaction with media, more specific gratifications have emerged (Sundar & Limperos 2013, p.511). Consequently, the typology developed by Mäntymäki and Islam will be utilized in the framework of this thesis because it is directly referring to the gratifications of Spotify. They identified the following four gratifications in relation to using Spotify: (1) social connectivity, (2) discovery of new music, (3) ubiquity and (4) enjoyment (Mäntymäki & Islam 2015, p.4).

#### **4.4 Framework for the Analysis**

In order to be able to apply the affordance theory, practice theory and uses and gratification theory as a framework during my analysis, the key concepts and theoretical assumptions will be summed up beforehand. The analysis process is not mainly based on a deductive but inductive coding process where I am looking for emerging practices that are then discussed in connection to the framework.

The field of practice theory is primarily used to discuss the primary research question RQ1 in order to find common sociocultural practices among the participants. When looking for practices, I will draw on Schatzki's definition of practices as: "[...] temporally evolving, open-ended set of doings and sayings linked by practical understandings, rules teleoaffective structure, and general understanding." (Schatzki 2002, p.87). The analysis will consider dispersed as well as integrative practices. Spotify will thereby be understood as a domain for practices and as the *site* or *field* where the practices take place. I will furthermore include the assumption that practices are connected to specific objects and are a combination of media-related and non-media related practices.

From the field of affordance theory, I will analyze which affordances Spotify provides to the participants of the study, how they are perceived, and how they connect to previous experiences on Spotify or with other means of acquiring music in order to answer RQ2. In this process, I will focus on what Ramstead et al. termed *conventional affordances* due to their interrelations with social norms and practices that were shaped by cultural expectations.

In order to approach RQ3, I will utilize the uses and gratifications theory to analyze which of the four gratifications *social connectivity*, *discovery of new music*, *ubiquity* and *enjoyment* from the framework of Mäntymäki and Islam are connected to the respective practices. The audience is hereby assumed to be active and self-aware of their actions, which means that they are capable of reporting their media use and the underlying motivations during the interviews.

## **5. Data and Methodology**

This chapter is presenting the research approach of the thesis in order to ensure the transparency and traceability of the study. In particular, I will describe the overall research design, the semi-structured interviews as means of data collection, and the process of the data analysis. Subsequently, the limitations of this approach and the ethical considerations, which come along with this study design, are discussed.

### **5.1 Data Collection**

In order to answer the research question of which practices have emerged and what underlying gratifications and affordances can be found, I employed a qualitative study design. Since there is a lack of research in the field of audience studies around music streaming, I chose an explorative approach in order to get insights into what constitutes the practices and the thinking behind them. The data collection consisted of the conduction of ten semi-structured interviews that aimed to explore the thoughts and practices behind the participants' use of Spotify.

#### **5.1.1 Sample**

The sample is made up of five female and five male participants in the age range of 20 to 30 years that belong to a sub-group of German Millennials that lives in urban areas and is part of the German middle class due to their high education level and their cultural capital. I chose to focus on this group since 75% of the German population live in cities (Statista 2018) and the generation of Millennials is characterized by a middle class with high education (Focus Money 2016). Eight of them are studying, one is currently an intern and one is in apprenticeship training. Seven of the participants are using the premium version and three the free version. These participants were recruited from my circle of friends and acquaintances.

In order to be able to understand the thought and experiences of the participant in a more detailed manner during the analysis, I will shortly introduce the ten participants. I will at first describe the three users with a free account: 20-year old Emilia and 22-year old Leila are both bachelor students in the field of natural sciences, received music lessons during their childhood and early youth, but are no active musicians today. The third user with a free account is 22-year old Adrian, who is studying in a Bachelor of Science program and considers himself as a hobby musician since he is

playing in a band. All three of them grew up with the German culture without major influences from other cultures and state that music played an important role in their upbringing.

Max (30) is studying Popular Music and Media, considers music as very important part of his life but is also working part-time in health care. He is the only participant, who is pursuing a musical career and plans to use Spotify not only as a user but also as a musician to publish his music. Claudia (23) was in the same study program shortly, before turning to her current apprenticeship and is pursuing piano playing, composing and music production as a hobby. Laura (25), who is studying in a Bachelor of Arts program and working part-time, had music lessons during her childhood but is no active musician today. Mark (25) is studying in a Bachelor of Science program, considers music as important part of his life and lives together with Leila as a couple. All four participants have a German cultural background.

Erik (24) also considers himself as a hobby musician and is currently pursuing his Master of Medical Science. He was born in China but moved to Germany as a child so he does not feel that the Chinese culture influenced him in terms of music listening. Marie (25), who is enrolled in a Bachelor of Arts program, played piano during her childhood and experiences music as important part of her life and as her hobby. Her family migrated from Russia when she was a child and she was influenced by the Russian as well as by the German culture during her upbringing. Marcel is a 22-year old intern, who considers music as important but is no musician himself. Although he has a Polish background and feels that he is navigating between the two cultures, he does not feel connected to or influenced by Polish music.

### **5.1.2 Interview Guide**

The interviews were conducted based on an interview guide that covered three broad thematic areas, which were namely (1) the user type and motivations for using Spotify, (2) the features of Spotify and the (3) cultural background. I formulated questions for each thematic field but due to the semi-structured approach, I was prepared to adjust to the development of the interview. I changed the order of the discussed topics or expanded a certain topic area when a respondent was coming up with interesting

aspects, which is a typical procedure during semi-structured interviews (Kvale 2007, p.2; Denscombe & Martyn 2010, p.175).

The development of the interview guide was on the one hand based on the literature review, but also aimed to explore new areas. The first part termed *User Type and Motivations to Use Spotify* aimed to explore how the users integrate Spotify into their everyday life and their broader music ecology. The second part of the interview, *Features and Use of Spotify*, was focusing on finding practices and the underlying motivations by asking the participants about which features they use or do not use, which position Spotify holds when discovering music or attending live music, and which role Spotify plays in social interactions online and offline. The third and last part was concerned with the *Cultural and Social Background* of the participants in order to be able to analyze and make sense of the statements in connection to the individual. These questions centered on what role music plays in the participants life and how they spend their days in terms of studies, work and hobbies. The complete interview guide can be found in the appendix.

### 5.1.3 Procedure

As Kvale describes it, the interview setting should be chosen in a way that encourages the respondent to talk freely about their experiences (Kvale 2007, p.6). I aimed to achieve that by letting the interviewee choose the location and doing some small talk before starting the interview. When I was conducting a face-to-face interview, I was mostly invited to the homes of the respondents and held one interview in a café, because they felt most comfortable in these locations. During the Skype interviews, the situation was different because we were in separate physical places, which resulted in the respondents and me being at home while conducting the interview. These interview settings also hold the advantages of providing a private space and have an acoustic that allowed for audio recording, which Denscombe stresses as important framework conditions (Denscombe & Martyn 2010, p.197).

The procedure of the interview was divided into three parts: briefing, main part of the interview and debriefing. I started with a briefing that included a short introduction to the study and information about the procedure. In particular, I told them about the topic and purpose of the thesis. In order to address the later on discussed ethical

issues, I pointed out that they do not have to answer questions they feel uncomfortable discussing with me and that they could cancel the interview at any time. Also, I ensured the participants that their responses will be handled confidential. However, I asked them, if I can quote them in the thesis when it cannot be connected to them and asked for their permission to do an audio record of our talk. When there were no further questions, I conducted the interview with the help of my interview guide but was reacting flexible to the upcoming topics. The interviews were closed with a debriefing where the respondent was asked, if they would like to add something and were thanked for their participation.

## 5.2 Data Analysis

The data analysis was conducted with the method of thematic analysis based on the guidelines that were developed by Braun and Clarke. Their guidelines were developed around the understanding of thematic analysis as follows: “TA is a method for systematically identifying, organizing, and offering insight into patterns of meaning (themes) across a data set.” (Braun & Clarke 2012, p.57). They describe the method as aiming to “make sense of collective or shared meanings and experiences” (Braun & Clarke 2012, p.57) and since I want to explore the emerged practices around the use of Spotify and the underlying motivations, this approach seems especially suitable for conducting the analysis.

The thematic analysis consisted of the following six-step process that was adopted from Braun and Clarke: In a first step, I was familiarizing myself with the data through reading my transcripts as well as listening to the audio tapes again and taking initial notes (Braun & Clarke 2012, p.60 f.). Afterwards, I was reading the transcript thoroughly and systematically labeled the text passages with initial codes (Braun & Clarke 2012, p. 61 f.). Based on the codes, I was searching for unifying themes (Braun & Clarke 2012, p.63) and reviewed them in regard to quality, boundaries and whether the codes that make up one theme can be considered sufficient and coherent (Braun & Clarke 2012, p.65). The whole process of finding codes and themes was conducted in an iterative manner to adjust them to the new discoveries. When this process was completed, I named and defined the themes (Braun & Clarke 2012, p.66 ff.), and created a spreadsheet as overview. This procedure allowed me to identify

sociocultural practices by searching for common activities among the participants in an iterative coding process. Through thematically analyzing the description of these activities, the underlying affordances and gratifications could be identified.

### **5.3 Ethical Considerations**

Choosing interviews as a means of data collection comes along with moral and ethical issues that need to be considered due to the involvement of the participants in the study (Kvale 2007, p.2). The most important issues were to ensure the informed consent and confidentiality, as well as reflecting on my private involvement.

When conducting interviews, it is necessary that the participant is agreeing to take part (Denscombe & Martyn 2010, p.178), is informed about possible consequences and is ensured that all the responses are treated confidentially (Kvale 2007, p.7 f.). As described above in the section about data collection, I aimed to address the problems of informed consent and confidentiality in a short briefing before starting with the interview. I had the impression that the participants did not perceive the topic of how they use Spotify as very sensitive, since some of them reacted amused when I was addressing these issues. So I think that the informed consent and the confidentiality were not something they were particularly worried about. In retrospective, I believe that the ethical issues were mostly resolved after talking openly with the participants about it.

However, the conduction of an interview can also provoke a tension between keeping a professional distance as a researcher and interacting on a more personal level (Kvale 2007, p.9). This was in particular problematic for me since the interview participants are also part of my private life. Thus, I was concerned that they could feel obligated to participate, which I openly addressed when contacting them about the interviews. In addition, the responses could have been influenced in a negative as well as in a positive way due to the fact that they know me and I will still be a part of their live after the interview instead of disappearing like another researcher would do. The fact, that all the respondents are part of my private life and partly also know each other, posed a special challenge in ensuring that no one could identify the others when I would quote them in the analysis.

## 5.4 Validity and Reliability of the Study

In understanding the quality criterion *validity* as assessment of whether the method investigates what the researcher aims for, I want to discuss the advantages and limitations of choosing semi-structured interviews as a means of data collection for this particular study.

The aim of this study was to gain in-depth insights into the life-worlds of the participants in order to find out which practices have emerged and what the underlying motivations are. The dynamic approach of conducting semi-structured interviews can help to foster the interaction between the interviewer and the respondent and thus enrich the thematic dimension of knowledge production in the process (Denscombe & Martyn 2010, p.8 f.). On the downside, approaching several interviews in a dynamic manner can lead to difficulties in comparing responses due to exploring different aspects of a topic. Other limitations concern the possible influence of the responses from the interviewee due to the way the identity of the researcher is perceived and through biases created by the inexperience of interviewers.

The quality criterion *Reliability* is understood here as how consistent and trustworthy the findings of the study are. In terms of interviews, this concerns among other aspects whether the participants responses would be similar, if the interviews were reproduced by other researchers (Kvale, p.4). I aimed to ensure the reliability of the research results by describing my process thoroughly in this method section and providing the utilized interview guides. However, it lies in the nature of semi-structured interview that the interplay between the researcher and the interviewee may lead to a different focus in the course of the interview. In addition, it is possible that some anecdotes or personal details might not be shared with an unknown researcher because it creates a different dynamic than with a friend. However, I believe that the main findings of the study will remain the same, if all areas from the interview guide will be discussed.

It is a common criticism towards qualitative research that the results are not generalizable due to the often small sample sizes. I was aiming to construct a diverse sample in terms of gender and age, as well as to include participants with a different cultural background. However, I acknowledge that my choice of participants is not a

representative sample for the group of urban, middle class Millennials from Germany, but should be rather seen as a purposive sample. Additionally, I chose to include face-to-face-interviews and Skype-interviews because I hoped to gain a greater variety by including people from different parts of Germany and not only from my hometown. Compared to other forms of Internet interviews, the use of Skype allows for a visual contact between the researcher and interviewee as well as for a real-time encounter without noteworthy time delays (Denscombe & Martyn 2010, p.190). While this format allowed me to interview people that were living too far away to meet for a face-to-face interview, it also came along with possible disadvantages, among which short-term interruptions of the interview due to technical difficulties were proving as the greatest challenge.

## 6. Analysis

This analysis section presents the results that emerged from the thematic analysis. The process resulted in the following four overarching themes, which are used to structure the presentation of the findings: social setting, listening mode, Spotify networks and music collection.

### 6.1 Social Setting

The study shows that the participants are mainly listening to music when they are alone, which becomes obvious when looking at how Erik describes his overall use of Spotify:

Erik: Well I think Spotify is mainly used when I am alone and not under social conditions. That means for example on the way to work so I can block out people that I don't know. Besides that when I travel by bike [...] but also when taking a walk. I think that are the activities for recovering when you just want to let some idyllic Folk-Indie-songs flow into you.

However, there are also common situations for social listening which include house parties, a low key evening with friends at home or meeting friends outside, for example in parks. In addition, there were also individual situations coming up: Marie sometimes uses Spotify during family gathering and Mark talked about a ritual of listening to a specific podcast series with one friend. Leila and Mark, who live together as a couple, are using Spotify quite often together in their kitchen. Adrian was the only one who stated that Spotify does not play a noteworthy role when meeting with people. While individual listening is mostly taking place via headphones or on the integrated speaker of the mobile phone or computer, they often connect a mobile phone as listening device to a Bluetooth box or another external speaker when listening in groups. Laura and Marie also said that they like to play Spotify via a smart TV because the quality of the sound is better.

#### 6.1.1 Mobile Listening

People with a premium account are heavily engaging in the practice of mobile listening, which centers on the obtained gratification of *ubiquity*. The participants with the free account on the other hand, use Spotify mainly at home because they would need a constant internet connection when travelling and do not want to use their data capacity for music. In the case of the free account users, the affordances are not fulfilling all their sought gratifications for *ubiquity* of offline mobile listening since the

affordances of Spotify are more restricted for them than for the premium users. As a consequence, the people with a free account are using other media more often because Spotify does not afford the download-function to them and they are therefore more restricted when it comes to using Spotify for mobile listening.

The people, who use Spotify regularly for mobile listening, are spending a lot of time in public transport systems. They mostly engage in a passive listening mode while observing their environment or while they conduct other activities on their phone, like scrolling through their Facebook newsfeed. Thus, mobile listening should be considered as a dispersed practice, as well as an integrative practice because some participants connect it with other activities. The motivations for mobile listening differ among the interviewees: For Max it is a possibility to “tune out” as Beer termed it (Beer 2007), while Marie and Marcel actively combine the music and the cityscape by trying to accentuate a situation with music or creating an own soundtrack, which mirrors Bull's findings of “biographic travelling” (Bull 2005, p.349). Claudia also describes the way to and from work as a moment where she can relax with music without having to fear that she will fall asleep. Marcel, who uses Spotify to block out his environment because he wants to isolate himself from the soundscape of the city when he is travelling, also adds on Bull's approach of a privatized listening experience (Bull 2005, p.344).

### **6.1.2 Mood Management**

During times of individual music listening, it is also a very common practice for the participants to engage in the practice of mood management. They report an interrelation between the choice of music and their mood because they chose their music according to their current mood and general situation. At the same time, they acknowledge that the mood is influenced as a result of that. While some say that they like to reinforce their mood by choosing the fitting music, some are actively trying to change their mood by listening to cheerful music when they don't feel well. Marie is even creating playlists for specific moods, while the others mostly rely on already created playlists. However, the current situation is not only influencing the song choice in terms of which emotions they can provoke, but also the preferred genre in general as Laura explains:

Laura: Punk more or less when I am in a good mood, when I am cheerful and happy. And metal is for everyday life when I am learning or stuff like that. It is good as a background noise then. [...] I know it is weird but it is very motivating when someone is shouting in your ear.

What distinguishes Spotify from other media in terms of what they afford for mood management as a practice seems to be the variety of the music library and the ability to easily search for the required music through specific mood-playlists and the saved music. This practice does not completely fit into one of the four gratifications; it is at most contributing to the gratification of enjoyment.

### 6.1.3 Navigating Group Dynamics Democratically

Since the focus during listening in groups is normally put on the social interaction, the listening mode is passive most of the time. The music is mainly played in form of shuffled playlists except for if a person wants to listen to a specific song. When listening to music in a group, certain aspects need to be considered in terms of what music is being played and who decides that. That is also the point where people are most likely to talk about the music or listen more attentively because the talk starts to focus around the music. In addition, social settings of music listening and the according group dynamics were also occurring for some of the participants rather unintended when they live together with their families, partners or roommates.

The interviews showed that there are mainly two different practices among the participants in navigating the group dynamics: Mostly, the participants stated that they try to adjust the music to the other persons' taste as good as possible and follow a rather "democratic" approach. However, there can be seen a shift in power relations when someone is hosting a social event. In that case, the host is mostly deciding what music is playing. This implies that the users have a certain cultural capital that allows them to find the appropriate music. The practice takes an extreme form in the case of Mark, who describes how he tries to avoid that everyone can just switch songs:

Mark: [...] If everything is going well it is locked away hermetically so that no one can reach it. It is also running through automatically. And when something is not working and something is not being played, I go there and change it. [...] Because I experienced enough parties where an open DJ-desk had too many changes in music. And when you are drunk you think it's really funny and it is not fitting at all.

The practices around navigating the group dynamics are providing the user with gratifications of *social connectivity* not on the platform by itself but in an offline

context. In addition, this practice is related to the *discovery of new music* because it is likely that for the user so far unknown songs are being played when the group is negotiating the content in a democratically manner.

#### **6.1.4 Creating Playlists for Special Occasions**

A practice, which aims to provide the right music for a social listening experience is, to create a special playlist for a special event or for reoccurring situations. While the participants mainly create these playlists for a party, Adrian created a couple of playlists for reoccurring events like a first date, which he does not edit or updates when he thinks they are fitting for the particular situation. The content of this playlist is not only adjusted to the type of event but also to the people, who attend the event.

The main gratification for this practice is the *enjoyment* of easily creating a playlist and having a fitting playlist for the occasion. For instance, Claudia says that Spotify is really helpful in the process of creating a party-playlist since the songs are all included in one library, which can be either explored in an active manner or passively by utilizing algorithm based suggestions of similar artists and songs, which makes it easier than creating a playlist with CDs. Erik also acknowledges that the process becomes easier but also states that the music library of Spotify makes the party more annoying than in times of USB-sticks where the songs were limited so you did not have to search for music wishes from the guests. Mark even developed specific rules when he is creating a playlist with his friends to navigate the great selection range: Everyone can propose songs and has three vetoes and then they vote which songs should be included in the playlist for the party. For him, creating a playlist for his party also entails aspects of *social connectivity*. Thus, Spotify provides the users with a more simple possibility of creating a specific mixtape than previous media and replaced them to a large extent, but is on the other hand creating new challenges through providing access to songs that are not included in the playlist.

## **6.2 Listening Mode**

Among the study participants, the daily listening time is varying between not using Spotify at all during some days and using it for up to six hours. But however long the listening period is, the users have developed practices around active and passive song selections and listening modes. In addition, they are aiming for a flow of music that is

unstructured, as opposed to for example the structured listening to an album from start to end. The music flow should not be disrupted by other content, unwanted songs or external influences.

### 6.2.1 Active & Passive Song Selection

When asking the participants about what music they listen to, it becomes apparent that most of them have a favorite genre but listen to a wide variety of music. They acknowledge that Spotify is providing them with a great variety of music for little or no costs than when compared to more traditional means of buying music as Max describes it:

Max: Well the spectrum became broader. Like I just said in the sense of when you have more possibilities you are going to use them. [...] If I would have a record shelve at home, I know that my choices are restricted. And it is not like that with Spotify.

The greater selection range when compared to competing music streaming providers and the low costs are among the main reasons to use Spotify for them. It is fostering the gratification of *discovering new music* and widening their perspective because there is a lower barrier to exploring different genres, which is leading to a promotion of diversity from their point of view. Another affordance on Spotify is that it allows for a personalized way of using it and provides the user with suggestions and prepared playlists, which contributes to the *enjoyment* of the listening experience. Thus, Spotify holds the potential to expand the cultural capital of the users.

The practice of actively seeking for and choosing the music is conducted through searching for songs, artist or genres in the search field. In contrast to that, a lot of the participants perceive it as easier to put on a playlists on shuffle and let Spotify and its algorithm decide what is being played:

Max: Well it can be simply exhausting to actively search for something, to put the effort into deciding the order you might like. And when somebody else is taking that over, a computer or algorithm, then it is just less exhausting. And if it is a bad song you can simply skip it. [...]

The algorithm affords the user to simplify the selection process of the content so that the user only needs to indicate a broad direction. More specifically, Spotify provides playlists for different genres, situations and moods and suggestions in the form of personalized playlists based on previous listening. In general, the participants liked that Spotify provided them with suggestion on music they might like. Claudia describes

the process of discovering new songs and adopting them for the own music collection as follows:

Claudia: I look at the different playlists you can choose from, listen if it is going in the direction that I want to listen to or not. And then I mostly skip songs and soon as I hear something that I like, I jump to the middle and if I still like it, I will add it to my playlist.

When it comes to rediscovering music or bands that the person already knows but had forgotten about, playlists are also the main mode in doing so. Marie described how a premade playlist from Spotify termed “time capsule” with songs from the 2000s created a throw-back moment to her childhood while Max states that he likes the playlist where ones most played tracks from the previous year are combined.

In principle, this affordance allows the user to *discover new music* but the effectiveness and the usefulness of the algorithm were controversial among the sample. Erik avoids using the algorithm-based suggestions and prefers to actively explore the playlists because he feels that Spotify is pushing specific artists at him that they want to promote. Marie on the other hand likes the suggestions and wants to get more suggestions from different genres, which is why she tries to “show” the algorithm all the music she is interested in.

### 6.2.2 Active & Passive Listening

The most common listening mode among the participants can be described as passive and distracted since they normally combine music listening via Spotify with other activities like learning, working or putting on music in a social setting, making music a *ubiquities* factor in their everyday lives. The possibility to turn on music just in order to actively listen to the music is a seldom practice among the participants and is addressing the gratification of *enjoyment* as Leila describes it:

Leila: I would say if I am learning, I mostly listen to calm music that doesn’t need a lot of cognitive performance. Otherwise it’s Indie, Rock, Pop, a little Reggae.

Interviewer: And when do you listen to these genres?

Leila: I listen to that when I really have time to listen and don’t need to do anything in parallel but actually want to listen to the music.

A reason for the mainly passive listening is that audio-formats like music or podcasts are perceived as requiring less attention than other media forms like films, but still provides the users with the entertainment factor they are looking for. That means that

the consumption modes are heavily relying on the medium. However, the perception about whether the primary consumption mode has changed in comparison to previous music listening formats is differing among the participants. While some state they did not change that habit, others say they listen less active to music when using Spotify then for example when using CDs.

### 6.2.3 Unstructured Music Flow

While the CD as a format promoted the listening of songs in a specific order, the predominant listening mode on Spotify among the participants is unstructured, which they mainly create through using the shuffle mode. Only Leila stated that she does not like using the shuffle function because her normal mode of consumption is to actively pick out single songs from albums. In addition, Marie says that she is sometimes listening to a whole album, but that this activity is mostly connected to special CD editions that she owns as a physical artifact. The motivations of using the shuffle mode on Spotify are varying among the interviewees but they are aiming to increase the sought gratification of *enjoyment*. While Claudia and Laura want to avoid listening to the same music style or band for several songs in a row, Erik says that he does not like to listen to a playlist in the same order all the time. Max adds on that argument by saying he simply likes to be surprised about what is coming up next. Mark argues that he was never an album listener, while Adrian perceives the given orders of playlists as not working out for himself.

For the people, who used the premium-version, the disruption of the music through the advertisements or bad internet connections during mobile listening were repeatedly reported as reasons to pay for accessing Spotify. The need to create this flow was - at least for some of them - determined by the important role that music in general had for them. For instance, Marie described music as continuous companion in her everyday life:

Marie: Well I am a music-person; I just always need music around. It has just always been like that (laughs).

Interviewer: So just like to have some music in the background?

Marie: Yes, I just like to have a soundtrack for something.

One common way to avoid a disruption of the music flow was using the queue function. It was especially utilized in two types of situations: The person is primarily concerned with another task like washing dishes or driving the car, so they can not react to the upcoming music and use the queue as a preventive measure to avoid disliked or unfitting songs. The other situation refers to listening to music in a social setting when someone wants to listen to a specific song, because it can be placed in the queue without stopping the current song and thus the music flow. One extreme example for the participants wish to create an ongoing stream, was elaborated upon by Claudia, who uses the cross-fading function to avoid the silence in-between the songs:

Claudia: What I also use at the moment is that cross-fading function. That means that the songs are not played directly one after the other, but they are being a little bit cross-faded. Because I am actually annoyed by the time that passes before the new song is starting (laughs).

This described listening mode of creating an undisrupted and unstructured listening experience can be seen as predominant and overarching mode that can be found in active and passive listening moments, as well as when people listen individually or in social settings.

## 6.3 Spotify Network

### 6.3.1 Building Small Networks

The practices that have emerged around building and using a Spotify network are based on the affordance to construct networks through following friends, see what they are listening to, and send playlists through external platforms like Facebook. When the users connect their Spotify account to Facebook, the process of finding friends is easier and the activities on Spotify are visible for the Facebook friends. This affordance of building networks is perceived negatively by six of the ten participants, three showed a positive attitude and one person took a neutral stance. The negative stance is rooted in the perception of the network function as interfering with the private sphere as Emilia illustrates:

Emilia: I think it is actually a little attack on your privacy that you can just see what the other person is listening to right now. [...] I have two followers. And I have no idea who they are, so that why I think it's a bit scary (laughs).

While Emilia does not want to use the function and perceives the unknown followers as intruders, the same perception can apply to friends. Adrian told a story of how he felt uncomfortable when a friend came to him after seeing that he repeatedly listened to the same music and started talking about the songs. Marie also portrays the adding of friends as an out-dated practice and shows that these rather new practices have already been temporally evolving:

Marie: It was...like a few years ago it was in to find your Facebook-friends. But to be honest I don't want them to see what I am listening to all the time...that's why. I don't follow a lot of people or have a lot of follower. Even though I sometimes like to see what they hear. It's a little contradictory (laughs). [...] But you know, among Facebook-friends are not only your closest friends and I don't want to show them everything I listen to. There is still this barrier of being judged, even though there is no direct interaction with this person.

As this excerpt also shows, the discomfort in displaying what one is hearing is related to issues of social norms, which the participants perceived in terms of what is socially acceptable music. Next to the fear of being judged by their taste in music, the awareness for social norms becomes also obvious through the following statement by Marcel, who has a positive attitude towards the network function:

Marcel: I don't mind that because I am not ashamed of my taste in music and I stand by that when someone sees what I was listening to lately. I don't attach great importance to that. I have nothing to hide. I am not secretly a Schlager-Fan.

However, as a result of the perceived social norms, most of the respondents only build small networks. Especially when compared to Facebook, Spotify is reserved for connecting with close friends. Others stated that they do not use the function at all so that their Spotify experience is always kept private. Overall, I think these practices show that Spotify as a medium should be considered as a social site that is shaped by its own social norms, or what Bourdieu termed a *doxa*. As a consequence, users also need to have a certain social and cultural capital in order to become a part of these small networks.

### **6.3.2 Using the Network - Creating Playlists Together, Sharing and Discovering Music**

The study showed that there are three practices that have developed around using the networks: Firstly, they create playlists together, for instance Erik reported that he thinks it is great that you can co-work on a playlist online because it allows him and his friends to overcome physical distances. Secondly, some of the participants reported

that they share music with their friends, which is not possible directly via Spotify but only through external messaging services like Facebook or Whatsapp. Marcel says he usually wants to recommend his friends new songs that he recently discovered or he is referring back to songs they have been talking about. In addition, Mark describes that friends send him a playlists that they have been creating together on another account and that he wanted to include in his music collection. However, Erik reported that one of his friends started to send him songs that he thought would be fitting to what he heard until he was so annoyed that he switched on the private mode in order to avoid that. Lastly, the display of the activities is used by a few people to discover new music based on what their friends are listening to. For instance, Claudia describes that she sometimes listens to songs and adds them to her music collection because her friends listened to it and it was shown in her activity feed. Yet, most of the participants do not engage with this affordance because they don't see the feed on the mobile version or are not interested in this function due to the different tastes in music.

These three practices are closely connected to two gratifications of the framework: On the one hand, they provide gratification for the need of *social connectivity* by interacting with close friends. On the other hand, the ability to share music and see what friends are listening to can contribute to *discovering new music*.

## 6.4 Curating Individual Music Collections

### 6.4.1 Building Collections

Even though the concept of streaming platforms is characterized by accessing instead of owning the music, the platform affords the user to create a symbolic music collection. This is in particular enabled through the possibility of saving songs, albums and playlists and to organize the songs in a personalized manner. This is an affordance, which is perceived very positively by the participants and is heavily used by most of them. Leila was the only one, who says she does not save songs at all but she is actively searching for specific songs. The curation of the individual music collection was approached through different practices by the participants. For the users with a premium account, the practices around curating an individual music collection contribute to the fulfillment of the need of *ubiquity* of music, since they can access their collection anytime and anywhere. Even though this is not possible for the users

with a free account, these practices are additionally addressing gratification of *enjoyment*. The affordance of building their own music collection allows users to expand their cultural capital without having to spend more of their economic capital. The construction of the music collection was conducted by the participants through collecting single songs and albums, or by saving premade playlists. Laura says that she used to create playlists but that she is now only saving playlists that were made by someone else as means of creating her collection. Marie is one extreme example of creating her own collection because she tries to replace it with her old iPod collection and wants the same variety. However, she has come across the problem that she reached the maximum of 9.900 items that can be saved.

#### **6.4.2 Organizing and Maintaining the Collection**

When it comes to organizing the music collection, one common practice among the participants was to save all the songs they liked under “My Songs”, which resulted in a single long playlist. However, some of them were also creating a variety of context-sensitive playlists that were structured according to moods, situations or genres. Marie also curates monthly playlists, which contain all of her favorite songs during the month, because she likes to create a throwback-moment through looking at her older playlists. Some of the participants did furthermore engage in the practice of maintaining their music collection through dynamically updating their playlists when they discovered new songs, while other preferred a more static approach and did not want to edit their playlists. These practices around organizing and maintaining the music collection add to the *enjoyment* of the listening experience.

## 7. Discussion

### 7.1 Discussion of the Findings

As the previous section showed, several practices have developed when using Spotify. These findings are to a large extent corresponding to the previous studies that have been presented in the literature review. However, the approach of exploring the overall use of Spotify enabled the determination of further practices.

In the context of individual music listening, the participants engaged in the practice of mobile listening, where the underlying motivations were various and mirrored the disagreement in the broader discourse around mobile listening with other music formats. On the one hand, the findings add to the argument of Bull that mobile listening is a highly privatized listening experience that creates a disjunction between the user and the surrounding people (Bull 2005, p.350, 353). On the other hand, the findings also support the argument that mobile listening is used to *tune out*, thus to distance oneself by altering the environment without escaping into a private bubble (Beer 2007, p.858). This divergence implies that the practice of mobile listening is shaped by the needs of the respective individual and that there are thus different modes that should be considered.

The practice of mood management via Spotify is supporting Hagen's approach of understanding music streaming through the metaphors as *lifeworld experiences* (Hagen 2016, p.9) where the music is closely connected to the feelings and routines of the user (Hagen 2015, p.637). In addition, it supports Geoff's argument that streaming services are offering emotional engagement for individuals (Geoff 2016, p.51 ff.). However, the practice of mood management does not seem to correspond with one of the gratifications from the typology, which is why I suggest extending the typology through further categories. Even though it is possible to suggest an additional category that applies for this study, an in-depth study is required to understand all the underlying gratifications and to develop a grounded extended version.

To my knowledge there have been no previous studies that examine how such streaming providers are integrated and managed within a social setting of music listening. This study showed that the main approach is to choose the music genre

according to the taste of the majority and put on a playlist in shuffle mode. However, when someone hosted a party, that person would normally decide what music is being played and sometimes also create a playlist that is tailored for the specific event. The curation of playlists for a specific or reoccurring event is a highly context-sensitive practice, which supports Hagen's argument that this practice is connected to the everyday life of the respective user (Hagen 2015, p.637), as well as Nag's concept of a *customized soundtrack* (Nag 2017, p.27). This context-sensitive approach to music listening is partially corresponding to the concept of the *eventization of listening* by Maasø, which states that music listening is influenced by events in our everyday life (Maasø 2017, p.12). However, this study did not find an interrelation between the usage of Spotify and live music events as this concept also implies. This missing link might be explained by the fact that most of the participants were not going to concerts regularly, which is rather unusual for the researched demographic.

When comparing the creation of a traditional mixtape to a Spotify playlist, the social component of listening and discussing music together is omitted, in fact, these playlists are often prepared to avoid discussions about the choice of music during events. This implies a shift in the purpose of such a compilation: While the creation of a mixtape often meant to provide someone else with new music and to talk about it, the great library of Spotify makes playlists necessary to navigate the possibilities and find the desired music for a situation. Thus, instead of navigating what Geoff termed *a paradox of choice* by mainly listening to already familiar music (Geoff 2016, p.49 f.), users curate their own context-sensitive playlists. But participants are not only creating playlists but are rather curating individual music collections. The practices include organizing them into either one playlists or several context-sensitive playlists and maintaining them by following either a dynamic approach by continuously updating playlists or conserving them in a static manner. These results comply to a large extent with Hagen's findings of how users construct and maintain playlists (Hagen 2015). However, this study did not find the practice of actively remaking previous structures as determined for example by albums.

When it comes to the content selection, the participants were listening to a great variety of music, which supports the existing arguments of Prior and Nag that music

streaming is promoting the discovery of new music and thus the dissolving of strict genre categories (Prior 2013, p.188; Nag 2017, p.30). It should be noted that Spotify is mainly perceived as a provider for music streaming even though they also offer podcasts and audiovisual content. The main listening mode can be described as passive and distracted since listening to Spotify is often combined with other activities and is closely connected to the affordance of random sequences through using the shuffle mode. In addition, the participants avoided possible disruptions of their stream through using the queue, downloading songs for mobile listening and using the cross-fading function, thus creating an uninterrupted flow of music. This unstructured and uninterrupted flow as a main mode of consumption is posing questions about the role that the previously dominating format of an album is having in this cultural landscape. The user's reliance on Spotify's playlists and therefore algorithms, gives Spotify a greater power to shape which music is successful and allows them to participate in a social engineering of the users' musical tastes by suggesting artists that they want to promote.

Furthermore, the study found that the users build only small networks because of social norms and the fear of being judged by their network. This is reinforcing previous findings from studies by Hagen and Lüders (Hagen & Lüders 2016), as well as by Silfverberg et al. (Silfverberg et al. 2011). However, the practices that have been established around using the network were thus far not explored. This could be explained by the limited possibility of interaction of the platform itself but Spotify affords the user to share playlists via other messenger services. Practices that were identified in interacting with the network comprise the following of friends, sharing music with them, creating a playlist together and discovering music through the displayed music history of the friends. These practices were only performed by a small part of the participant group because the network function was controversial and music listening in general was portrayed as a rather individual practice. So while these practices address the need for social connectivity, the actual existence of this need varied among the sample.

In conducting this research at an intersection between creative industries, new media and audience studies, the thesis contributes to an understanding of how the shifts in

the creative industries through the establishment of Spotify as new medium are integrated into the everyday lives of the participants.

## 7.2 Limitations

Besides the above discussed issues around reliability and validity, this study is object to certain further limitations. First of all, this thesis was limited by time constraints so that the scope of the thesis in general and the data collection process in particular had to be narrowed down. As a result, I decided to restrict the sample size to ten people, since this number allowed me to reach a saturation point in terms of recurrent answers to the discussed topics. Besides the scope of the sample, the chosen sample profile needs to be considered as a limitation of this study, since it is representing a specific sub-group of German Millennials.

The recent development of music streaming services and their integration into our everyday lives shows the timely relevance, but also posed challenges for the research. Due to the rather recent establishment of this format, little research has been conducted in the specific field of audience studies around music streaming. As a result of this research gap, the literature review frames music streaming with the help of previous research on other music listening formats. Furthermore, the steady development of music streaming services like Spotify complicates the research in terms of conducting research that will be still relevant when the platforms develop further. I aimed to ensure the relevance by approaching the topic through a broad research approach that provides an overview about a variety of practices. However, there have already been important changes in the free mobile version of Spotify that I was not able to consider, because these changes occurred after my data collection. As a consequence of the discussed limitations around the sample and the relevance of the findings, I want to stress that the identified practices, gratifications and affordances should always be considered in a context-sensitive manner.

## 8. Conclusion

The aim of this thesis has been to contribute to an understanding of which sociocultural practices have emerged around the use of the music streaming platform Spotify among urban and middle class Millennials in Germany. Furthermore, the underlying affordances of the platform and the gratifications were analyzed to achieve a deeper understanding of the practices. The study consisted of ten semi-structured interviews, which were analyzed against the background of the key concepts from practice theory, affordance theory, as well as uses and gratification theory. Since the existing literature is primarily focusing on singular practices and on the northern EU-countries, this thesis contributes to an understanding of how Spotify is used in the everyday of the participants by highlighting a variety of practices and thus providing an overview about the integration into the broader music ecology. This thesis has identified sociocultural practices around the four themes (1) social setting, (2) listening mode, (3) Spotify networks and (4) music collection and has outlined the underlying affordances of Spotify as well as the sought gratifications from the users.

The study showed that mobile listening and mood management are common practices during individual listening experiences, while the listening in social settings is shaped by a democratic approach of navigating group dynamics and for the occasion tailored playlists. The overarching listening mode is passive, while the song selection can be based on active searching or randomization through shuffle mode. The users are thereby aiming to construct an unstructured and undisrupted flow of music. The participants, who engage in the practice of building a network around Spotify, use the affordance to create playlists together, share music with friends or to discover new music. Lastly, users were building, organizing and maintaining their own music collection on Spotify.

This study showed the variety of practices, the underlying affordances, and gratifications of German Millennials when using Spotify. It should be kept in mind that such practices are not necessarily transferable since they are temporally evolving and depend on social and cultural factors. Thus, they should always be considered in a context-sensitive manner.

The successful implementation of music streaming as a concept into music market worldwide and the therefore occurring shifts in music consumption are a rather recent and dynamic development, which requires research from different perspectives in order to be better understood. The field of audience studies is thereby especially little researched, so that I will propose possible future research projects for this field.

This study used interviews to understand how the participants use Spotify. In future research projects, it would be interesting to supplement this with an ethnographic approach to observe the use in the everyday life of the study participants. In such an approach, the researcher could witness the actually conducted practices and understand the underlying motivations as an additional means next to the reflections of participants in interviews. Another approach that this field of study could profit from, would be the combination of quantitative data to get the information of how people interact with these platforms and qualitative data to understand this interaction. Music streaming providers like Spotify collect huge amounts of data about a variety of parameter that allows them to analyze their users and provide targeted advertisements. Since their big data sets are the basis of their business, it will be difficult for researchers to receive access to the data. However, a cooperation of academia and Spotify could provide valuable insights for both parties.

In terms of the affordances that music streaming provider have for the users, it would be interesting to conduct in-depth studies to find out which of the features are perceived and in what sense they differ among the provider of music streaming. Such a study could foster an understanding of which features are perceived and which features the users are looking for. This bears practical implications for the design of the platform and could foster an understanding of music streaming audiences. Furthermore, the field of audience studies requires more in-depth studies of the needs and gratifications that underlie the processes of choosing streaming as a format. So far, I found only one typology, which in my opinion does not cover the variety of gratifications that users seek and obtain when using music streaming. Such studies will be useful for researchers as well as practitioners in understanding why people choose this format.

Considering that music streaming has become a global phenomenon, I think it desirable to achieve a greater diversity of researched audiences as well as among the researchers. After all, the practices of an audience are closely interlinked with their social and cultural background and so far the research is mainly focusing on northern Europe.

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## Appendices

### Interview Guide

#### **User Type and Motivations to Use Spotify**

*I would like to start with getting to know what type of user you are and what motivations lie behind the decision to use Spotify.*

Q1: How does a typical day of your Spotify usage look like? Can you guide me through one typical day?

Q2: Do you use a premium or free account? Why so?

Q3: How much time do you spend on Spotify on an average day? Do you think you are a heavy user?

Q4: What are your reasons to use Spotify as a means to listen to music? What benefits does it provide compared to other mediums?

Q5: Do you use other mediums to listen to music? Do you see them as a supplement or substitution to Spotify?

#### **Features and Use of Spotify**

*Spotify allows for a lot of different actions through their features. I would like to learn more about how you use Spotify.*

Q6: Which features do you use regularly, and why?

Q7: Are there features you know about, but you do not want to use? Please elaborate why.

Q8: What position does Spotify hold in the process of discovering new music?

Q9: Did you adopt different listening behaviors since you use Spotify? If yes, what changed?

Q10: Is Spotify influencing your attendance of live music?

Q11: Do you interact with other people on the platform itself? If yes, could you describe the form of interaction?

Q12: Which role does Spotify play in interactions with people in an offline setting?

#### **Cultural and Social Background**

Q13: Which role did music play in your upbringing?

Q14: Do you make music yourself? Do you play an instrument?

Q15: What music do you listen to and why? Is it depending on the listening context?

Q16: By which cultures / ethnicities have you been influenced?

Q17: How else do you like to spend your free time? Do you have particular hobbies?

Q18: Could you describe what you are doing for a living / what you study / learn?

Q19: Could you describe your living situation (partner etc.)? Do you feel it is influencing your use of Spotify?

Q20: Do you want to add something to that topic?

## Sample Overview

<b>Name</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Account Type</b>	<b>Work / Studies</b>
<b>Emilia</b>	20	Female	Free	Bachelor Student
<b>Claudia</b>	23	Female	Premium	Apprenticeship
<b>Erik</b>	24	Male	Premium	Master Student
<b>Leila</b>	22	Female	Free	Bachelor Student
<b>Mark</b>	25	Male	Premium	Bachelor Student
<b>Adrian</b>	22	Male	Free	Bachelor Student
<b>Marie</b>	25	Female	Premium	Bachelor Student
<b>Marcel</b>	22	Male	Premium	Intern
<b>Max</b>	30	Male	Premium	Bachelor Student & Working Part-Time
<b>Laura</b>	25	Female	Premium	Bachelor Student & Working Part-Time