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Constructing Inequality Regimes: A Conceptual Framework for the Study of Musicians on Digital Platforms

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Abstract

Digital platforms are reshaping musicians' professional identities and career paths. Current research primarily focuses on how algorithmic classification and recommendation systems influence music distribution and visibility. However, little attention has been paid to how platforms draw professional boundaries, shape identities, and reproduce career inequality through organisational processes. This study combines Bourdieusian concepts of field and position with the framework of inequality regimes to propose an analytical framework for studying how digital platforms affect musicians' careers and professional identities. The qualitative framework emphasises the non-human processes through which inequality is produced and reproduced. As integral components of this framework, we introduce two analytical concepts: group-making mechanisms and platform-based professional socialisation. Group-making mechanisms explain how platform classifications create mainstream and marginal categories and reproduce inequality. Platform-based professional socialisation suggests that musicians gradually accept and adapt to platform logics of classification through interaction and shape their professional identities accordingly. These concepts provide new theoretical tools for understanding the interplay between identity construction and inequality on digital platforms. As a conceptual contribution, this study lays the groundwork for future empirical research on professional identity and inequality in platform-based cultural production. It also extends the application of Acker's inequality regimes to digital contexts.

Keywords: platform classification; inequality regimes; professional identity; group-making mechanisms; platform-based professional socialisation; digital music careers

JEL: L82, J24, J71, Z13

1. Introduction

In the context of digital music platforms, the professional roles and career trajectories of musicians are undergoing significant transformation. Digital platforms have both changed how music is distributed and accessed by audiences (Thomson, 2013; Woods and Davis, 2024) and reshaped musicians' career creation paths (Jerasa and Burriß, 2024; Raffa, 2025; Tintiango et al., 2023). In the pre-digital music industry, professional recognition and career success depended on record label contracts, professional training, and industry certifications (Kjus, 2022). Today, however, digital platforms such as TikTok and Spotify have become central to music distribution and consumption. Former measures of musicians' career success have been replaced by digital visibility and traffic, including views, likes, comments, and shares (Aguar and Waldfoegel, 2021; Colley et al., 2022). We suggest that in this process, the skills and practices expected from musicians have expanded and that, in consequence, their professional identities have changed. The identities of professional musicians are no longer centred only on the task of musical creation; they now also extend to their performance in digital marketing and content management (Mühlbach and Arora, 2020; Thomson, 2013). Meanwhile, the construction of profes-

sional identity increasingly depends on audience feedback on digital platforms (Tintiango et al., 2023). The influence of platforms on music creators has become an important topic of scholarly attention. This transformation also offers new perspectives on cultural production and social structures in the digital era.

As digital platforms have become important to how musicians share their work and develop their careers, their professional lives have become strongly influenced by digital classification systems. Musicians rarely present themselves to audiences entirely on their own terms. Algorithms and commercial preferences decide how musicians are categorised (O'Dair and Fry, 2019). In this way, labels are applied which simplify musical diversity into manageable categories (Cotter, 2019) and influence which musical works and content are recommended and become visible (Prey, 2020). This classification system reflects clear hierarchies within the platforms. For example, platforms tend to promote music that fits mainstream culture and English-speaking contexts. In contrast, niche genres and non-English music usually remain confined to smaller communities or remain on the margins of the platform (Prey, 2020; Salganik et al., 2024; Schedl and Bauer, 2018). Therefore, digital platforms cannot be considered neutral techni-



cal intermediaries. In fact, they are involved in gatekeeping and promotion processes and can help or hinder musicians' careers (Asadullah et al., 2018; Cotter, 2019; Flyverbom, 2022).

Platform-based content classification is built through a series of technologies and mechanisms. Platforms automatically identify and categorise creators by standardising user behaviour data, simplifying content features, and creating computable recommendation links (O'Dair and Fry, 2019). For example, the music-tracking platform Last.fm treats artists as objects generated from user listening data, which are then used to create labels such as 'similar artists' or 'trending acts' (Alaimo and Kallinikos, 2021). These mechanisms are often embedded in black-box technical systems, which makes it difficult for creators to fully understand how the decisive algorithms work (Bishop, 2019). However, this does not mean that creators are entirely passive. Cotter (2019) and Zhang et al. (2023) have shown that content creators often engage in algorithmic gossip and develop an algorithmic imaginary to discuss and speculate about how platforms work and adjust their behaviour accordingly. Hence, platform classification algorithms 'structure, but do not unilaterally determine user behaviour' (Cotter, 2019, p. 895). Although Cotter (2019) and Zhang et al. (2023) have delivered insights about how human creators and platform algorithms interact, the deeper power logics of classification has not been fully explored. This includes how classification systems draw boundaries between mainstream and marginal musicians, and how these boundaries affect career belonging and exclusion. This limits our understanding of how digital classification systems work as governance tools and what role they play in cultural production.

To work towards a better understanding of how professional musicians are being ranked and classified, Acker's (2006, 2009) concept of inequality regimes in institutional settings offers a useful perspective. Acker argues that inequality, gender inequality in particular, is embedded in structures such as language, task distribution, cognitive classification, and legitimacy logics, and that it is maintained through everyday work routines (Amis et al., 2020, p. 208). Recent research has extended the analysis of inequality to digital settings. For example, Wood (2021) has used the concept of 'flexible despotism' (p. 18) to describe the invisible labour and structural risks that digital scheduling systems impose on platform workers. Wood has argued that the digital management of workforce flexibility allows for organisational control. Although similar mechanisms may be active on digital music platforms, limited work on this topic exists.

Although some research has shown how platform classification mechanisms influence musicians' career paths, several issues remain underexplored. First, some research has focused on interactions between platforms and creators but has overlooked the fact that platform governance is

not a neutral system mediator. Second, there has been a lack of theoretical explanation of how platforms construct mainstream and marginal career identities through technical mechanisms, such as automated classification, algorithmic recommendation, and tagging systems. In addition, although much research has criticised the inequality caused by algorithmic opacity, little research has explored how this inequality affects musicians on digital platforms. Acker's (2006) concept of inequality regimes has the potential to provide social explanations in the digital era. Therefore, this study presents an analytical framework that combines Bourdieu's concepts of field and position (Bourdieu, 1989, p. 16) with Acker's (2006, 2009) inequality regimes. Adding to this combined framework, we introduce two further analytical concepts. Group-making mechanisms explain how platform classifications draw boundaries between mainstream and marginal groups and reproduce inequality in this process. Platform-based professional socialisation explores how musicians interact with platforms. Through this interaction, musicians gradually accept and adapt to the logics of platform classification. This process shapes new professional identities or sustains existing ones. These concepts help to clarify how the framework of inequality regimes can be applied to digital platforms. It is important to note that this framework is not a quantitative tool for measuring inequality, nor can it calculate the degree of inequality. Instead, it emphasises the mechanisms through which inequality is produced, sustained, and legitimised in digital contexts of creative content production. The contribution of this framework lies in offering a qualitative and process-oriented analytical perspective that helps explain how platform governance shapes musicians' identities and career opportunities. This framework also contributes to managerial practice, as it emphasises how platform governance practices influence organisational identities and the fair management of creative labour.

2. State of the Art

2.1 Musician Identities and New Labels

In this study, identity is understood as field-related (Bourdieu, 1989, p. 16). Existing research has already examined identity and its development from many different angles. The identity of musicians includes self-identity, external recognition, and the interaction between the two.

Self-identity is the overall view humans have of themselves, in which different self-concepts are integrated (MacDonald et al., 2002). For example, musicians' self-identity includes how they perceive their own musical abilities. Musicians also often use music to express their personal perspectives on the world (Hübner, 2013), and some musicians perform to gain a sense of personal achievement or self-fulfilment (Davidson, 2002; O'Neill, 2002).

A musician's identity is shaped by other humans and is often emphasised in terms of their role as a composer, performer, or improviser. In this context, the way music is

expressed also influences identity. Instruments, both conventional ones and computer-based and electronic instruments, are considered to contribute to how musicians see their own identity (Hübner, 2013; Lamont, 2002; Milner, 2009; Spilker, 2012). Musicians today may even specialise in digital skills using ‘artificial intelligence, deep learning and holographic systems’ without playing conventional instruments (De Notaris and Savonardo, 2022, p. 159). Musicians’ identities are also affected by social expectations and the feedback of authority figures. For example, young musicians may be influenced by their friends’ expectations and by evaluators (e.g., conservatoire audition panels or competition judges) (Lamont, 2002; O’Neill, 2002).

In sum, in the context of musical practices, musicians’ identities are continuously shaped by both external feedback and the self. This dualism is exemplified in O’Neill’s (2002) presentation of two interviews with a female music student. This case illustrates how an authority figure (a conservatoire examiner) influenced her identity and how it changed over time. In the first interview, this student reported that the interview panel at one conservatoire advised her to change career direction. She referred to her identity as a musician in the past tense and mentioned the possibility of becoming a music critic or pursuing a similar path. In this way, her identity as a musician shifted as a result of external feedback. In the second interview, however, she had successfully passed another conservatoire audition. She expressed excitement about becoming a performing musician and no longer mentioned alternative identities. This case supports the social constructionist view that a musician’s identity is fluid. It evolves through the continuous interaction and negotiation between personal beliefs (the self) and external environments (others). On this basis, the present study adopts this dual perspective, and we argue that a musician’s identity emerges both from self-recognition and from the influence of others.

Before the digital era, most research argued that musicians were usually recognised through their professional roles, which included being performers in a band or ensemble, frontstage performers, and recording artists (Eastman, 2010; Glynn and Lounsbury, 2005; Hughes, 2000). Self-expression in identity was deeply influenced by traditional gatekeepers in the music industry. These included the training system in conservatoires, the guidance of authority teachers, the evaluation standards of institutions, and school governance bodies such as the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority (SCAA) (Lamont, 2002; O’Neill, 2002). In the United Kingdom (UK), SCAA standards defined and distinguished musicians from non-musicians, often based on whether they had formal instrumental training. In music production and distribution, identity expression was also shaped by record companies and traditional media institutions (e.g., television and radio) (Järvekülg and Wikström, 2021; Ng and Gamble, 2024; Nikolov et al., 2021). By contrast, during this period independent musicians en-

joyed more freedom to express their identity. Yet, without the support of record labels for distribution, they often faced disadvantages (Nikolov et al., 2021; Zwaan and ter Bogt, 2009).

When digital platforms first emerged in the late 1990s, some research optimistically suggested that the platforms could provide musicians with broader exposure and greater freedom (Bartleet et al., 2019; Woods and Davis, 2024). The platforms were also expected to dismantle the mechanisms of traditional gatekeeping (Murphy and Hume, 2023; Woods and Davis, 2024). However, although digital platforms have challenged traditional gatekeepers, they have become new gatekeepers themselves (Murphy and Hume, 2023; Riom, 2023). On the one hand, the platforms have disrupted traditional professional boundaries that defined musicians in binary terms, such as whether they had received formal training or could play instruments. The platforms have begun to include many creators without formal musical education (Everts, 2023; Ng and Gamble, 2024). These creators no longer depend solely on recognition from gatekeepers such as television and radio (Haynes and Marshall, 2017), and they have been able to reach broader audiences and gain social recognition as musicians through platform visibility (Bishop, 2025; Evans, 2021). On the other hand, as digital platforms have become new gatekeepers, musicians’ identities are often reconstructed according to platform classification logics and/or influencer norms (Bishop, 2025; Eastman, 2010). For example, some contemporary female musicians have been categorised as ‘bubblegrunge’, a tag coded around feminine expression. In order to appear in Spotify recommendations, these female musicians have accepted and continued using this label (Muchitsch and Werner, 2024), a practice that may have consequences for how musicians view themselves and their own identities. This means that in the digital era, the influence of others on musicians’ identities has become more complex than before. Most research has focused on the impact of platforms on musicians, as shown by Bishop (2025), Eastman (2010), Haynes and Marshall (2017), and Woods and Davis (2024). However, such research often presents a one-sided view of how platforms shape musicians and pays less attention to how musicians’ self-perceptions interact with external recognition. This study therefore adopts a dynamic perspective on identity formation on digital platforms. It aims to provide a lens through which the interaction between self and others in studies of musicians’ professional identity.

2.2 Inequality Production in the Musical Industry

Inequality research in the music industry can broadly be divided into two categories: structural inequality (e.g., gender, race, and class) (Goldin and Rouse, 2000; Jerasa and Burriss, 2024) and industry-/field-specific inequality (e.g., gatekeeping and resource allocation) (Pilati et al., 2024; Reitsamer, 2011). This distinction echoes the tra-

dition of political economy studies on cultural industries. As Garnham and Inglis (1990) and Hesmondhalgh (2003) argue, even in seemingly free creative environments, cultural labour remains constrained by the logic of capital and institutional rules. Structural inequality represents the underlying causes of inequality, and industry-/field-specific inequality reflects how these causes manifest in particular industry contexts. The two forms of inequality are closely connected. Gatekeepers' decisions are often shaped by racial or gender biases, and white male musicians are more likely to be favoured (Hesmondhalgh and Sun, 2024). However, this study focuses specifically on industry-/field-specific inequality. This does not mean that structural inequality is absent from the industry/field dynamic. Rather, the focus here is on how gatekeeping practices, market resource distribution, and control over visibility generate inequalities for musicians.

Before the rise of digital platforms, musicians' career development depended heavily on traditional gatekeepers, such as record labels and television and radio media (Zwaan and ter Bogt, 2009). These institutions controlled resources, distribution channels, and media exposure, and they decided who could enter the public sphere. This 'screening mechanism' was not fully transparent. For example, selections made by artists and repertoire (A&R) staff combined both artistic and market evaluations (Negus, 2011; Zwaan and ter Bogt, 2009). Media selection also played a role. Critics legitimised certain cultural products as art only when specific aesthetic standards were met and aligned with accepted cultural values (Järvekülg and Wikström, 2021). We know that such selection processes existed, but the exact standards and criteria remain unclear. Record labels occupied a central position. They had the capacity to provide professional guidance, album recording, national distribution, and media promotion for their artists (Nikolov et al., 2021; Reitsamer, 2011; Zwaan and ter Bogt, 2009). This reinforced unequal access to career opportunities within the industry, and independent musicians were largely excluded from these resources.

The rise of digital platforms was initially described as an opportunity for the 'disintermediation of musicians' (Rogers, 2013), which meant that anyone could upload music to digital platforms, thereby breaking down the barriers of traditional distribution (Bartleet et al., 2019; Bataille and Perrenoud, 2021; Woods and Davis, 2024). In practice, platforms are neither neutral nor able to provide musicians with a more equal professional environment (O'Dair and Fry, 2019). Instead, platforms have become the new gatekeepers. Through algorithmic recommendation, chart systems, and invisible content moderation, they redefine who gains exposure and who achieves success (Jerasa and Burriss, 2024; O'Dair and Fry, 2019; Riom, 2023). This mechanism creates clear winner-takes-all dynamics (Bonini and Magaouda, 2024; Pilati et al., 2024). Data have shown that 1% of musicians receive 77% of total revenues (Raffa,

2025). By contrast, long-tail musicians, who are obscure or lesser-known musicians described in the long-tail theory, were originally expected to reach niche audiences and gain visibility through digital distribution. However, they still find it difficult to break through algorithmic barriers (Knust, 2025). Independent musicians are particularly vulnerable to marginalisation (Tessler and Flynn, 2016). Related research on digital labour also points out that creators' activities on platforms are not only a form of self-expression but also a type of data labour exploited by capital (Terranova, 2000). At the same time, traditional gatekeepers continue to play a role on platforms. For example, record labels cooperate with platforms to promote their artists, giving these artists a privileged position in the digital environment (Barna, 2019; Ng and Gamble, 2024). This means that inequality on digital platforms does not come from a single source. It is instead the result of complex interactions between traditional resource allocation and new forms of digital resources allocation (Rauh, 2024). This also explains why many musicians who became famous through digital platforms eventually chose to sign with record labels (Zwaan and ter Bogt, 2009). In addition, research shows that record labels have updated their selection practices to accord with the digital environment. These labels now consider both traditional evaluation standards and digital indicators, such as follower counts and visibility (Carter, 2024; Raffa, 2025; Zhang and Negus, 2024). However, no research has clearly defined the exact evaluation dimensions or standards. For instance, it remains unclear how many followers a musician needs on a platform to be considered successful.

Most research has revealed these inequalities, but it largely remains descriptive. They focus on the characteristics of inequality and on the difficulties musicians face in the digital environment, such as the opacity of algorithms (O'Dair and Fry, 2019; Polak and Schaap, 2024). Yet, the selection standards used by gatekeepers and the principles by which platforms allocate visibility remain unknown. Before discussing concrete standards, it is necessary to understand the mechanisms through which inequality operates on digital platforms. There is no systematic framework that shows how inequality takes shape and persists through the interaction between platforms and musicians' everyday activities. For example, research on algorithmic opacity, the marginal position of independent musicians, and the (in)visible divide in the industry has presented empirical findings. These findings describe what kinds of inequalities exist but do not explain why or how these inequalities occur. To address this gap, this study builds on Acker's (2006) framework of inequality regimes. This analytical perspective focuses on organisational processes and helps explain how digital platforms sustain and reproduce inequality. The proposed framework also provides an analytical foundation for future research on the music industry.

In sum, existing research offers two important insights for this study. First, research on musicians' identities shows

that identity includes both self-recognition and recognition by others, and that it changes dynamically through the interaction between self and others (Bishop, 2025; Järvekülg and Wikström, 2021; MacDonald et al., 2002; Ng and Gamble, 2024; O'Neill, 2002; Woods and Davis, 2024). Second, research on inequality in the music industry mainly highlights industry-/field-specific inequality, particularly in terms of gatekeeping and resource allocation. Digital platforms act as new gatekeepers. They also work with traditional gatekeepers, and they create a hybrid system of control (O'Dair and Fry, 2019; Rauh, 2024; Riom, 2023). Platforms use algorithmic recommendation, tagging systems, and curation. These mechanisms have made access to visibility even more unequal (Knust, 2025; Pilati et al., 2024; Tessler and Flynn, 2016).

Given that the mechanisms discussed above primarily reflect the inequality-producing processes described by Acker (2006, 2009), this study focuses on their implications for organisational practices. These mechanisms are also connected to the structured characteristics of digital platforms as a field. This point will be further elaborated in the subsequent theoretical framework section, drawing on Bourdieu's field perspective. Additionally, it is important to note that this study builds on Acker's (2006, 2009) inequality regimes to examine how platform classifications and algorithmic systems shape musicians' professional identities in everyday practice and how they sustain inequality. The framework does not provide final empirical results. Instead, it offers a new analytical angle and a basis for thinking about inequality on digital platforms. It is also important to acknowledge the purpose of this approach: Acker's framework can explain the nature of inequality and why it persists, but it does not (intend to) measure its exact degree. In addition, Bourdieu's field perspective (Bourdieu, 1989) contributes to understanding conceptualise digital platforms as a new, digitalised field of music production.

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1 Musicians and Identity Work

Musicians' identities are not fixed but evolve with social and individual life experiences. Some research traces the origins of musical identity from early musical awareness in infancy (Trevarthen, 2002) to school environments (Lamont, 2002), family influences (Borthwick and Davidson, 2002), personal views during adolescence (O'Neill, 2002), and performing experiences (Davidson, 2002). These identities are referred to as identities in music (IIM), rather than music in identities (MII) (MacDonald et al., 2002). IIM concerns identity within music itself. In contrast, MII focuses on the aspects of musical identity that are socially defined within cultural roles and musical categories. Research in this conceptual stream discusses how music is used as a resource for developing other aspects of identity, such as gender, ethnicity (Dibben, 2002; Folkestad, 2002), or how

music therapy can have on identity (MacDonald and Miell, 2002; Magee, 2002). Here, we focus on MII.

MII means a dynamic process of interaction between individuals and others in the external social world. Musicians' understanding of their musical identity depends not only on self-perception, type of instrument, and styles of expression but also on continuous external feedback. Traditionally, this feedback mainly came from authoritative institutions or gatekeepers such as record labels and major media outlets (Järvekülg and Wikström, 2021; Reitsamer, 2011; Zwaan and ter Bogt, 2009). A musician's identity was validated through ticket revenue, chart rankings, or awards (Everts, 2023; Reitsamer, 2011). On digital platforms, musicians receive feedback more directly: they can see follower counts, views, and interaction data (Jones, 2021, pp. 103–119; O'Dair and Fry, 2019). However, these novel forms of feedback are still contingent on authority. The platforms act as new gatekeepers, while their preferences, algorithms, and recommendation systems strongly influence musicians' visibility (Hesmondhalgh and Sun, 2024; Raffa, 2025; Riom, 2023; Woods and Davis, 2024). Yet, the details remain unclear, and few studies show how platforms operate in practice. Although it is known that platforms are not neutral (O'Dair and Fry, 2019), there is limited insight into how they shape (in)equality.

The identities of musicians who are active on platforms are influenced both by self-recognition and audience feedback, as well as by platform classifications and algorithmic logics. This means that identity on platforms is inseparable from visibility, exposure, and access to resources (Muchitsch and Werner, 2024). Research has revealed that inequalities exist on digital platforms, but it does not explain how these mechanisms are continuously produced. In view of this, this study combines Bourdieu's concept of field with Acker's framework of inequality regimes to provide an analytical framework for exploring inequality on digital platforms.

3.2 The Musical Field

Before discussing musicians' identities and inequality on platforms, we need to clarify our analytical perspective using Bourdieu's concepts of field and position. Bourdieu (1989, p. 16) defines a field as a relatively autonomous 'social space'. In a field or a social space, individuals and groups interact, compete, and cooperate around certain resources. Each field has its own logic and rules, which result from the types of capital that are valued in the respective field, such as economic (financial resources), cultural (skills and knowledge), social (networks and relationships) and symbolic (recognition derived from these forms capital) capital (Bourdieu, 1989, p. 17). The position of each participant is determined by their volume of capital and the rules within the field (Lueg et al., 2023).

In this study, we argue that digital platforms constitute a new field of cultural production, with new rules for what

types of capital matter and are recognised as legitimate by actors in the field. Musicians activities on these platforms are carried out according to platform rules. In comparison with the traditional music industry, this field is no longer fully dependent on traditional gatekeepers (O'Dair and Fry, 2019). Meanwhile, musicians' positions in the digital field are shaped dynamically by platform classifications, audience feedback, and shifting traffic logics (Fry, 2019; Jones, 2021, pp. 103–119; O'Dair and Fry, 2019). For example, whether musicians are assigned to a particular label or included in recommendations affects whether they occupy central, powerful, or marginal positions in the field.

In view of this, Bourdieu's theory contributes to the development of an analytical lens through which we can understand digital platforms. Digital platforms are more than technical media or distribution channels. They function as a new field of cultural production, as they define what can be considered 'capital' value for professional musicians.

3.3 Acker's Inequality Regimes

Acker (2006) proposes the analytical framework of inequality regimes to explain how inequality is continuously produced and sustained in everyday organisational practices. Acker argues that all organisations have inequality regimes, which she defines as 'loosely interrelated practices, processes, actions, and meanings that result in and maintain class, gender, and racial inequalities within particular organizations' (Acker, 2006, p. 443). This framework focuses on specific organisations and explains how inequality is reproduced through daily, mundane activities in these organisations (Lueg, 2026).

Acker's (2006, 2009) framework of inequality regimes includes the following six dimensions: (1) bases of inequality—class, gender, and race are the foundations of inequality; (2) shape and degree of inequality—inequality always appears in hierarchies, wage differences, and the distribution of power; (3) organising processes that create and recreate inequality—recruitment, promotion, pay setting, and daily interactions all reproduce inequality; (4) visibility of inequality—inequality is often hidden, and privileged groups do not see their own privilege; (5) legitimacy of inequality—inequality is naturalised and institutionalised so that it looks normal and justified; (6) control and compliance—inequality is maintained through direct control (e.g., wages and rules), indirect control (e.g., surveillance and selective recruitment), and internal control (e.g., fear of losing one's livelihood).

The original context of Acker's framework was traditional organisations, such as factories, firms, and public institutions. These organisations have clear boundaries, hierarchies, and formal rules. In contrast, digital platforms do not share these bureaucratic governance features. Instead, digital platforms regulate musicians' visibility through algorithmic recommendations, content distribution, and user interaction. Although platforms can also be seen as organi-

sations, their logics differ from those of traditional organisations and are more complex. Therefore, it is necessary to extend and partly adapt Acker's framework to fit the context of digital platforms. Below, we present suggestions for how the six dimensions can be reinterpreted.

(1) Bases of inequality: In the platform environment, this dimension manifests as classification mechanisms by which musicians are categorised. Platforms use labels such as genre, style, and language, as well as metadata like song titles or length to assign musicians to different catalogues or communities. These classifications determine which audiences musicians are recommended to and, consequently, shape their visibility and career opportunities (Jones, 2021, pp. 103–119). For example, English-language music is more likely to appear in Spotify's global charts (Prey, 2020). This shows how classification bases create cross-context inequality.

(2) Shape and degree of inequality: In traditional organisations, this dimension refers to wage gaps, steep hierarchies, and segregation patterns. A similar logic applies to platforms, where inequality can also be measured in quantifiable terms. Whereas Acker (2006, 2009) emphasised race and gender, we focus on data that reflect inequality on platforms, such as follower counts, views, interactions, and revenue. Musicians supported by record labels usually gain more exposure and attention than independent musicians (Ng and Gamble, 2024; Tessler and Flynn, 2016), which creates clear hierarchical gaps. Gender and race may be interwoven with variables such as follower counts and views, but the tangible relation between different form of overlapping and intersecting inequality data remains hidden in the 'black box' that is platform algorithms.

(3) Organising processes that create and recreate inequality: On platforms, inequality is shaped through algorithmic recommendation, curator choice, and content moderation (Bonini and Gandini, 2019). These mechanisms determine which musicians gain visibility and which works enter mainstream promotion and distribution channels. In response, musicians adjust their strategies: they may change their style to match platform preferences (Kiberg, 2023) or learn from successful cases on platforms (Mutchitsch and Werner, 2024). These practices show that inequality is continuously reproduced and maintained in the interaction between humans actors and non-human algorithms.

(4) Visibility of inequality: In this dimension, Acker's logic is more directly applicable to platforms. Inequality is often hidden behind the appearance of openness and equality (Raffa, 2025; Woods and Davis, 2024). Musicians cannot understand why their works are not recommended or why their visibility suddenly drops, as platform recommendation logics lack transparency (Bonini and Gandini, 2019; Cotter, 2019).

(5) Legitimacy of inequality: Platform algorithms are often presented as neutral and objective tools, as though

Table 1. Comparison of Acker’s framework (2006, 2009) and its adaptation to digital platforms.

Dimension	Acker’s framework (2006, 2009)	Adaptation to digital platforms
Bases of inequality	Inequality rooted in class, gender, race, and other social categories.	Platform-based classifications and labels (metadata, company vs. independent) that shape visibility and audience allocation
Shape and degree of inequality	Degree of hierarchy, segregation, wage and power differences	Degree of visibility and outcomes on platforms (followers, views, and revenue)
Organising processes	Recruitment, promotion, pay-setting, and everyday interactions that reproduce inequality	Algorithmic recommendation, curation, and content moderation; musicians’ adaptive practices to align with platform
Visibility of inequality	Inequality often invisible to privileged groups	Platform opacity: black-box recommendation and prioritisation
Legitimacy of inequality	Inequality justified through naturalised or institutionalised discourses	Algorithms presented as neutral and data-driven, obscuring human decisions
Control and compliance	Direct, indirect, and internalised control mechanisms sustaining inequality	Platforms control musicians’ creative practices and enforce platform labels

they simply reflect user preferences or data-driven logics (Duffy and Meisner, 2023). They are framed as a form of non-human agency. Yet, this framing hides human factors (e.g., manual curation, cooperation with record labels, and commercial promotion strategies) (Barna, 2019; Ng and Gamble, 2024; O’Dair and Fry, 2019).

(6) Control and compliance: In Acker’s framework, this dimension refers to the direct or indirect supervision and control of workers. On digital platforms, control mainly appears as algorithm-driven forms of invisible discipline. To gain more recommendations and visibility, musicians engage in self-compliance and acquiescent behaviour. They actively adjust their creative content, posting frequency, and interaction strategies, and may accept platform-assigned labels (Ng and Gamble, 2024; Raffa, 2025). Musicians shape their identities and practices to fit platform logics in order to avoid marginalisation (O’Dair and Fry, 2019; Tintiangko et al., 2023). Although this adaptability appears to be voluntary, it reflects the invisible control platforms exercise over musicians.

In Table 1, we provide an overview of how Acker’s analytical framework can be applied to digital platforms.

Acker (2009) noted that inequality regimes are closely linked to local economies and policy contexts. However, the framework itself was designed to analyse the organisational level. The same applies to this study, in which we do not discuss broader structural inequalities. Instead, we focus on how inequality is produced and sustained within digital platforms as specific organisational environments. The purpose of this study is limited to proposing an analytical lens that can be used to re-evaluate the relationship between musicians’ identities and career inequality on platforms. We acknowledge that platforms operate differently across countries and regions and are shaped by local policies and cultures. Musicians and their companies (where relevant) are also constrained by these local environments.

The framework proposed in this study can offer a starting point for future research to explore these more specific settings.

3.4 Analytical Synthesis: Combining Bourdieu and Acker

This study combines Bourdieu’s (1989) concepts of field and position with Acker’s (2006, 2009) framework of inequality regimes. It also introduces two analytical concepts: group-making mechanisms and platform-based professional socialisation. The first concept explains how platforms use classification logics to draw professional boundaries and reproduce inequality. The second concept explains how musicians interact with platforms.

3.4.1 Group-Making Mechanisms

Some research has focused on how platform governance and algorithms shape creators’ strategies for production and distribution (Bishop, 2019; Cotter, 2019; Prey, 2020; Zhang et al., 2023). This research describes the interaction between platform influence and creators’ responses and often treats platform classification as a technical tool for managing visibility and distributing traffic. Although some research has explored how platform governance affects visibility and distribution, little research has examined the social function of classification in cultural production and occupational governance. Similarly, little attention has been paid to how platforms use classification logics to draw boundaries between the mainstream and marginal group. In doing so, platforms define who belongs and who is excluded. The concept of boundary work was first introduced by Gieryn (1983), who argued that boundary making is a key practice in legitimising knowledge within scientific fields. Lamont and Molnár (2002) later extended this perspective to culture and social classification. They highlighted that the construction of group boundaries is central to how individuals are assigned to identities, positions, or systems of belonging. In the context of platform gover-

nance, Poell et al. (2021) argued that platforms participate in cultural production and identity governance through algorithmic logics and data infrastructures, thereby acting as cultural intermediaries and redistributors of positions.

Therefore, this study argues that platform classification is not only a tool for content management, it is also a group-making mechanism. Through algorithmic tagging, recommendation logics, and data standards, platforms produce identity classifications that separate mainstream from marginal musicians. According to the boundary work perspective, drawing boundaries is not only about sorting content. It also defines and assigns identities and positions (Gieryn, 1983; Lamont and Molnár, 2002). Platform governance often starts with filtering and recommending content, but it also classifies creators as insiders or outsiders (Wimmer, 2013). This process shapes not only the circulation of content, but also the cultural belonging, legitimacy, and positioning of creators (Lamont and Molnár, 2002). Flyverbom (2022) has proposed the concept of ‘digital architectures of visibility’ (p. 4). He argues that digital platforms shape the logic of visibility through classification, recommendation, and interface design. These mechanisms appear to be based on user behaviour but often contain structural preferences. For instance, music that does not fit data processing standards may be excluded or pushed to the margins. This helps produce a classification system that appears natural and mainstream. As platforms repeatedly train user preferences, they also reinforce existing classification structures. Over time, this creates a hierarchical data order (Alaimo and Kallinikos, 2021).

Particularly in the field of music, this boundary-making process is highly automated and data-driven (O’Dair and Fry, 2019). Through ongoing processes of classification and reclassification, platforms embed musicians into specific tagging systems and algorithmic recommendation paths. This affects their chances of online visibility, audience acceptance, and professional recognition. The distinction between mainstream and non-mainstream careers no longer depends solely on industry tradition or peer recognition: it is produced and reinforced by platform governance structures (Bonini and Gandini, 2019; O’Dair and Fry, 2019). This suggests that digital platforms are not just technical intermediaries in cultural production. They have become key agents in shaping professional identities and organising cultural boundaries. Their classification systems constitute an essential foundation for analysing musicians’ professional practices and the structural conditions of inequality.

3.4.2 Platform-Based Professional Socialisation

Musicians adjust their creative behaviours and expressive strategies in response to ongoing algorithmic recommendations, tagging systems, and visibility feedback (Cotter, 2019; Muchitsch and Werner, 2024). We argue that over time, this logic of expression shifts from a strategic choice

by musicians to being part of their habitus (Bourdieu and Nice, 2013). This habitus, as ‘a subjective but not individual system of internalized structures, schemes of perception, conception, and action’ (Bourdieu and Nice, 2013, p. 86), shapes their future artistic work and self-presentation. The habitus reflects how group members, that is, musicians, have internalised the norms, values, and (power) structure of digital platforms as ‘rules of the game’ (Bourdieu, 1984, 1996). Building on this concept, professional habitus describes the embodied skills, demands, values, and accepted ways of acting that shape members’ participation in a specific professional field (Spence and Carter, 2014). Platforms have broken traditional professional boundaries by including creators without formal training. These individuals can now gain social recognition as musicians through algorithmic visibility (Bishop, 2025; Evans, 2021). This openness challenges conventional professional standards and reshapes how people develop their professional habitus as musicians.

Although professional habitus has been examined in other occupational fields, such as accounting (Spence and Carter, 2014), research has yet to address musicians. Current literature does not explain how digital platforms recalibrate musicians’ professional habitus or how these changes transform the structure of professional identities.

Therefore, the present study proposes platform-based professional socialisation as an analytical lens to interpret how musicians construct their professional identities. This concept of platform-based professional socialisation draws on the notion of organisational socialisation, which refers to how individuals come to understand their professional roles, behavioural norms, and identities through social interaction and institutional mechanisms (Ibarra, 1999; Van Maanen and Schein, 1977). Although digital platforms are not traditional organisations, their mechanisms, such as recommendation systems, tagging, and curation, perform quasi-organisational socialising functions (Laaksonen and Porttikivi, 2022). Platforms do not formally train creators, but they construct a new professional environment through algorithmic recommendations, categorisation, and visibility feedback (Duffy and Meisner, 2023). From a Bourdieusian perspective, this form of socialisation can be understood as the process through which habitus is recalibrated within the digital field (Husu, 2013). The present study adopts the concept of platform-based professional socialisation to emphasise that platform governance not only influences musicians’ creative practices but also changes their understanding of professional identities through everyday practices. In this process, musicians’ professional identities undergo transformations across multiple dimensions.

On digital platforms, three key aspects of musicians’ professional identities are being redefined. First, the way musicians are identified has changed. In the past, their identity was shaped by record labels, performance experiences, and industry recognition (Kjus, 2022; Tolmie, 2017). On

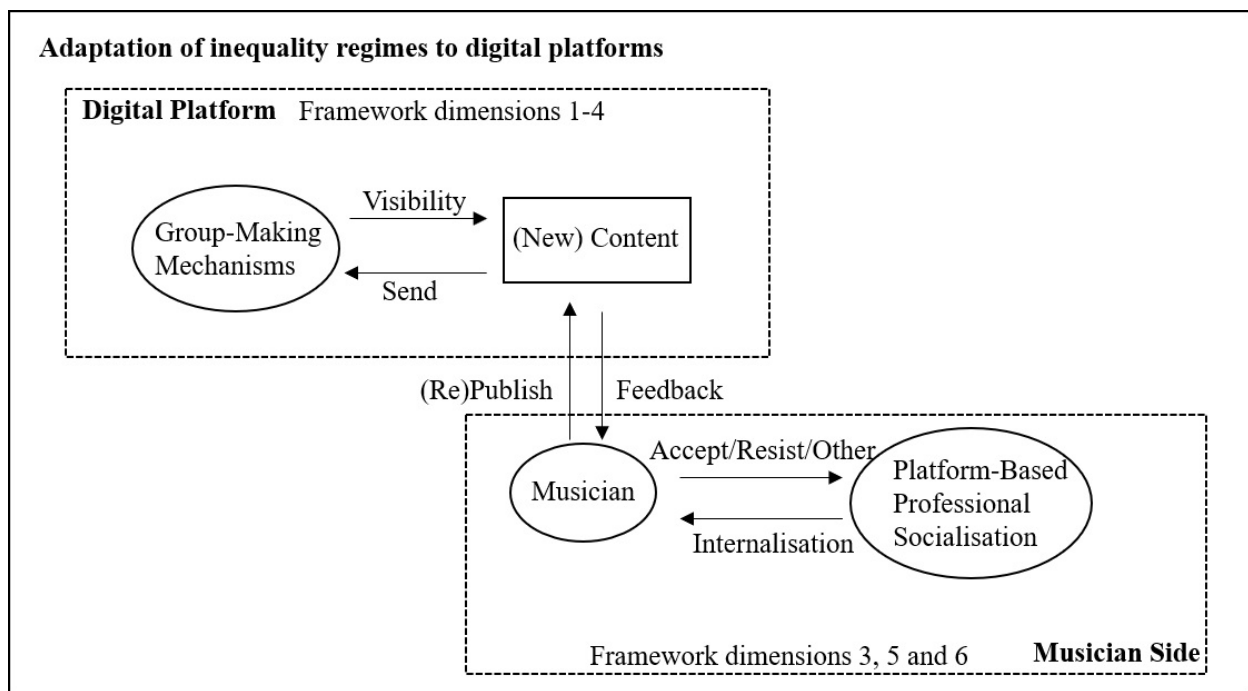


Fig. 1. Adaptation of inequality regimes to digital platforms. Note. The six dimensions are distributed across the positions of platforms and musicians rather than shown as six separate boxes.

platforms, tagging systems have become central to identity recognition. Musicians gradually accept and continue to use the tags assigned by platforms (Muchitsch and Werner, 2024). Second, in traditional music industry settings, professional identity relied on training, live performances, and awards (Connell, 2020). In contrast, platform standards have shifted toward digital visibility and measurable traffic returns (Bonini and Gandini, 2019; Maaso and Hagen, 2020). This change means that musicians adjust their behaviour to align with platform preferences. Some musicians also reach out to platform curators to learn about their preferences and increase their chances of being recommended (Bonini and Gandini, 2019; Muchitsch and Werner, 2024). They treat algorithmic feedback as a form of professional validation. Finally, platforms have reshaped musicians' collaboration strategies and the ways in which they connect and work with others on digital platforms. Platforms encourage musicians to choose collaborators based on factors such as popularity, stylistic tags, and audience overlap (Seufitelli et al., 2023; Wang and Jiang, 2024). These collaborations not only affect their visibility but also reshape the boundaries of their professional communities.

To provide a clearer illustration of how our analytical framework and the two core concepts (group-making mechanisms and platform-based professional socialisation) operate, Fig. 1 visualises the interaction loop between musicians, platform mechanisms, and processes of socialisation. It also incorporates the six dimensions of the inequality regimes framework; in this way, the overall logic of our framework is clarified.

In Fig. 1, Bourdieu's concepts of field and position provide the overall relational structure. The field is conceptualised as the digital environment of music production and circulation, in which platforms and musicians occupy different positions. Acker's six dimensions of inequality regimes are embedded across these relational positions. They are not assigned to six separate visual components. Fig. 1 shows how these dimensions operate through platform mechanisms, content circulation, musicians' responses, feedback, and platform-based professional socialisation.

4. Research Design and Analytical Entry Points

First, it is important to clarify that the framework proposed here is not an empirically validated tool. We draw on Bourdieu's (1989) concepts of field and position and Acker's (2006, 2009) framework of inequality regimes to develop an analytical perspective for analyse how digital platforms shape musicians' positions and professional identities. This framework focuses on the processes through which inequality is produced and reproduced, rather than on measuring inequality as an outcome. Our aim is to provide a theoretical tool for understanding the mechanisms and underlying nature of inequality on digital platforms, not to quantify the degree of inequality. For these reasons, this framework cannot be used directly as a quantitative instrument to calculate exact levels of inequality. Regarding its possible operationalisation, we suggest several potential entry points for analysis that may serve as inspiration

and a methodological basis for future studies. It should be stressed that the framework has not yet been applied in practice, and no empirical results are provided here.

(1) Bases of inequality: This dimension refers to the categories assigned to musicians on platforms and can be analysed through platform labels and classification systems, such as Spotify playlists or TikTok tags. Future studies could interview musicians to explore how they understand and respond to these labels. For example, qualitative interviewing may show that musicians accept the labels, resist them, or are ambivalent towards them. Platform categories could be employed in interview guides to prompt musicians' responses that reveal their attitudes towards classification. Regarding quantitative operationalisation, it could be possible to connect to Spotify's Application Programming Interface (API) using Python to collect data on trending genres or predict popularity.

(2) Shape and degree of inequality: This dimension manifests as gaps in visibility and traffic. Examples include monthly listeners on streaming services, as well as follower counts, views, interactions, and revenue on social media. Such indicators can be collected manually. At the same time, future research could interview musicians from different groups and compare them. For example, musicians with company support and independent musicians without any institutional support. Such a comparison can show how musicians experience and interpret these differences. In the application of this dimension of Acker's (2006, 2009) framework, quantitative indicators can be combined with qualitative interviews. Quantitative data can confirm whether visibility gaps exist, and qualitative interviews can show how musicians understand and explain these inequalities from their own emic perspectives.

(3) Organising processes that create and recreate inequality: This dimension focuses on how inequalities are produced and reproduced through everyday practices on digital platforms. Future research could observe musicians' content practices and conduct interviews to examine their responses to opaque mechanisms, such as algorithms, recommendation systems, and content moderation. For example, researchers may ask about musicians' strategies, how they change their style, or how they adjust posting times and posting frequency. Quantitative indicators, such as the higher visibility of pop content compared with rock content, can be used as background information for interviews. These indicators would help in preparing high quality interviews and exploring musicians' perspectives from multiple angles. The main goal is to learn how musicians interpret inequality and how they respond to it.

(4) Visibility of inequality: The invisibility of platform mechanisms often leaves musicians confused about fluctuations in their visibility and reach. Future research could explore this issue through interviews. The focus would be on understanding musicians' views and emotions, and how they perceive or identify these hidden inequali-

ties. This dimension can be examined mainly through interviews, which could capture musicians' specific frustrations, emotions, and actions.

(5) Legitimacy of inequality: Regarding this dimension, future research could collect public information from different platforms, such as policy documents and statements. This approach can help identify what is framed as 'legitimate'. In interviews, researchers may also ask musicians whether they believe these neutral narratives on platforms and why they accept or challenge them. This aspect may involve collecting public information and conducting some basic text analysis. However, this analysis would only serve as preparatory work for the interviews. The main goal would be to obtain more concrete views from musicians.

(6) Control and compliance: Platforms exert invisible discipline through algorithms. Future research could conduct interviews to learn how musicians describe how assumed algorithmic logics affect their behaviour, and whether this leads to compliance. Some musicians may accept behavioural change and compliance voluntarily, whereas others may feel coerced or show more complex psychological and behavioural responses. In parallel, to corroborate potential findings, this dimension can also be explored through the observation of musicians' actual platform practices. For instance, researchers could conduct case studies on selected platforms to study how musicians adjust their content styles.

The six analytical entry points discussed above are summarised in Table 2, which provides an overview of how Acker's (2006, 2009) framework can be applied to analyse inequality regimes on digital platforms and outlines potential directions for future research.

Overall, our framework is mainly applicable to qualitative, empirical explorations of musicians' views, feelings, and practices. Although some of the dimensions involve quantitative indicators, the purpose of these is to support interviews or virtual ethnography. Nevertheless, there are several dimensions that may provide theoretical guidance for future quantitative studies. For example, regarding the first dimension, Python could be used to capture streaming data. In the second and third dimensions, indicators (e.g., follower counts) could be included. These data could be used to analyse genre distributions, user profiles, and popular song trends. They could also be used to improve recommendation systems. These insights could be useful not only for record companies but also for independent musicians seeking to understand the market, as well as for platform managers and technical teams. Moreover, the framework presented in this study can be used in combination with quantitative research that identifies significant inequalities on digital platforms to help explain why such inequalities persist. For instance, quantitative data may indicate that white male musicians receive more views. Our framework would allow the analysis to go beyond observations of direct, one-dimensional (e.g., gender or racial) dis-

Table 2. Applying Acker's (2006, 2009) analytical dimensions to the study of digital platforms.

Entry point (Acker's dimension)	Research focus on digital platforms	Data sources	Methods
Bases of inequality	Categories assigned to musicians through platform labels and classification systems (e.g., Spotify playlists, TikTok tags). Explore how musicians interpret, accept, or resist these labels.	Platform categories, playlists, TikTok tags; possible API (Application Programming Interface) data.	Qualitative interviews; background analysis of classification systems.
Shape and degree of inequality	Visibility and traffic gaps, such as followers, views, and revenue differences between musicians. Focuses on how musicians with and without company support experience these inequalities.	Platform statistics (views, followers, revenue); comparison of supported and independent musicians.	Quantitative analysis of indicators; qualitative interviews.
Organising processes	How inequalities are produced and reproduced through musicians' everyday content practices and algorithmic feedback. Examines strategic adjustments in style, timing, and frequency.	Musicians' platform posts, interaction data, and algorithmic recommendations.	Observation of platform practices; qualitative interviews; quantitative indicator checks.
Visibility of inequality	Musicians' perceptions and emotions regarding hidden inequalities on platforms. Focuses on how they interpret fluctuations in visibility and reach.	Interview data from musicians discussing experiences of visibility and reach.	Qualitative interviews capturing emotions, frustrations, and actions.
Legitimacy of inequality	How platforms construct and justify legitimacy through public narratives and policies. Explores musicians' attitudes toward these 'neutral' narratives.	Platform policy documents, official statements, public announcements.	Document analysis; qualitative interviews with musicians.
Control and compliance	Algorithmic discipline and self-regulation on platforms. Analyses how musicians comply with, resist, or internalise platform control mechanisms.	Musicians' actual platform content and behavioural traces.	Qualitative interviews; observation of platforms practices; comparative behavioural analysis.

crimination. From a cultural perspective, it could be argued that algorithms and recommendation systems may reinforce the symbolic image of the archetypal musician, which is often tied to white male-dominated popular music styles.

From an organisational perspective, it is understood that algorithms are often built on historical data and user behaviour. If past data already favoured white male musicians, the system may keep reproducing this preference. Thus, this historical inequality embedded in data creates a self-reinforcing cycle. Understood from a field position perspective, white male musicians may also hold more social capital (networks) and cultural capital (recognised styles). These forms of capital can be converted into economic capital (income) and symbolic capital (status as top/famous musicians) on platforms.

Finally, it is important to note some challenges in applying this framework. The opacity of platform algorithms may limit data accessibility. In most cases, it is difficult to use automated tools to capture platform data, as many platforms restrict API access or require formal approval and ethical clearance. In practice, for our own future analysis, we plan to rely mainly on manual observation and the collection of quantitative indicators from platforms. These

can be used for basic statistical analysis, such as descriptive statistics and correlation tests, and possibly for discussions of causal or mediating effects. The most important parts of our future study will be the interviews and analysis process. However, there is uncertainty about the interview samples. We cannot provide exact sample numbers at this early stage. We will follow the principle of saturation: once new interviews no longer yield new insights, the data collection will stop (Baker and Edwards, 2012). As a guideline, we plan to follow Adler and Adler's suggestion (as cited in Baker and Edwards, 2012) and aim for around 30 interviews. Furthermore, cross-platform analysis also presents difficulties. Different platforms provide different indicators. For example, streaming services show monthly listeners but not followers, whereas social media platforms only show follower counts. Spotify's view counts may represent monthly listeners, but some platforms, such as Instagram, do not provide view counts at all. These are problems that will likely arise in a future applied study, which, from our perspective, strengthens our argument that the opaque mechanisms of status and inequality production on digital platforms deserve both analytical and empirical attention.

5. Conclusions

This study proposes a conceptual lens through which researchers can observe how digital platforms, classification mechanisms, and algorithmic logics shape musicians' professional identities. The study also reviews how music platforms continuously produce and sustain career inequality. We demonstrate that musicians' identities come from both self-recognition and external feedback. Digital platforms add new layers of complexity to this interaction. At the same time, platforms act as new gatekeeping mechanisms: not only do they reproduce unequal resource distribution from the traditional industry, but they also create new gaps through classification, recommendation, and visibility. We suggest extending research to a conceptually guided analysis of how these mechanisms actually operate.

To address this research gap, we have proposed an analytical framework that combines concepts from Bourdieu and Acker. Bourdieu's (1989) concepts of field and position can be used to help explain how platforms create a new field of cultural production. They can also be applied to show how musicians gain or lose positions under classification logics. Acker's (2006, 2009) framework of inequality regimes provides a tool for analysing organisational processes and allows researchers to explore how inequality is produced and reproduced through everyday practices and platform logics.

It is important to note that Acker's inequality regime framework (2006, 2009) is widely cited in research. However, scholars tend to apply it in three main ways (Nkomo and Rodriguez, 2019). The first type of studies simply reference or draw on Acker's concepts of gendered inequalities or gendered organisations theory (e.g., Alsos and Ljunggren, 2017; Mickey, 2022). The second type of studies is common in management and organisation research. These studies apply Acker's framework to new samples or specific organisational settings in order to address a particular topic (e.g., Greene and Robbins, 2015). The third type of studies combines Acker's framework with other theories and develops a more integrated analytical approach (e.g., Handy and Rowlands, 2017). Our study places Acker's inequality regime framework (2006, 2009) in the context of digital platforms. It also incorporates Bourdieu's field theory. In this way, this study draws on features of both the second and the third type of application.

In addition, most empirical research that draws on Acker's inequality regime framework (2006, 2009) uses qualitative methods. Researchers often rely on interviews, observation, content analysis, or thematic analysis (e.g., Meyers, 2022; Mickey, 2022). Only a small number of studies use quantitative approaches (e.g., Smith-Doerr et al., 2019). Acker (2006, 2009) highlights race, gender, and class in the original framework. However, most studies pay attention to gender alone. Very few studies explore multiple dimensions of inequality at the same time. Existing research also focuses almost entirely on inequality regimes

in traditional and concrete organisational settings, such as worker cooperatives (Meyers, 2022) and federal workers (Smith-Doerr et al., 2019). These settings have clear organisational boundaries, physical workplaces, and stable structures.

In contrast, this study extends Acker's framework to the virtual organisational settings created by digital platforms. Musicians who work on digital platforms conduct most of their organisational activities and production practices within these environments. This study develops a more open analytical perspective that does not limit the analysis to a single dimension of inequality. By extending Acker's framework, the proposed framework makes it possible to identify a wider and more complex set of inequality mechanisms in digital creative labour. The analytical model proposed here is useful for understanding the digital music field. It can also be applied to other areas of digital cultural production, such as digital artists, online writers, film and game creators, and livestream content producers. We hope that this framework will offer a scalable foundation for future research and support a deeper examination of inequality mechanisms in the platform era.

This study proposes two concepts that have been developed from our analytical framework. The first is group-making mechanisms. This concept shows how platforms use classification and recommendation systems to draw career boundaries. It also explains how platforms decide who enters the mainstream and who is excluded. The second concept is platform-based professional socialisation. This concept explains how musicians make adaptive adjustments in their interactions with platforms, and how these adjustments gradually become part of their professional habitus and reshape their professional identities. These two concepts extend current understandings of musicians' identities and inequality and also provide theoretical tools for studying how digital platforms function as new organisational forms.

Therefore, the proposed framework provides a process-oriented analytical perspective and a qualitative framework for explaining how digital platforms shape musicians' professional identities and sustain resource inequalities. The framework and the two concepts proposed here can inspire future empirical studies, particularly in cross-platform and cross-cultural comparisons of professional groups, and they can also help explain the deeper mechanisms behind unequal outcomes in empirical research. Moreover, they can be used to explain how inequality is continuously produced and reproduced. In addition, this study offers insights for other groups who are active on digital platforms. From a management perspective, this framework also provides insights into how independent or marginalised musicians can organise communities to counteract platform-based inequalities. Finally, this study encourages platform managers and cultural organisations to reflect on how governance mechanisms and classification

systems can be designed in ways that reduce inequality of opportunity and foster more inclusive environments.

Availability of Data and Materials

This study presents a conceptual framework and does not involve the collection, generation, or analysis of original datasets.

Author Contributions

XT designed the research and prepared the first draft of the manuscript. KL contributed to the development of the article's structure, conceptual framework, and theoretical foundation. Throughout the drafting and revision process, both authors discussed the manuscript and critically revised it for important intellectual content. Both authors read and approved the final manuscript. Both authors have participated sufficiently in the work and agreed to be accountable for all aspects of the work.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest. Klarissa Lueg is serving as one of the Guest editors of this journal. We declare that Klarissa Lueg had no involvement in the peer review of this article and has no access to information regarding its peer review. Full responsibility for the editorial process for this article was delegated to Katja Rost.

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