

Kara Sloane

Colleen Syron

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A few months back in May 2018, Donald Glover released a Grammy Award winning song and music video titled “This is America” under his stage name Childish Gambino. The controversial single is packed with metaphors reminding Americans of the chaos and corruption that we have grown ignorant towards. “This is America” accumulated 85.3 million views on YouTube in its first week, earning the title of the biggest first week debut of any video that year (Sergey, 2019) amid setting off a staggering number of hot-take columns and online conversations. This remarkable artistic achievement not only demonstrates the potential music has to critically address pressing issues, but also shows the power music has in connecting people together by eliciting conversation. Recognizing the influential role music can play in communication evokes the thought of how this force can be better utilized to aid social interaction.

Amid all that conversation triggered by “This is America,” which took place seemingly everywhere online, presents an interesting opportunity to ask what it would take to create a space dedicated to adequately convening and collecting our conversations about one of our central obsessions; music. Not only to strike conversation, but to connect people in real life. As it stands, music streaming platforms such as Spotify, Apple Music, and YouTube only provide limited ways that users can connect and communicate about what they are listening to. I intend to create an online space dedicated to turning music streaming into a social experience rather than

individual, where music is the driving force behind creating conversations, meeting new people, and provoking ideas beyond the screen.

There were 278 million paid music subscriptions at the end of 2018, much of our time on Spotify, Apple Music and their rivals is spent listening alone. (Harris, 2019) When examining our leading music streaming platforms, I came to realize that these applications are trying to transform themselves into a social space but are only scratching the surface. For instance, Apple Music has the ability to link to your Facebook and has a personalized playlist called Friends Mix that highlights what your friends are listening to that week. (Cookney, 2018) However, Facebook encompasses everyone from work colleagues to your grandparents; people that you wouldn't care to know what they are listening to or share with them what you are listening to. Meanwhile, a playlist based simply on what all your friends are listening to is useless if it doesn't filter out the noise from those who don't have a similar taste in music.

Spotify, the most successful music streaming service with 157 million monthly users, including 71 million paying subscribers, has also dipped their toes in going social. (Puszta, 2019) However, they have taken a very limited stance. With Spotify, everyone has their individual profile where you can follow your friends and share your own playlists, and that's about it. Aside from being a great music streaming service for individual use, there is no opportunities currently available to share opinions, ask questions, or form real connections with fellow listeners. Spotify has a huge following but is overlooking how powerful of a social function it can be transitioned into.

Another popular music streaming service is YouTube Music, that has overhauled its music charts in multiple countries, with a Trending chart and revamped Top Songs, Top Artist, and Top Music Videos. (Zucker, 2019) To its credit, YouTube is a successful space for music

lovers to share and evoke conversations. “This is America” did draw a notable 286,000 comments in its first week on YouTube, as well as several videos analyzing its symbolism. (Tubiermont, 2019) However, most sharing and conversation on the subject, especially thoughtful conversations and arguments actually took place far from YouTube. YouTube has many strengths, but it isn’t a great place for thoughtful back and forth. It is mostly a place to watch videos, give a brief opinion and move on.

It’s important to realize that people are talking about music aside from music streaming platforms. Twitter has long been home to thousands of musical artists who update us on new songs, tours, opinions, lives, and more. Instagram, too, has become a marketing tool for musicians and allows a place for followers to share opinions, however both Twitter and Instagram are not specifically tailored to the music industry. Conversation and community are intrinsic to music in the real world, and both of these social media platforms and others like it form a gap between music listening and conversation as a whole experience and doesn’t elicit any personal connection between people.

This research concludes that there is not an adequate or successful place that bridges the gap between music listening and conversation as a single experience. Creating a space that combines these forcing will allow for a heightened music listening experience, as well as an opportunity to connect people in ways that aren’t available as it currently stands, whether online or in person.

In order to create an effective platform of my own, I followed up my research by conducting my own study. I created and sent out a survey to study the social media and music streaming habits of those around me. Out of the answers of my 23 respondents, I came to some interesting conclusions.

The first question I asked was: What types of social media do you frequently use? A surprising discovery I got from asking this question was that less than half of respondents at 42% reported using Twitter regularly. I was previously under the impression that Twitter held the number one spot, perhaps second to Facebook. But I suppose I don't use Twitter anymore either. I personally decided not use Twitter anymore because of the exhausting amount of information that I didn't care about; obligations to follow people I somewhat know whose lives and opinions don't really interest me. This can conclude that a space dedicated solely to music sharing and conversating can be beneficial, especially if it doesn't put an emphasis on connecting with people you know personally and rather people that share common interests.

Another interesting conclusion I made is that majority of the people surveyed at 68% reported that they use social media to follow/stay up-to-date with their favorite artists. This is all done through non-music streaming platforms like Twitter and Instagram because the ability to do this on music streaming apps is limited. This shows that majority of music listeners care more about just the sound of the music, it's a connection between artists.

This connection is what you imagine would bring most people to visiting live shows, however that is not the only factor. My survey findings showed me that majority of people at 84% agreed that they don't have to even know the artist playing. They don't necessarily need to know the music in deciding to go to a concert but rather go to concerts to hang out with friends or to meet new people. This question solidified my big idea that music plays a huge role in connecting people together, beyond just voicing opinions online.

Music holds a powerful force in bringing people together in real time, a concept that is slipping away. This distinct ability music has over people shouldn't be overlooked, and rather used as an aid to create more meaningful interactions between people. I intend to show the

relationship music has in aiding social interaction by demonstrating and facilitating new innovative ways music can create conversations, link new people together, and provoke ideas beyond the screen.

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