

**The Music Business and Digital Impacts. Innovations and Disruptions in the Music Industries** by Daniel Nordgård

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**Book review by Peter Tschmuck**

The multi-talented Daniel Nordgård's resume includes DJing in his Norwegian hometown Kristiansand as well as becoming a director of Norway's largest music festival (Quart) and board membership of several music business associations in Norway. Currently he is first and foremost a well-regarded academic specialising in music business research who began his university career as a PhD student at the University of Agder in Kristiansand/Norway in 2009.

Two years beforehand he was invited by Peter Jenner (former manager of Pink Floyd, The Clash, T Rex and other famous acts) and Bendik Hofseth (renowned Norwegian composer and musician as well as a professor at Agder) to act as secretary to the Kristiansand Round Table Con-

ference (RTC). This was an invite-only meeting of between 30 to 50 international music business professionals that included representatives of various collecting societies, technology firms, lawyers, lobbyists, academic scholars and journalists to discuss developments in the dramatically changing music economy.

Although the RTC talks were recorded they were held using Chatham House Rules, meaning that all statements and arguments that occurred during the RTC could not be directly attributed. The recordings provided an excellent collection of invaluable first-hand information about the music business that grew over the several years the RTC took place. A direct consequence was using this incredible pool of data for a PhD project on developments over time in the digitalized music business. [The Music Business and Digital Impacts](#) is the result of that PhD project, which contextualises its finding within a broad theoretical framework.

Nordgård structures his book into three parts. In the first chapter, he outlines the theoretical framework, defining music recording, music publishing and live music as three different, but inter-related music industries, each with their own logics of production and dissemination. In all three music sectors however, copyright plays a crucial role and copyright issues were a frequently contested area in the RTC discussions. As such findings in the economics of copyright literature are important components of the author's analysis of the sectors' value chains. The most important analytical framework Nordgård employs is the concept of Strategic Action Fields (SAF) by Fligstein & McAdam (2012). A SAF is a social field constituted by individuals who share their values and beliefs to form a collective identity. The individuals become "*skilled strategic actors*" (Fligstein & McAdam 2012: 46) who are able to convince others to pursue a goal by collective actions. A company as well as other institutions can be defined as SAFs. The author argues that the concept of SAFs "*(...) can be used in analysing and making sense of the music industries' digital transitions*" (Nordgård 2018: 20). In the theoretical part of the book, the author highlights change processes, but also continuities

in the music industries by analysing the decline of the recorded music industry and the rise of the live business by the digitization processes.

The core of Nordgård's book is the analysis of the topics discussed in the RTC talks in chapter 2. This reflects the often controversial and ambiguous discussions among the music business representative and outside stakeholders. In the earlier years of the RTC, discussions often revolved around the decline of recorded music sales and accessing music on the Internet, with the main lament being the inability to compete with free (e.g. P2P file sharing). However, with the launch of Spotify in 2008 the discussions shifted to questions on how to monetise music streaming, As well as Spotify, the role and impact of Apple and Google (YouTube) were fiercely debated topics, often with invited representatives from these firms in attendance. Other debates included dealing with "outside" stakeholders such as ISPs & ICTs as well as influencing policymakers and legislation given their increasing relevance in the music business.

Another very relevant topic was the role of record companies, with claims of their obsolescence, contrasting with claims that record labels still played an essential gatekeeping role in A&R development and as owners of vast recorded music catalogues. The discussions also highlighted the music industries' complex structures that result in the dysfunctional exploitation of music rights and inefficiencies in the distribution of revenues. This led to extensive discussions on possible solutions such a Global Repertoire Database (GRD) and an International Music Registry (IMR)

By the end of chapter 2, the author has identified three main concepts (Nordgård 2018: 99-119): (1) The concept of internal dynamics proposing "*(...) that structures and dynamics of the music industries is a determining factor of their adoption of new digital opportunities (...)*" (Nordgård 2018: 100); (2) the concept of external actors' impact on progressions what Fligstein and McAdam refer to a exogenous shocks and (3) the concept of relations to legislation and policymaking to influence the legal framework in the music industries.

In the final part of ["The Music Business and Digital Impacts"](#) the author ties together the three concepts via the analytical framework of SAFs to answer the main research question: *"What determines the music industries' processes of adapting to a digital, online era?"* (Nordgård 2018: 121). The main findings are firstly that the music industries themselves are critical in re-organising their structures, processes as well as internal and external relations. Secondly, the disruptive incumbents that caused the "digital crisis" will not replace the established industry players. Thirdly, there is little evidence for a convergence between the external stakeholders such as Apple, Google or Spotify and the three music industries. Therefore, Nordgård proposes alternative approaches to understand the digital changes based on the analytical concept of SAFs.

Nordgård's new book provides an excellent insight into the controversial discourse on the impact of digitization on the music industries. His analysis of the recorded RTC talks helps the reader understand how the industries' various stakeholders perceived the changes and how they reacted to these external challenges. Whilst the focus is limited to the period between 2007 and 2011, the topics remain relevant to subsequent RTC's. Arguably one could contest the notion of three different music industries especially given the evident bias in the book towards the music recording and publishing sectors and little analysis of the changing live music business. Even though the book takes a relativizing view of disruption, it is an inspiring source for a further discussion about what is happening in the digitized music economy – a discussion that will be continued in [Springer's Music Business Research book series](#).

## References

Fligstein, N. & McAdam, D. (2012) *A theory of fields*, New York, Oxford University Press.