

**THE ROLE OF DIGITAL MEDIA IN MUSIC INDUSTRY:
AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF THE MIZO YOUTUBESPHERE**

**A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF
PHILOSOPHY**

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**In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in Mass Communication of Mizoram University, Aizawl**

CERTIFICATE OF SUPERVISOR

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I, **JOEL LALTLANCHHUAHA**, hereby declare that the subject matter of this thesis is the record of work done by me, that the contents of this thesis did not form basis of the award of any previous degree to me or to do the best of my knowledge to anybody else, and that the thesis has not been submitted by me for any research degree in any other University/Institute.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

A.I.R.	-	All India Radio
M.D.M.	-	Music Domain Mizoram
M.Z.I.	-	Mizo Zaimi Insuihkhawm
C.D.	-	Compact Disc
D.V.D.	-	Digital Versatile Disc
O-T-T	-	Over-The-Top
D.J.	-	Disc Jockey
APP	-	Application
Y.P.P.	-	YouTube Partner Program

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

As a medium for communication, art, and expression, music has always been significant to civilization. The production, distribution, and consumption of music have undergone significant transformations over time. To reach listeners in the past, musicians used radio, television, and tangible media like CDs or cassettes. However, the music industry has changed globally in the modern era due to digital platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube. Without relying on conventional media, these platforms enable musicians to post their music, connect with fans directly, and get recognition. According to Cayari (2011), even independent and young musicians can now establish their careers online because to the growth of websites like YouTube. Over the past decades, there has been a growing acknowledgement of the social character of music, an acknowledgement which has led researchers from various disciplines to pay closer attention to the work and findings of social scientists. As a result, many researchers have also come to urge the necessity of a multidisciplinary approach to music, recognizing that far from leading to a purely reductionist approach, the social sciences could contribute significantly to renewed and extended musical studies.

Smaller areas like Mizoram, a state in Northeast India with a vibrant music scene, have also been affected by this worldwide trend. YouTube has been a major music release outlet for many Mizo artists in recent years. They view YouTube as a platform and a portfolio that allows them to present their work to a larger audience. Digital media does, however, provide certain difficulties in addition to new potential. Many artists have trouble making money off of their work, navigating algorithms, and adapting to the shifting demands of their audience. Although they have their own restrictions, local platforms like Darbu and Thulkhung are starting to take the place of international ones and provide artists more control. Notwithstanding these changes, not much scholarly study has been done on how Mizo musicians interact

with and traverse the digital music scene. The purpose of this study is to investigate how Mizorami musicians utilize and interpret websites such as YouTube, what opportunities and challenges they encounter, and how digital media is influencing the regional music landscape. The study contributes to the expanding corpus of research on digital media and cultural production in non-metropolitan environments by concentrating on the voices of musicians.

In light of this, the current study aims to comprehend how Mizoram's music scene is changing due to digital media, specifically YouTube. It looks at how artists use these platforms to become more visible, mold their artistic processes, and deal with the advantages and disadvantages of a quickly changing digital landscape. By doing this, the study acknowledges Mizoram's own linguistic, cultural, and institutional background while placing it amid broader global changes. The thesis offers a localized perspective that emphasizes the daily challenges and tactics of artists in a minority-language region, while also adding to the expanding corpus of study on platformization and cultural production by recording these experiences. As a result, the introduction lays the groundwork for the investigation that follows, which progresses from general worldwide trends to the unique circumstances of Mizoram and culminates in the establishment of the research questions that direct this investigation.

Thus, this study considers Mizoram's unique cultural, linguistic, and institutional circumstances while placing it within the broader changes of the global music industry. The study intends to chronicle how digital platforms are changing creative practice, career choices, and visibility in a minority-language setting by concentrating on the experiences of Mizo artists. By doing this, it fills a gap in the literature that frequently ignores smaller and peripheral cultural economies and adds to larger discussions on the function of digital media in modern music.

1.2 Background and Context

The emergence of digital media has altered the function of media organizations, audiences, and artists. Artists may create fan communities, release music on their own, and get direct response from comments, likes, and shares on social media sites like Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube. Digital platforms provide a platform for user-generated material, which makes media more participatory than traditional media like radio and television (Edmond, 2014; Chandler & Munday, 2011). Large audiences can now be reached by even small or independent musicians because to the democratization of music. Perhaps more than before, music is the object of a wide range of theories which sometimes complement but, more often, contradict each other. It is surely tempting to impute at least part of those discrepancies to the variety of disciplines involved. However, this would constitute far too reductionist or simplistic an explanation. For instance, how could it account for the fact that various contrasting approaches cross over disciplinary (as well as institutional) boundaries: or that theories issuing from diverse disciplinary locations share the same basic conception of music?

From cassette recordings in the 1970s to totally digital releases now, Mizoram's music culture has evolved. Lalsangzuali Sailo released the first cassette in the Mizo music industry in 1978, and video production started in the middle of the 1980s. In order to organize musicians and distribute content, artist organizations such as Music Domain Mizoram (MDM) and the Mizo Zaimi Insuihkhawm Pawl (MZI) have been crucial (Zohlupuii, 2013). Local digital platforms that provide mechanisms for local governance and monetization, such as Darbu and Thulkhung, have also surfaced as alternatives to global platforms. These modifications are a reflection of a larger transformation in Mizoram's musical production and consumption patterns. Nowadays, a lot of up-and-coming artists begin their careers on YouTube or Instagram, eschewing more traditional media. Instead of using official industry channels, they frequently rely on peer networks and self-promotion. However, there are still disparities in access to digital technologies, and some artists continue to encounter obstacles because they lack funding, technical know-how, or resources.

Although it is changing, the local music industry is still brittle and heavily reliant on unofficial partnerships, live performances, and community gatherings.

These changes demonstrate how internet platforms have permeated every aspect of Mizoram's creative and cultural life. On the one hand, YouTube gives artists previously unheard-of chances to connect with audiences, share their work, and get beyond conventional gatekeepers like radio and television. However, monetization, piracy, algorithmic visibility, and the weight of self-promotion present serious obstacles for artists. Although local platforms like Darbu and Thulkhung show an effort to offer culturally relevant solutions, they face competition from international businesses that command more resources and attention. The presence of various local and global systems demonstrates how Mizoram is an active site of invention, adaptation, and negotiation rather than just a passive recipient of global trends. It is crucial to comprehend these dynamics because they demonstrate how musicians in smaller, minority-language environments deal with the challenges and opportunities presented by the digital era. The current study, which explores how Mizo artists use digital platforms in ways that are both influenced by global systems and firmly anchored in local cultural realities, is thus set up by this larger background.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

The way that musicians distribute their music, engage with listeners, and develop their careers has been altered by digital platforms such as YouTube. Nowadays, YouTube is the primary channel used by many artists in Mizoram to market their work. More creative flexibility, simpler audience access, and the capacity to publish without relying on conventional media like radio or television are just a few of the new opportunities brought about by this change. These platforms do, however, also present certain difficulties that are not always simple to resolve. The fact that most artists struggle to make money on digital platforms is one of the primary issues. The revenue from YouTube advertisements and other digital tools is frequently insufficient to sustain a steady career, despite the fact that their music may receive views and likes. Artists also find it difficult to comprehend how algorithms impact

their content's prominence. Some claim that their videos get lost in the system if they don't get enough views right away. This puts pressure on artists to spend in pricey visuals or follow trends, which not all of them can afford. Music is not a singular phenomenon and, hence, is not captured by one definition. Still, issues of what music "is" set the boundaries of the field by clarifying what is and is not being studied. Scholars in the social sciences and humanities emphasize that the distinction between music and "not music" is ultimately a social construct—one that is shaped by, and shapes, social arrangements and cultural assumptions.

The absence of appropriate information and assistance is another problem. Many artists lack access to instruction on the proper use of internet platforms. They pick up knowledge from peers or through trial and error. To address some of these problems, local alternatives such as Darbu and Thulkhung have emerged, providing platforms that prioritize Mizo material and make an effort to monetize local artists. These sites, however, are still relatively tiny, compete with international behemoths like YouTube and Spotify, and are susceptible to issues like low user engagement and piracy. Music promotion is still influenced by traditional media, particularly through newspapers, television, and artist associations. However, membership or visibility are frequently prerequisites for entry to these venues, which may bar independent or up-and-coming performers. All of these elements demonstrate that although digital media has given Mizoram's artists new opportunities, it has also brought up a new set of challenges that require more analysis.

When combined, these difficulties reveal a large gap in scholarship and practice. Although Mizo artists are avid users of YouTube and other platforms, little is known about how they manage the demands of the digital economy while balancing cultural identity, sustainability, and visibility. Smaller, minority-language environments like Mizoram are often overlooked in the literature on music and internet platforms because it tends to concentrate on metropolitan industries, massive marketplaces, or international success stories. This lack of focus runs the risk of ignoring the inventiveness, challenges, and tactics of musicians who work on the periphery of the Indian and international music scenes. This thesis fills a significant research vacuum

by recording their lived experiences and examining the advantages and disadvantages of digital platforms in this context. In addition to adding to larger theoretical discussions on platformization, precarity, and the globalization of music, it aims to provide fresh perspectives on how digital media transforms cultural creation in peripheral areas.

1.4 Research Objectives and Questions

Objectives –

- [1] To explore how music-makers in Mizoram use and perceive YouTube as a platform for visibility, promotion, and career development within the local music industry.
- [2] To understand how digital platforms—especially YouTube and Instagram— influence the creative, strategic, and income-related decisions of Mizo artists.
- [3] To examine the affordances and limitations of local digital platforms (e.g., *Darbu*, *Thulkhung*) in relation to YouTube and other global services.
- [4] To analyse how traditional media institutions and artist organizations continue to shape visibility, recognition, and access alongside the rise of YouTube.

Research Questions –

- [1] How do Mizo music-makers use and perceive YouTube for visibility, promotion, and career development?

[2] How do platforms such as YouTube and Instagram influence the creative strategies, branding, and income of artists?

[3] What affordances and limitations do local platforms like Darbu and Thulkhung offer compared to YouTube?

[4] In what ways do traditional media institutions and artist organizations interact with or adapt to digital platforms in Mizoram?

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study is significant because it examines in detail how Mizoram's music production, consumption, and sharing practices are being altered by digital platforms, particularly YouTube. Mizo musicians can use sites like YouTube to market their music and connect with new fans, but there are drawbacks as well, such little revenue, pressure to create videos, and trouble deciphering algorithms. This study provides insight into how musicians in a small and distinct cultural context adjust to global digital systems by examining the real-world experiences of music-makers. This is important because the majority of studies on music and digital media concentrates on global companies or big cities rather than local areas like Mizoram. Hence, DeNora (2000) speaks of "a range of strategies through which music is mobilized as a resource for producing the scenes, routines, assumptions and occasions that constitute 'social life'". That is, people use music to give meaning to themselves and their world.

Additionally, the study adds to discussions regarding the future of regional music scenes and the influence of platforms on career development. Artists who wish to learn more efficient ways to use digital tools may find it helpful. Additionally, it might assist local legislators, artist associations, and developers in strengthening

musician support networks. The results, for instance, can help guide decisions about training and copyright protection or drive the creation of regional platforms like Darbu. Lastly, by demonstrating how international platforms are utilized in particular, regional ways and how cultural, technological, and economic elements all influence digital music practices in Mizoram, this study advances scholarly understanding of digital media.

This study's importance comes from its capacity to relate local experiences to more general scholarly discussions and real-world issues. By expanding conversations on platformization, affordances, and cultural labour into a minority-language and non-metropolitan environment that is frequently overlooked in current study, it advances the fields of communication and media studies on an academic level. Practically speaking, the study provides information that platform developers, artists, and legislators can use. It offers helpful information for creating training programs, bolstering regional platforms, and promoting long-term careers in the creative industry by examining the opportunities and difficulties experienced by Mizo musicians. In this way, the study tackles practical problems that musicians in Mizoram experience while simultaneously advancing theoretical understanding.

1.6 Scope of the Study

This study focuses on how Mizoram musicians' careers, tactics, and creative practices are shaped by digital media channels, particularly YouTube. The study mainly investigates how Mizo musicians utilize YouTube for artistic expression, exposure, and promotion, as well as how these platforms affect their choices about content production, revenue, and audience interaction. Although YouTube is the primary medium under investigation, the study also takes into account other platforms, such as Instagram, Facebook, Darbu, and Thulkhung, because artists frequently utilize them in tandem.

Twenty-one (21) musicians from a range of backgrounds and genres are among the study's participants, the most of whom are based in Aizawl. In the Mizo music

scene, they are singer-songwriters, performers, and producers who are active on digital platforms and who represent both up-and-coming and established voices. Five institutional officials from media outlets and music-related organizations were interviewed for the study as well. Their viewpoints are used to offer context and insight into the structural elements of the Mizoram music business. Nonetheless, the artists' own digital activities and life experiences continue to be the main focus.

Technical music creation, music theory, and statistical audience behaviour are not the focus of this study. Although several points are supported by audience statistics from a prior poll, this is not the main emphasis of the analysis. Because the study is restricted to the years 2022–2024 and is based on qualitative interviews, the results are not intended for generalization but rather represent the unique settings and opinions of the participants.

1.7 Area of the Study

Mizoram, a state in Northeast India renowned for its dynamic and changing music culture, was the site of this investigation. The emphasis is on musicians from the capital city of Aizawl, which is home to the majority of digital music activity. Aizawl has developed into a gathering place for independent musicians who share their work, develop fan bases, and further their careers via websites like YouTube and Instagram. Although they are engaged in the Aizawl music scene, several participants are originating from different districts. Mizoram's distinct cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic characteristics offer a crucial backdrop for comprehending how international websites like YouTube are utilized locally.

1.8 Definition of Key and Local Terms

Online platforms that facilitate the production, sharing, and distribution of content—especially in the context of music—are referred to as digital media in this study. This includes local platforms like Darbu and Thulkhung, which are especially made for Mizo audiences and performers, as well as international platforms like YouTube,

Instagram, and Facebook. Regardless of genre, education, or institutional connection, anyone actively engaged in the creation, performance, or production of music is referred to as a music-maker. This comprises bands, producers, solo artists, and singer-songwriters who use digital channels to market their music. The cultural and creative environment that has developed around YouTube in Mizoram is referred to as the “YouTubesphere” in this thesis. It encompasses not just the actual videos but also the customs, groups, and meanings related to making and sharing music on YouTube. The characteristics and opportunities provided by digital platforms that influence artists’ actions and choices are referred to as affordances. YouTube’s algorithms, comment sections, and monetization mechanisms, for instance, are viewed as affordances that impact the creation and dissemination of music. Last but not least, gatekeeping describes the methods by which organizations like media outlets, artist associations, or even platforms themselves restrict access to visibility or recognition through content policies and algorithms.

Music Domain Mizoram (MDM) is a prominent music organizational body based in Aizawl that has become central to the state’s contemporary digital music landscape. Through its official YouTube channel, MDM Official Mizoram, which hosts over 800,000 subscribers and thousands of videos, the institution has established itself as both a distributor and archive of Mizo music, spanning popular, gospel, and contemporary genres. MDM’s activities extend beyond digital distribution: it operates with a formal membership system, convenes general assemblies, and distributes royalties to affiliated artists and YouTubers, thereby professionalizing music-making practices in Mizoram while aligning them with global copyright and revenue-sharing models. Its governance structure, including elected leadership roles such as the General Secretary, underscores its institutional orientation, while its digital presence across platforms like Facebook and Instagram highlights its role as a community-builder and intermediary between artists and audiences. By managing an extensive catalogue of artists and curating content for wide circulation, MDM mediates the relationship between local creativity and global platform economies, positioning itself as both a facilitator of cultural continuity and an agent of change in the digital era. In this way, MDM represents not only a media label but also an

institutional framework through which Mizoram's music industry negotiates visibility, recognition, and sustainability within the broader dynamics of digital media.

Mizo Zaimi Insuihkhawm Pawl (MZI) is a nonprofit organization headquartered in Aizawl, whose guiding principle—aptly encapsulated in its motto “Unity Through Music”—emphasizes the unifying power of musical expression among the Zo (Mizo) people worldwide. Functioning as both a cultural mediator and a community network, MZI aims to foster cohesion and collective identity through music, serving as a platform where musicians and enthusiasts engage, collaborate, and preserve musical heritage. The organization maintains an active presence across social and digital media channels and also participates in regional cultural events such as Chapchar Kut—Mizoram's celebrated spring festival—where it collaborates with groups like MDM to organize performances by member musicians, thereby reinforcing its role in promoting cultural continuity and public engagement through collective musical participation.

Both Darbu and Thulkhung serve different but complementary facets of the Mizo music ecosystem, marking important advancements in the localization and online distribution of Mizo music. Regarded as the first hyper-local music streaming platform in Mizoram, Darbu curates a huge collection of songs by Mizo musicians. Users may stream, buy exclusive new releases, and support producers by purchasing products straight from the app. Users can download content for uninterrupted listening thanks to its offline-first design, and integrated social features allow listeners and artists to engage. This implementation highlights the platform's aim as a community-focused musical hub rather than just a distribution business. In contrast, *Thulkhung*, launched by Music Domain Mizoram (MDM) in May 2023, functions as a multi-format streaming application offering music videos, films, and audio content, accessible through a dedicated download domain. Music videos are available for rent or purchase, with pricing set at approximately Rs.30 per video, reinforcing *Thulkhung*'s role as a digital storefront for visual content. Collectively, *Darbu* emphasizes interactive audio consumption and artist support, while *Thulkhung*

broadens the spectrum by integrating audiovisual and cinematic content, thereby mapping a two-pronged approach to preserving, monetizing, and proliferating Mizo musical and filmic expressions in the digital era.

1.9 Structure of the Thesis

This thesis is organized into nine chapters.

Chapter One: Introduction sets the stage for the study. It introduces the background and context of the research, identifies the problem, outlines the objectives and research questions, and explains the significance, scope, and key terms of the study. It also provides a preview of the methodology and theoretical framework, a reflexive note on researcher positionality, and an overview of the thesis structure.

Chapter Two: Methodology and theoretical framework detail the research design, sampling strategy, data collection methods, and procedures of analysis. It also discusses issues of translation, reflexivity, and ethics, while situating the researcher's positionality in relation to the field. It also presents the theoretical frameworks that guide the study, including platform affordances, the networked self, and the concept of platform society.

Chapter Three: Literature Review surveys existing scholarship on digital media and music, the rise of YouTube and platform economies, and the Indian and Mizo contexts.

Chapters Four to Seven: Findings and Analysis present the empirical results of the study, structured according to the four research objectives.

- Chapter Four examines YouTube as a platform for visibility and career development.
- Chapter Five explores creativity, strategy, and survival in the platform era.

- Chapter Six investigates the affordances and limitations of local platforms in a globalized media environment.
- Chapter Seven analyses the continuing role of traditional media institutions and artist organizations alongside digital platforms.

Chapter Eight: Findings and Discussions synthesizes the findings across all objectives. It highlights key tensions such as visibility versus sustainability, empowerment versus precarity, and global versus local infrastructures. It also reflects on the theoretical contributions of the study.

Chapter Nine: Conclusion and Recommendations summarizes the main findings, outlines the empirical, theoretical, and practical contributions of the research, and identifies its limitations. It concludes by suggesting directions for future research and practical recommendations for artists, institutions, and policymakers.

Together, these chapters provide both an in-depth case study of Mizoram's digital music landscape and a broader contribution to communication and media studies by situating local practices within global debates on platformization and cultural production.

CHAPTER II

METHODOLOGY

2.1 Introduction

The methods used in this investigation is described in this chapter. A description of the participants and research environment follows an explanation of the research design, sampling plan, and data collection techniques. Along with explaining the data analysis method and highlighting ethical implications, the chapter also addresses language and translation challenges. Lastly, it considers the positionality of the researcher and the methods used to guarantee reflexivity and reduce bias.

2.2 Research Design

A qualitative research design was used in the study. A qualitative technique was the most suitable given the exploratory nature of the subject since it provided a thorough grasp of how Mizo artists use and perceive digital media platforms. The study places more emphasis on participants lived experiences, meanings, and methods than it does on numerical data. Semi-structured interviews were used as the main technique for gathering data because they gave participants the freedom to express themselves in their own words and allowed for the exploration of particular topics.

To better understand how Mizo artists encounter, interpret, and negotiate the digital music landscape, this study uses an exploratory and qualitative research approach. Subjective meanings, cultural practices, and lived experiences that are difficult to capture by statistical data are especially well-suited for qualitative research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). For a study focused on how artists view and react to platforms like YouTube, Darbu, and Thulkhung, qualitative design prioritizes depth, context, and interpretation over measurement or generalization. A broader, more culturally sensitive explanation of how artists negotiate visibility, recognition, and revenue is

made possible by qualitative approaches in Mizoram, where digital practices are heavily influenced by cultural values, language, and community networks.

This study's exploratory approach further highlights the topic's originality. Since there hasn't been much scholarly research on digital platforms in the Mizo music industry, it is vital to produce new insights rather than test established theories (Stebbins, 2001). Openness and adaptability are key components of exploratory research, which enables the researcher to spot new trends and surprising results. The survey revealed, for example, that artists have conflicting feelings about being paid, that they depend on both YouTube and traditional media, and that they place emotional value on metrics like likes and views. Because the exploratory approach values discovery and a range of viewpoints, these findings might not have emerged under a strict research design. By mapping opportunities, challenges, and strategies, the research contributes a foundational understanding on which future studies can build.

2.3 Data Collection

Data collection was conducted between 2022 and 2024 in Aizawl, Mizoram, with some interviews carried out over the phone when face-to-face meetings were not possible due to scheduling or geographic constraints. A total of 21 artists and 5 institutional representatives were interviewed. The artist group included independent singer-songwriters, musicians, and producers, most of whom were between the ages of 25 and 35. Around 65 percent were male and 35 percent female. The institutional participants included representatives from traditional media outlets, local digital platforms, and artist associations. Interviews were semi-structured and conversational in tone, usually lasting between 60 and 90 minutes. The discussions focused on how participants use YouTube and other platforms, their creative strategies, their challenges and opportunities, and their views on institutions and local media. Interviews were conducted in Mizo, recorded with verbal consent, and later transcribed and translated into English. In addition to interviews, online

questionnaires with open-ended questions were distributed to audiences to complement the artist perspectives and provide insights into consumption patterns.

The study used semi-structured interviews, which offered a mix between structure and flexibility, to collect data. In addition to using guiding questions, this approach allows participants to freely develop and present new ideas (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). It worked especially well for examining individual stories, artistic challenges, and adaptation techniques. While still generating similar data, the structure allowed younger, digitally active artists and older, institutionally experienced musicians to interact in various ways. Additionally, semi-structured interviews promoted a conversational tone that made participants feel at ease and inclined to offer frank remarks. The interviews, which were conducted in Mizo and subsequently translated into English, documented both unique experiences and common trends. To find recurrent themes and conflicts, the generated narratives were subjected to a thematic analysis. With the help of semi-structured interviews and a qualitative and exploratory approach, the study was able to provide a comprehensive picture of how Mizoram artists use internet platforms in relation to creativity, visibility, and institutional impact. In addition to recording the interview on the voice recording app on the researcher's smartphone, the researcher had a notebook and pen on hand to write significant information and observations during the interviews.

2.4 Sampling and Recruitment

Snowball sampling was used to find participants. Through a personal link, the researcher was first able to get in touch with other artists when one of the participants—who happened to be a friend's husband—agreed to be interviewed. As participants recommended the researcher to peers and coworkers, the sample grew from this initial size. Following each interview, the participant was asked to recommend a fellow artist, who is typically a friend or someone with whom they have a personal relationship. However, the researcher conducted a brief screening procedure before reaching out to these recommended artists to see if they were a suitable fit for the study's goals and objectives. For example, the researcher looked at

whether the artists were active musicians with recent official releases and a reasonably active internet presence. Reaching musicians who were active in the Mizo YouTubesphere—including those who might not have been readily recognized through public information alone—was made possible by this strategy.

Snowball sampling was the main method used to recruit participants for this study. Using a non-probability technique called snowball sampling, the researcher first selects volunteers and then asks them to suggest more people who fit the study's requirements (Noy, 2008). As demonstrated by the Mizo music scene, it works particularly well in situations when the intended audience is tiny, specialized, or socially connected. This strategy offered a useful and culturally relevant means to engage people who might otherwise be hard to reach, as musicians in Mizoram frequently know one another directly or through professional organizations. The study was also able to incorporate a range of viewpoints from various genres, expertise levels, and institutional engagement types because to snowball sampling.

The snowball method allowed for wider interactions during fieldwork, allowing the researcher to interact with 21 artists. Saturation had been reached at this time, according to thematic analysis of their narratives, when participants started repeating recurrent themes and patterns. The study conducted interviews with five more individuals, representing Zonet, All India Radio (AIR) Aizawl, Vanglaini daily, Music Domain Mizoram (MDM), and the Mizo Zaimi Insuihkhawm Pawl (MZI), in order to further enhance the data and offer institutional viewpoints. This extension made sure that the results included the perspectives of media and organizational stakeholders who continue to influence the music ecosystem in addition to the lived experiences of musicians. Snowball sampling was therefore ideally suited to provide for access, diversity, and saturation in a narrow and interrelated cultural sector.

2.5 Language and Translation

Being a native Mizo speaker, the researcher conducted all of the interviews in Mizo, which was the subjects' and the researcher's common first language. This choice was

made on purpose because it guaranteed that the interviews would take place in a setting that was comfortable for both language and culture and permitted participants to speak in their native tongue. By using Mizo, participants were able to communicate more nuancedly, reduce the possibility of misunderstandings, and let culturally particular expressions and references come to them organically. It was crucial to conduct interviews in the local language in order to capture genuine tales in a setting where music practices are intricately woven into local culture and identity.

The researcher did the transcription and translation himself. The researcher transcribed straight into English while listening to the original audio recordings, rather than first creating transcripts in Mizo and then translating them into English. Since the theme coding and interpretation were carried out in English, this method was used for pragmatic reasons and to expedite the analysis process. Even while this approach necessitated a great deal of attention to detail, it made it possible for the researcher to stay in constant contact with the data during the transcription process. Additionally, the direct translation lessened the chance that meaning would be altered or lost during several transcribing stages. To make sure that the English transcripts accurately captured the participants' statements, the procedure necessitated attentive listening and numerous comparisons with the original recordings.

The researcher's competence in both Mizo and English helped reduce misrepresentation, even though translation always requires some degree of interpretation. Although there were no significant instances of untranslatable phrases, extra caution was used when using colloquial idioms, culturally complex terms, or references unique to Mizoram's music scene. Contextual explanations were included in brackets where needed to make meaning clear. The researcher made sure that participant voices were consistently translated into English by managing the entire procedure herself. The trustworthiness of the translations was improved by the frequent cross-checking with audio recordings, even though the lack of a second translator might be viewed as a drawback. The translation process was also impacted by the positionality of the researcher. Despite being a working musician, the

researcher did not disclose this fact to interviewers and only started making songs available to the public after data collection was finished. This distance lessened the possibility of subjective bias in the interpretation of participants' statements and preserved objectivity. In order to guarantee that translations were influenced by methodological rigor rather than insider notions, the researcher instead approached the interviews primarily from the perspective of an academic investigator.

All participants gave their verbal agreement before to each interview in order to resolve ethical concerns. Participants were made aware that their remarks would be translated into English for reporting and analysis purposes during this process. This openness guaranteed that participants felt comfortable with how their stories were handled while also upholding the informed consent concept. The English transcripts generated by this procedure were immediately utilized for thematic analysis and categorization. The researcher constantly referred back to the original Mizo recordings when clarifications were needed, even though the analysis was done in English. This made sure the final readings were based on the context of the original language. In sum, conducting the interviews in Mizo and translating them into English with careful attention to accuracy, reflexivity, and ethical practice enabled the study to capture rich, authentic data while making it accessible for academic analysis.

2.6 Data Analysis

To interpret the interview data, the study employed reflexive theme analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2019). This approach was chosen because it acknowledges the researcher's active interpretive role while offering flexibility and rigor, enabling themes to be formed inductively from the data. Reflective thematic analysis is ideally suited to exploratory research of this type, where the goal is to map experiences, highlight patterns, and connect them with broader conceptual frameworks, as opposed to more organized approaches like grounded theory, which attempt to develop formalized theory. Although Grounded Theory was initially taken into consideration in the study, its more formal requirements and the challenge of

maintaining its coding techniques within the project's parameters made it less suitable. In contrast, reflexive thematic analysis enabled the researcher to engage systematically with coding, theme development, and interpretation while remaining attentive to the data.

Instead of using a predetermined theoretical template, the analysis started with inductive coding, which placed an emphasis on immersion in the data. The researcher conducted the first five interviews, then transcribed and evaluated them to create preliminary codes that encapsulated significant data chunks in brief descriptive words. These codes mentioned issues with monetization, audience interaction, and visibility. The analysis was updated and improved as the next five interviews were finished, adding new codes and revising older ones as necessary. The entire dataset was subjected to this batch-based, iterative method, which made sure that the coding was consistent and sensitive to fresh discoveries. Without using programs like Nvivo, the coding was done by hand in Microsoft Word. Codes, frequently in succinct words that encapsulated participants' views, were written in the margins of transcripts or in related papers. This procedure was aided by annotation, underlining, and repeated reading. Manual coding allowed the researcher to be deeply involved with the narratives and maintain a strong relationship with the data throughout, even when software might have provided efficiency. After then, thematic development entailed classifying codes into more general categories based on contrasts, patterns, and repetitions seen in various interviews. For instance, frequent mentions of YouTube's contribution to reach expansion were categorized under "visibility," whereas frequent conversations about copyright and affiliations were categorized under "institutional roles."

In order to verify the authenticity of the transcripts and interpretations, rigor was maintained throughout the process by repeatedly listening to the original audio recordings, which were in Mizo. Cross-checking translations and hearing participants' voices again strengthened the findings' credibility, even though reflexive notes were not routinely maintained. By closely matching themes to participants' intended meanings, this recursive approach also assisted in theme

refinement. Visibility, self-promotion, monetization, innovation, institutional roles, and tensions between local and global platforms were among the final themes, which represented both pragmatic difficulties and more general conceptual issues. These themes were viewed as interpretive constructs rather than fixed categories, influenced by the interplay of the data, the positionality of the researcher, and the theoretical framework of affordance theory and platform studies. Thus, reflexive theme analysis provided a means of striking a balance between participants' narratives and conceptual interpretation, producing conclusions that were theoretically informed and based on lived experience.

2.7 Ethical Considerations

A key component of the study process was ethical responsibility. Before the interviews, all participants gave their verbal informed consent after being reassured that participation was completely voluntary and that they might stop at any moment. Where asked, anonymity was preserved, and identifying information was changed or left out to preserve confidentiality. Transcripts and recordings were safely kept and only the researcher had access to them. Additionally, care was made to prevent participants from feeling under pressure to reveal more information than they were comfortable doing, particularly when it came to financial or emotional difficulties.

2.8 Researcher Positionality and Reflexivity

The research was unavoidably influenced by the researcher's own viewpoint. The researcher and the participants had certain similarities as musicians. The fact that music was merely a pastime and not a career at the time of data collection, however, allowed for a balance between insider and outsider viewpoints. There were very few professional ties to the participants; snowball sampling was used after a single first contact through a personal acquaintance.

In order to preserve objectivity, the researcher typically kept their own musical background a secret. However, when it was brought up informally, it frequently

fostered confidence and prompted more candid communication. This intimate knowledge made rapport easier, and cautious reflection made sure that prejudice was kept to a minimum. The researcher purposefully went into interviews without doing a lot of background study about the individual in order to avoid making assumptions and to approach each discussion with an open mind. To add context and confirmation, replies were then compared to the participants' social media pages and YouTube channels. There was also personal relevance to this research. The researcher is driven by a desire to aid in the growth of the Mizo music scene, acknowledging the ingenuity and difficulties encountered by regional musicians. There isn't a thriving music industry in Mizoram right now, and few musicians can make a living from their craft. By chronicling these experiences, the research aims to both promote scholarly knowledge and identify regions in dire need of institutional and infrastructure support.

2.9 Theoretical Framework

The idea of platform affordances (Gibson, 1979; Bucher & Helmond, 2018) and the more general theoretical framework of platform studies (van Dijck, Poell, & de Waal, 2018) serve as the foundation for this investigation. Platformization (van Dijck, Poell, & de Waal, 2018) is the term used in this study to describe the infiltration of platform logics into social and cultural spheres. YouTube offers Mizo artists a way to get over conventional gatekeepers, but it also creates new reliance on measurements, algorithms, and revenue systems. Thus, platformization offers a prism through which to view how regional musicians deal with, adjust to, and are limited by international digital infrastructures. These frameworks make it easier to comprehend how Mizoram artists use new local apps like Darbu and Thulkhung as well as online platforms like YouTube and Instagram. Examining how these platforms affect artists' creative decisions, exposure, marketing initiatives, and career paths is the goal.

The Idea of affordances (Bucher & Helmond, 2018), which emphasizes the opportunities and limitations inherent in digital platforms, is equally significant.

YouTube offers bands worldwide visibility, direct audience interaction, and inexpensive distribution. In addition, it uses algorithmic screening to limit visibility and necessitates constant content creation to be relevant. Examining how Mizo artists view and utilize these affordances sheds light on their creative processes and challenges in an environment with few resources and institutional support. James Gibson, an ecological psychologist, first used the term “affordances” in 1979 to refer to the opportunities for action that an organism’s surroundings present. This concept has been expanded upon in digital media studies to explain how platforms offer specific features or services that users can utilize, but only within the constraints imposed by the platform’s interface, design, and business logic. According to Bucher and Helmond (2018), affordances are socially and politically determined in addition to being technical characteristics. YouTube, for instance, enables content producers to post videos, get comments, track their analytics, and even make money off of their work. However, these affordances are also shaped by advertising policies, algorithmic suggestions, and opaque moderation procedures that affect what is rewarded and seen. In addition, the study makes use of Papacharissi’s (2010) networked self theory, which looks at how digital platforms influence how people construct their identities and exhibit themselves in public. According to this study, Mizo musicians actively perform a version of themselves in order to satisfy platform requirements and keep audiences interested, rather than just uploading music. To be visible in algorithm-driven environments, this entails controlling visual aesthetics, adapting content to trends, replying to followers, and keeping a steady presence. In non-metropolitan areas like Mizoram, where musicians frequently rely entirely on digital platforms for exposure and recognition and access to established music business infrastructures is restricted, this notion is particularly pertinent.

Additionally, the work fits into the expanding subject of platform studies, which highlights how platforms serve as active agents that shape communication, labour, and culture rather than merely being tools (van Dijck et al., 2018). Platforms are defined as socio-technical infrastructures that marginalize certain user behaviours, embed particular values, and encourage particular user behaviours. This viewpoint views websites such as YouTube as commercial systems that encourage engagement,

virality, and monetization—often at the expense of smaller, local voices—rather than as neutral forums. For artists in Mizoram, who could encounter both opportunities and limitations in these settings, this is especially important. Together, these frameworks allow for a deeper understanding of how artists perceive, negotiate, and adapt to the opportunities and challenges presented by digital media. They aid in elucidating the reasons behind the use of particular tactics, the ways in which innovative choices are impacted, and the difficulties that still exist in spite of platform accessibility. Crucially, they also lend credence to the study’s critical examination of how Mizoram’s platform-based music industry mirrors larger conflicts between regional creativity and international digital economy. This research can investigate not only what artists do online but also how and why their practices are influenced by digital infrastructures that are both enabling and limiting, particularly in underrepresented and culturally distinct regions like Mizoram, by fusing affordance theory with platform studies.

2.10 Conclusion

The methodological framework for the study has been described in this chapter, with a focus on the justification for using an exploratory and qualitative approach. In order to capture the intricacies of artists’ and institutions’ experiences within Mizoram’s changing music ecosystem, the study design prioritized depth, context, and significance over quantification. Because the approach was based on reflexivity, it made sure that the researcher’s positionality, language choices, and interpretative function were all taken into consideration at every stage.

Cultural sensitivity and ethical integrity were highly valued in the study, especially in the way that participant voices were translated and analysed. Combining methodical processes with an adaptable, context-sensitive approach preserved rigor while enabling the study to stay responsive to new information. Through the interpretative lens of reflexive thematic analysis, narratives were converted into significant themes that linked individual experiences to more general inquiries about

institutional power, visibility, and innovation. All things considered, the methodological decisions established a foundation that was both rigorous and flexible, allowing the study to engage with broader theoretical discussions on platformization and affordances while shedding light on local views.

CHAPTER III

LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 Introduction

The literature on digital media, the Indian and international music businesses, YouTube as a platform, and the function of local media and artist communities is reviewed in this chapter. It lays the groundwork for comprehending how larger shifts in the digital music industry impact Mizo musicians. Books, peer-reviewed journal articles, and industry reports that are pertinent to the study's subjects make up the literature. It is clear that there is very little, if any, literature about the Mizo music scene in general and the media's contribution to its growth in particular. For the researchers, this presents both a difficulty and an opportunity because it opens up new research directions and literature that can greatly support further studies and scholars. The majority of the literature evaluated for this study focuses on other parts of the world with more sophisticated and sophisticated industry infrastructure and resources that could support an artist's career. Nonetheless, these investigations continue to offer the blueprints, enabling other researchers to spot conceptual or theoretical framework inadequacies.

3.2 Digital Media and Music

The creation, consumption, and distribution of music have all changed as a result of digital media. Without depending on conventional gatekeepers like record labels or radio stations, musicians may now more easily reach audiences throughout the world because to the growth of platforms like YouTube, Spotify, and Instagram. According to academics like Baym (2018), this change allows artists greater creative freedom but also puts additional demands on them to manage their online presence and interact with their followers on a regular basis. In a similar vein, Wikström (2020) emphasizes that although digital platforms make things more accessible, they also establish new hierarchies based on data-driven metrics and visibility. According to

research, digital platforms are not impartial; rather, their algorithms promote engagement, popularity, and watch time (van Dijck et al., 2018). This platform's logic frequently determines which music is buried and which is promoted. According to Hesmondhalgh and Meier (2018), these kinds of systems might exacerbate inequality by favouring content that is already well-known, which hinders the success of up-and-coming or local artists. Because they lack the resources and industrial backing seen in larger cities, these difficulties are considerably more severe for artists in smaller or non-metropolitan places. Newer formats also present challenges for libraries. Ongoing access to online digital media poses concerns related to file format migration and delivery over time. Copyright affects files' longevity in online environments such as YouTube, as files posted illegally are often removed without warning.

Scholars have also noted that the move to digital media is profoundly social and cultural in addition to being technological. For instance, Prior (2010) talks about how new types of "artist-entrepreneurs" who have to balance creativity with digital labor have emerged as a result of the digitalization of music creation. In a similar vein, Hracs (2012) explains how independent musicians are under constant pressure to communicate with their audience, market themselves, and promote themselves online. These studies contribute to the understanding of why artists frequently find it difficult to strike a compromise between their artistic objectives and the demands of digital visibility, especially in emerging or regional businesses. This conflict is particularly pertinent in Mizoram, where musicians frequently operate without the support of major labels, as they are required to handle platform-related and artistic issues independently. Additionally, studies reveal that digital platforms are not impartial; rather, they are driven by algorithms that give priority to interaction, popularity, and watch time (van Dijck et al., 2018). Which music is pushed and which is buried is frequently determined by the logic of this platform. By rewarding work that is already well-known, such systems might perpetuate inequality by hindering the success of lesser-known or local artists, as Hesmondhalgh and Meier (2018) highlight. These difficulties are particularly severe for artists in non-

metropolitan or smaller places since they do not have access to the same resources or industry support.

3.3 The YouTube Ecosystem

One of the most significant music-related websites in the world is YouTube. It serves as a search engine and a social media platform, and throughout the last ten years, its influence in the music industry has increased significantly. Burgess and Green (2018) claim that although YouTube allows artists to get beyond traditional industry hurdles, algorithm-driven visibility, eye-catching thumbnails, and strategic engagement are typically necessary for success. Sen and Saha (2021) investigate how regional artists in India utilize YouTube to preserve cultural identity, build niche audiences, and increase visibility. Research also shows that YouTube is used by artists for branding and audience interaction in addition to content delivery (Cayari, 2011). YouTube's monetization, however, varies. In many places, artists complain that until they get a lot of views, their ad revenue is inconsistent or insufficient. According to a 2019 study by Wang and Lobato, creators frequently use crowdfunding or goods to diversify their revenue streams, particularly in situations where platform revenue alone is unsustainable. In the late-1990s and early-2000s, there were dire predictions about the future of music video production, and the music industry generally. A decade prior, during music video's "golden years" between about 1985 and 1996, it was a different story.

Regional case studies that provide comparative insights are also highlighted in recent studies. While YouTube helps musicians reach a variety of audiences, it also supports content uniformity driven by algorithmic trends, according to Das and Biswas' (2020) analysis of the platform's impact in fostering independent music in West Bengal. Similar to this, Arora and Rangaswamy (2021) discovered that a large number of Indian small-town creators use YouTube for both cultural production and economic survival, even though their success frequently hinges on unofficial support systems and social capital. Relevant to the Mizo YouTubesphere, these stories demonstrate that although YouTube can democratize access, it does not eliminate the

structural obstacles that artists from underrepresented regions must overcome. Research also shows that YouTube is used by artists for branding and audience interaction in addition to content delivery (Cayari, 2011). YouTube's monetization, however, varies. In many places, artists complain that until they get a lot of views, their ad revenue is inconsistent or insufficient. According to a 2019 study by Wang and Lobato, creators frequently use crowdfunding or goods to diversify their revenue streams, particularly in situations where platform revenue alone is unsustainable.

The majority of the worldwide scholarship on digital media and music is centred on metropolitan or Western contexts, despite the fact that it offers valuable insights into platform governance, visibility, and monetization challenges. Although these studies show how platforms reorganize cultural sectors, they hardly ever look at the implications for non-metropolitan, minority-language, or smaller locations. Given their small market size, limited infrastructure, and unique cultural dynamics, musicians' experiences in these settings may vary greatly. This disparity emphasizes the necessity of investigating platformization procedures in regions such as Mizoram, which continue to be marginalized within the national and international music businesses.

3.4 Digital Music in India

The consumption of digital music has grown significantly in India, where streaming has taken over as the primary method of access (FICCI-EY, 2023). Music-listening habits have been influenced by platforms such as YouTube, Spotify, JioSaavn, and Gaana. Because of its extensive reach and free access, YouTube continues to be the most popular platform (Mehta & Dar, 2022). However, independent or regional musicians receive little attention in the majority of study, which concentrates on Bollywood and popular music. The impact of digital platforms on music-making in local contexts has been the subject of some research. For instance, Ghosh (2020) examined how digital platforms help Bengali folk musicians connect with listeners across the diaspora. Digital platforms enabled new kinds of cultural expression, but they also strengthened old power structures, according to Deka's (2019) study of

Assamese musicians' online tactics. Since Mizoram has comparable potential and constraints, these insights are pertinent to this study. The traditional rationale for music videos was simple. In exchange for the cost of a video, record companies could receive exposure for a single and hopefully more revenue from an increase in sales of records, other rights fees, and merchandise sales. That is to say, until recently the value of a music video for a record label was almost entirely promotional.

Indian artists' self-presentation and self-imagination have also been greatly influenced by digital media. According to a 2017 study on Indian indie musicians by Bhattacharjya and Mookerjee-Leonard, artists can experiment with genre, language, and collaboration using digital platforms in ways that aren't feasible with traditional media. For artists from culturally varied areas like Mizoram, this independence is crucial. Furthermore, digital platforms help to build alternative music economies that threaten the dominance of Bollywood-centric models, according to Jain and Jha (2022). These results provide credence to the notion that Mizoram's local musicians are redefining music in their own contexts by utilizing digital platforms rather than merely adjusting to them. The impact of digital platforms on music-making in local contexts has been the subject of some research. For instance, Ghosh (2020) examined how digital platforms help Bengali folk musicians connect with listeners across the diaspora. Digital platforms enabled new kinds of cultural expression, but they also strengthened old power structures, according to Deka's (2019) study of Assamese musicians' online tactics. Since Mizoram has comparable potential and constraints, these insights are pertinent to this study.

Despite the fact that research on the Indian digital music economy has expanded, it still frequently focuses on Bollywood and the sizable music industries in places like Bangalore, Delhi, and Mumbai. Despite being an essential component of India's cultural landscape, regional and minority-language contexts are frequently left out of these conversations. Given the thriving but little-known music scenes in Northeast India, the dearth of research in this region is particularly notable. This omission paints an insufficient image of India's digital music ecosystem, highlighting the significance of using Mizoram as a case study to broaden the field of research.

3.5 Local Media and Artist Organizations

Traditional media in Mizoram—such as cable TV, radio, and newspapers—has long played a role in promoting music. Organizations like the Mizo Zaimi Insuihkhawm Pawl (MZI) and Music Domain Mizoram (MDM) have helped structure the industry by offering representation, performance opportunities, and royalty systems. However, the rise of digital platforms is changing these roles. As noted by Zohlupuii (2013), artist associations have been instrumental in building collective structures in the past, but now face challenges adapting to digital realities. Local streaming services such as Darbu and Thulkhung represent homegrown attempts to meet the needs of Mizo artists. These platforms offer features like local monetization, copyright protection, and culturally relevant filters. However, they face challenges including piracy, low app usage, and fierce rivalry from international firms, and their reach is restricted. Since there isn't much scholarly research on these platforms, it is both pertinent and significant that they be included in our study.

Furthermore, Sharma (2021) investigated the ways in which media organizations in Northeast India are adapting to digital shifts and discovered that, despite their great cultural influence, local institutions frequently take their time implementing digital procedures. Independent artists have the chance to fill this need by producing their own digital material. This implies that artists in Mizoram are not just performers but also distributors, producers, and cultural businesspeople. Because they indicate a transition in the power dynamics from institutional gatekeepers to digitally empowered individuals, these developments are crucial to record. Local streaming platforms like Thulkhung and Darbu are examples of in-house efforts to cater to Mizo musicians' requirements. These systems provide culturally relevant filtering, copyright protection, and local monetization. However, they face challenges including piracy, low app usage, and fierce rivalry from international firms, and their reach is restricted. Since there isn't much scholarly research on these platforms, it is both pertinent and significant that they be included in our study.

3.6 Gaps in the Literature

Although scholarly interest in the ways that digital platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and Spotify are changing the global music industry is expanding, the majority of previous research has concentrated on musicians in wealthy nations or large cities. These studies, which frequently use examples from North America, Europe, or major Asian cities, tend to focus on fandom, commercialization, platform labour, and algorithmic visibility. Research on how artists from tiny areas, like Mizoram, interact with internet platforms in culturally particular ways is still lacking, though. Despite YouTube's prominent role in music industry, research has not quantified the importance of music listening in YouTube in comparison to other content genres. Also, it remains unknown whether there are differences in viewing and listening patterns between music and other content genres on one hand and between different types of music videos on the other.

There is a dearth of research on the usage of YouTube by artists in the Indian Northeast, particularly when it comes to community-based production processes, religious content, or vernacular music. Although some literature (e.g., Sharma & Singh, 2021) discusses the production of vernacular content in North-East India, there is currently a dearth of in-depth qualitative studies on the inspirations, challenges, and adaptations of these artists. Furthermore, the majority of literature ignores the significance of new local platforms like Darbu and Thulkhung in favour of concentrating on global platforms. What these local alternatives can and cannot provide independent or community-based artists, as well as how they compare to major giants like YouTube, are not well understood. Another area of discrepancy is the interaction between digital platforms and traditional media, including newspapers, television, and radio. In places like Mizoram, artists frequently depend on both to establish and sustain their visibility, despite the fact that much literature regards them as distinct or rival locations. More research is needed to understand how artists move across these platforms and how conventional institutions adjust to digital changes.

Last but not least, although some theoretical research has looked at ideas like platform affordances and the networked self, these frameworks have not been widely used in non-metropolitan, minority-language music scenes. By concentrating on the lived experiences of Mizo musicians and their distinctive navigating of local and international venues within a particular cultural and media context, this study fills these gaps.

3.7 Conclusion

The literature demonstrates how the music industry is changing in intricate ways due to digital media. Global platforms like YouTube have structural issues that impact visibility, innovation, and revenue, even as they present new opportunities. These effects are impacted by local culture, infrastructure, and institutional support in regional settings such as Mizoram. By concentrating on how Mizoram artists directly experience these changes and use local and international platforms to advance their musical careers, this study expands on previous studies in this area. Most of the YouTube studies do not give an emphasis to behaviour around music. A recent study that quantified music interaction habits among Finnish youth, found YouTube being the most frequently used music service that many use daily. YouTube was also used to complement Spotify listening and for sharing music. Another focal example looked into how students find videos. It showed that YouTube was the primary source for video search and music was the most frequently sought content category. In the typical case, users first searched and then continued by browsing the related videos. It has been elsewhere documented, using both disclosed and proprietary data, that people access music videos mostly through YouTube Search.

The literature mentioned above shows how digital media has drastically changed the music industry both domestically and internationally, with sites like YouTube being essential for visibility, distribution, and promotion. Nonetheless, a large portion of the research favours established sectors, prevailing languages, and urban settings. There are significant knowledge gaps on how platformization plays out in smaller cultural economies because regional, minority-language contexts like Mizoram are

still seldom studied. By investigating how Mizo artists use YouTube and other platforms, how they perceive the benefits and drawbacks of digital media, and how they manage the conflicting impacts of local platforms, international services, and conventional institutions, this study aims to close that gap. By focusing on Mizoram, the research contributes both empirically and theoretically to the growing scholarship on media, music, and platform society, while extending these debates into a context that is often marginalized in academic discussions.

CHAPTER IV

YOUTUBE AS A PLATFORM FOR VISIBILITY AND CAREER DEVELOPMENT

4.1 Introduction

The results of the first research objective—to investigate how Mizoram musicians use and view YouTube as a platform for visibility, promotion, and career advancement within the local music industry—are presented in this chapter. This chapter explores how YouTube is utilized in practice and how artists interpret its role in their careers, based on a thematic analysis of interviews with 21 musicians and bolstered by institutional representatives' observations. This chapter covers the following topics: self-management, YouTube as a portfolio, promotion through video culture, YouTube as a platform for visibility, and views of success and failure.

4.2 YouTube as a Launchpad for Visibility

For the majority of participants, YouTube was their first—and frequently most crucial—platform for showcasing their music to a larger audience. It was commonly referred to by artists as their “stage,” “launchpad,” or “window to the world.” YouTube offered a special opportunity to reach listeners well beyond their personal networks, particularly for individuals without access to mainstream media or label assistance. A number of musicians talked about the early phases of their careers, when they posted tracks with little anticipation. “I just uploaded it for fun, but I was surprised when people started commenting and sharing,” one participant wrote; “It gave me hope that I might actually succeed.” It was “unbelievable for someone who never performed outside church,” according to another, who recounted how their first video, which was shot in a bedroom using a phone camera, garnered over a thousand views in that week.

One of the main advantages that was frequently cited was the ability to upload without requiring authorization from gatekeepers or institutions. The fact that YouTube gave participants control over how they entered the music industry gave them a sense of empowerment. In a region like Mizoram, where musicians might not have many official channels for releasing their music, this was particularly crucial. One recurrent element was how they “announced themselves” as artists mostly on YouTube. Even people who were active on Facebook or Instagram claimed to have uploaded their entire songs or music videos to YouTube. “Instagram is for updates, but YouTube is where the real work goes,” one participant clarified; “People can tell if you’re serious or not there.” Additionally, participants discussed how YouTube enabled them to reach a variety of audiences, including non-Mizo viewers, Mizo communities beyond the state, and people in other towns. Many felt more confident after receiving viewers from unexpected sources. “I was shocked when someone from Delhi or Singapore commented on my song,” said a man in his early 30s. “Wow, I thought, people outside of Mizoram are also concerned” he added.

YouTube provided a platform for female performers to gain popularity without having to cope with the constraints or discomforts of live performances. “I can prepare, record, and edit on YouTube, but sometimes I feel shy to sing in front of a crowd,” one woman wrote, “It reduces my worry and provides me control.” Participants also emphasized how opportunities offline were facilitated by YouTube presence. Many reported that when their YouTube videos were viewed, they received invitations to live performances, church concerts, youth initiatives, and even sponsorships. According to a young performer, “My first concert was on YouTube. After hearing my song, a member of a young fellowship invited me to perform. I would still be unknown if it weren’t for the video.”

A few participants also described how YouTube helped them reconnect with diasporic or distant relatives. One said, “My uncle from Canada found me on YouTube. He didn’t know I make music. Now he sends my links to all his friends.” This shows how YouTube not only supports visibility in the public music sphere but also strengthens personal and diasporic networks. In short, YouTube serves as more

than just a tool for uploading music — it is a platform of self-introduction, confidence-building, community connection, and personal growth. The freedom to upload and be seen without needing approval from traditional media structures was described by many as a powerful shift in how music careers can begin in Mizoram.

4.3 Promotion Through Video Culture

For the majority of musicians in Mizoram, YouTube serves as a venue for visual communication of identity, emotion, and professionalism in addition to being a place to host music. Almost all of the participants agreed that videos are crucial for building credibility and drawing attention. One artist put it simply: “Without video, people skip your song. It’s like they don’t trust it.”

The platform’s design is reflected in this move toward promotion that is centered around videos. Because YouTube is primarily a visual platform, creators now need to consider their appearance just as much as their music. Several musicians talked about devoting time, funds, and artistic energy to music videos, even for tracks that were home-recorded or had a modest budget. One participant explained: “We shoot even with our phones, but we try to make it look cinematic. If the video looks bad, people will not click.” Video culture on YouTube has encouraged artists to pay attention to visual storytelling, fashion, camera work, and editing. Many said they were inspired by watching professional music videos from Western or Korean countries. One musician acknowledged, “We copy some things we see from K-pop videos.” “It looks neat and professional, but that’s not because we want to be like them.” This demonstrates how, even in situations when resources are few, local manufacturing is influenced by global visual standards.

Some people use video promotion as a way to highlight their locality. To indicate their origins, several artists purposefully incorporated well-known locations, cultural symbols, or traditional attire. According to one singer-songwriter, “I stood close to Solomon’s Temple in one video while wearing a Hmar puan. People will know I’m from here that way.” With Mizo viewers, these visual signals foster a feeling of

genuineness and connection. Marketing methods also include titles and thumbnails. A lot of attendees stressed how Important It is to create visually appealing thumbnails. One person stated, “YouTube is like a market. People will pass by your dull thumbnail.” Many turned to graphic design-savvy friends or utilized free tools like Canva. Others admitted to making mistakes: “I just use my best photo and hope for the best sometimes.”

In addition to official music videos, musicians use lyric videos, informal vlogs, and behind-the-scenes videos to promote their work. In between releases, these supplemental videos keep viewers interested. One artist explained: “If I don’t upload for long, people forget me. So, I post guitar covers, Q&As, or updates just to stay in their minds.” This type of continuous interaction demonstrates how YouTube promotes consistent promotion rather than sporadic releases. Another marketing tactic was the use of collaboration videos. Some people talked of creating duet videos or reaction content by collaborating with other singers, YouTubers, or dancers. Their audience grew as a result. “I did one collab with a guy who has more subscribers,” one said. “He promoted it, and I got new fans from his page.”

But there were drawbacks to video production as well. Some artists experienced pressure to consistently improve their visuals or preserve a particular look. One person remarked, “Even if your song is good, people won’t care if the video is boring.” Artists occasionally hesitated to release tracks at all as a result of this pressure. “I’m waiting to be able to shoot a proper video, but I have a few finished tracks.” This section as a whole demonstrates how Mizo artists’ self-promotion has changed as a result of YouTube’s video-centric culture. It encourages them to become proficient in self-branding and visual storytelling in addition to becoming musicians. The focus on layout, image, and ongoing content creation gives musical labor a new depth that is both empowering and draining.

4.4 YouTube and Self-Management

Many of the artists in this survey stressed that they are solely responsible for running their YouTube accounts. In addition to uploading movies, this also entails creating thumbnails, selecting titles, adjusting audio and images, and writing descriptions. Many participants reported having little to no prior knowledge of YouTube's operations when they started their adventure. "I didn't know how to do anything at first, but I kept trying until I figured it out," one artist said. Throughout the interviews, this attitude of self-learning kept coming up.

A number of painters stated that they "learn'd by watching other artists work and by following online tutorials. "I watch other people's YouTube channels to see what kinds of thumbnails work or what gets more views," one participant clarified. I occasionally adapt the style to fit my songs while copying it. This suggests a form of unofficial peer-based learning in which producers take platform tactics from others and modify them to fit their own brand. It was said that running one's own channel was both empowering and draining. Although several artists pointed out that it took time away from creating music, they also valued the freedom it offered them—"I can decide how I want my video to look, what I wear, how I act." It was widely believed that the non-musical duties of editing, uploading, and promoting may take precedence over the artistic process. According to one artist, "I sometimes work on a single thumbnail and video edit for two or three days. I don't even want to hear the song when I'm finished."

Several participants also brought up the pressure to comprehend YouTube's algorithms. Many didn't know how to write effective tags and descriptions or when the "best time" to submit may be. One person commented, "I don't know what that really means, but I keep hearing people say 'you have to beat the algorithm.'" Others agreed, demonstrating that although creators are aware of the technological logics of the platform, they do not have the support necessary to properly comprehend or make use of them. Artists frequently took pride in their knowledge despite the difficulties. One artist remarked, "I can now edit my own videos and mix

the audio too, but it took me two years.” Learning YouTube’s tools was viewed as a sign of artistic freedom and tenacity as well as a technical achievement. “Nobody taught me,” reflected another attendee. “I simply persisted till I gained confidence. Knowing that I don’t need to rely on anyone else makes me happy.” Nonetheless, it was clear how emotionally taxing it was to handle everything. “It’s exhausting to consider what to post, when to post, and how to respond to comments,” one artist acknowledged. “At times, I simply want to release a song without having to worry about all of that.” Another said, “I get nervous sometimes, so I don’t open my channel. What if the video wasn’t a success?” This demonstrates how platform self-management adds a great deal of mental and emotional stress, especially for single artists without label or team assistance, even while it gives them creative flexibility.

Furthermore, cross-platform promotion is an essential part of YouTube management, in addition to publication. Artists often reported posting their new releases on Facebook pages, Instagram stories, and WhatsApp groups. “Even after I upload on YouTube, I have to post the link on my Insta and spam all my friends,” one participant joked. Despite being time-consuming and frequently fruitless, these promotional activities are essential for increasing visibility. Overall, this section shows that YouTube self-management has two sides. It gives artists the freedom to tell their own stories and release content on their own, but it also puts a lot of pressure on them to be social media strategists, marketers, and video editors all at once. This result is consistent with platform labor theories that highlight how, in the digital age, people are taking on more responsibility instead of institutions (Baym, 2018; Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2011).

4.5 YouTube as a Portfolio

YouTube serves as a personal portfolio in addition to being a release and advertising tool for a large number of musicians in Mizoram. Frequently, musicians referred to their channel as a “gallery,” “resume,” or “record” of their artistic development. “I just tell them to check my channel if they want to know who I am,” one participant wrote. This viewpoint demonstrates how artists view their YouTube channel as a

dynamic repository of their identity and body of work. Artists may showcase their career, performing techniques, and aesthetic preferences in one location thanks to YouTube's user-friendly interface. To make their profiles more structured and polished, a number of participants claimed to have grouped their videos into playlists based on themes, such as originals, covers, and live sessions. "I made one playlist for love songs and one for gospel," a singer explained. "So, if someone is interested in only one style, they can find it easily."

When applying for jobs, applying for grants, or contacting sponsors and event planners, some artists include links to their channels. "I sent my YouTube link as proof of my work when I applied for a small project fund," one participant explained. "I just gave my YouTube handle when a wedding planner asked for samples," another person added. This demonstrates how YouTube transforms from a platform for views into evidence of expertise, aptitude, and dedication. A few artists stressed how important curation and consistency are to giving their channel a polished appearance. "If my first video is bad, people might not stay," one person stated, "I thus make an effort to get better over time." This shows that the platform promotes continuous quality improvement and that first impressions count. Additionally, the site allows artists to demonstrate their development and progress. Some said that older recordings were crude or unpolished, yet they were nevertheless posted online as indicators of progress. One participant smiled and said, "I was shy in my first video. However, after watching it, I realize how far I've come." Others mentioned redoing previous films or songs to update their portfolio while keeping their original concepts.

A feeling of artistic credibility is also influenced by the concept of a portfolio. Artists believe they have a position in the local scene when they have a YouTube channel with regular posts. One songwriter stated, "Even though I'm not famous, people know I'm serious because my channel has content." "I get messages saying, 'I've seen your channel, can we work together,'" a beat producer continued. That is very significant. It's interesting to note that some institutional personnel also thought of artist channels as unofficial showcases. "We are more likely to feature an artist

with a strong channel,” stated a former Zonet staffer, “It demonstrates their ability to work.” Similarly, Music Domain Mizoram members stated that they occasionally search YouTube for talent. “It’s easier to help those who are already active online,” they explained. Naturally, this focus on keeping a robust portfolio also increases pressure. Some participants believed that in order to maintain their “brand,” they had to upload frequently, even when they were feeling uninspired. “I can’t go months without posting anything on my channel”, One person said, “People will think I quit.” Another clarified that she waited to release a film until she was certain that it met the standards she had previously established.

In conclusion, this section demonstrates how YouTube functions as a digital resume that promotes visibility, opportunity, and self-validation in addition to being a commercial platform. Mizoram’s artists use their platforms to gain recognition as creators with an expanding body of work in addition to being heard. This reaffirms how the platform shapes music-making as a curated public identity as much as a creative endeavour.

4.6 Perceptions of Success and Failure on YouTube

Artists frequently utilize YouTube analytics, such as views, likes, comments, and subscriber numbers, as a gauge of their performance, and these measures have a strong emotional connection to them. These figures act as instantaneous and obvious forms of feedback for a large number of participants, impacting their motivation, sense of self, and even decisions about future production. A number of musicians freely admitted to the psychological impact of their performances. “I feel like maybe I failed when I upload something and it gets few views,” one participant acknowledged, “Was the song horrible, I wonder? Was the video inadequate?” This introspection shows how measures affect an artist’s self-worth in addition to how others see them.

There was a noticeable ambivalence toward pursuing numbers, even though the majority of interviewees stated a wish to gain recognition and connect with a larger

audience. “We want views, of course,” one participant thought, “We’re not perfect. However, I try not to get too caught up in it. It reached someone, I remind myself, even if it only receives a few hundred views.” This answer exemplifies the conflict between internal and external incentives—between the value of art in and of itself and the approval that comes from being seen. However, many acknowledged that they frequently checked their YouTube Studio dashboards to monitor view time and audience engagement. “I don’t understand the algorithm, but I keep checking which videos get views,” one artist wrote, “I attempt to do more of the same if anything works.” This type of performance monitoring shows how artists adapt based on feedback loops engineered into the platform.

A few individuals also acknowledged that they were annoyed by what they saw as others’ unmerited success. One singer-songwriter remarked, “I get resentful sometimes when someone else goes viral with a really basic video.” “I worked on my project for months, but it didn’t succeed. After that, someone shares a cover song, and it receives thousands of views.” These parallels demonstrate how an artist’s sense of justice or meritocracy can be undermined by algorithmic popularity, which might seem random. Others demonstrated fortitude and made an effort to keep things in perspective. “I had to learn not to take it personally,” said one participant, “There are so many factors—time of upload, thumbnail, title. It doesn’t mean my song is bad.” “Some of my best songs didn’t get views,” another person thought, “Later on, though, I hear from someone that it was very meaningful to them. For me, that is also success.” These comments suggest that many artists are actively negotiating new definitions of success that include aspects such as self-expression, emotional connection, and personal growth in addition to monetary gain. Some participants described instances in which burnout or a loss of desire resulted from unsatisfactory outcomes. “For months”, one participant said, “I didn’t want to upload after one song didn’t do well. I believed that I had lost my significance.” This kind of emotional response reveals one of the hidden costs of platform labour: the psychological toll that arises from tying artistic identity to platform performance.

Some artists did, however, convey optimism and tenacity. One participant came to the conclusion that “YouTube can be unpredictable. This one might not have worked. The next one might. You must never give up.” This optimism highlights the platform’s dual nature as a place for fresh prospects as well as a source of uncertainty. In general, Mizo artists’ perceptions of success and failure on YouTube are nuanced and intensely personal. Although they are frequently seen critically, metrics do matter. Artists are learning how to deal with the highs and lows of algorithmic prominence, frequently without the help of organizations or expert advice. Their stories are representative of larger discussions concerning the psychological impacts of digital labour, especially in creative economies that are underrepresented.

4.7 Summary of Findings

This chapter examined how Mizoram musicians view and use YouTube as a digital medium to further their careers, increase their visibility, and market their music. Several interconnected patterns that represent the potential and difficulties these artists encounter in the YouTubesphere were found through thematic analysis of the interview material. Initially, YouTube became a major venue for musicians, serving as a digital stage that provides direct access to viewers without the need for conventional gatekeeping. The majority of participants said that it was the standard location for the release of music videos, cover versions, and original songs. One of the most important tools for building a presence in the local music scene, YouTube was frequently the first step toward visibility. The platform gave several artists their first big break, allowing them to get noticed, interact with followers, or even get invites to collaborate or perform live. Second, the chapter demonstrated how YouTube’s visual dimension is used by musicians. Creative choices about setting, storytelling, and styling were impacted by the video medium. Artists felt compelled to create visually appealing content in order to satisfy audience expectations influenced by both domestic and international trends, as well as to appease the algorithm. In this sense, the platform influenced the creation, composition, and packaging of music in addition to its distribution.

YouTube's platform logic was also reflected in promotion tactics. The majority of artists used cross-platform sharing to drive viewers to their YouTube channel, particularly through Instagram. Additionally, they stressed the significance of consistency, thumbnails, and timeliness. Many had created spontaneous tactics based on peer learning and trial-and-error, even though they had minimal formal experience in digital marketing. Some artists were still uncertain about how to "crack the algorithm" or develop in a sustainable way, though. YouTube provided a platform for branding and self-expression in terms of identity and self-presentation. To fit their personal and professional objectives, artists carefully controlled their online character, voice, and genre. Some artists were careful, attempting to strike a balance between authenticity and acceptability in the eyes of their local audience, while others adopted daring or experimental techniques. The chapter also looked at how accessing YouTube affects one's emotions and mental health. Numerous participants connected platform indicators like views, likes, and comments to their perception of artistic value. When their job did not do well, some people felt uncertainty, anxiety, or burnout, while others utilized these figures as motivation. The seemingly random aspect of algorithmic visibility—why certain songs become viral while others, just as wonderful, go unnoticed—was another source of annoyance.

Lastly, there was complexity in how artists viewed success and failure on YouTube. For some, success meant earning money or going viral, but for others, it meant developing personally, receiving insightful criticism, or enjoying the creative process. In order to find a balance between platform requirements and creative values, the majority of participants negotiated between these definitions. When taken as a whole, these results demonstrate how important YouTube is to Mizo musicians' digital music life. It is a cultural place as well as a publishing tool, one that promotes visibility but also necessitates adjustment, emotional work, and ongoing education. These observations prepare the reader for the following chapter, which will examine how artistic decision-making is influenced by digital platforms in general, such as Instagram and TuneCore, in terms of creativity, strategy, and revenue creation.

Beyond visibility, artists considered how much YouTube helps them advance their careers. Few people considered the platform to be a dependable source of income, but the majority saw it as an essential tool for promotion. With earnings reliant on meeting audience levels that were challenging to meet in Mizoram's tiny language and geographic market, monetization was commonly characterized as weak or intermittent. Revenues were insufficient to support a full-time career, even for those who were eligible for monetization. However, YouTube did open doors to additional opportunities: after becoming well-known online, some artists said they were invited to play at events, work with other musicians, or be featured in local media. These repercussions emphasize YouTube's function as a platform for promotion rather than an independent source of employment. Theoretically, this dynamic mirrors the larger conversations about precarity and platform labour (Gill & Pratt, 2008; Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2011). Digital platforms give artists the opportunity to display their work and establish their names, but they also place the onus of risk, capital, and ongoing self-promotion on the individual. This dependence on platforms increases the vulnerability of Mizo musicians, who already work in a delicate cultural economy with little institutional backing. The difference between cash reward and symbolic recognition was especially apparent. Though most of them admitted that this fame did not equate to financial security, artists appreciated the acknowledgment and affirmation that came from audience participation. This is consistent with criticisms of platform capitalism around the world, which holds that platforms provide symbolic avenues for speech while taking advantage of user labour without providing sufficient pay (Terranova, 2000; van Dijck et al., 2018). In this sense, YouTube shapes careers by offering symbolic wealth that artists must transform into other opportunities rather than by directly supplying sustainability. As a result, career development in the Mizo YouTubesphere is marked by a constant conflict between aspiration and limitation, recognition and sustainability.

A number of Inconsistencies at the core of platform use are shown by Mizo artists' experiences. On the one hand, YouTube offers a sense of autonomy from conventional media establishments, which some artists have characterized as being

inaccessible, slow, or selective. However, increased independence is accompanied by new reliance on audience analytics and computational algorithms. Regular uploads, targeted advertising, and adherence to platform guidelines are necessary to acquire and regain visibility, which is not guaranteed. In theory, this gives artists more freedom, but in reality, it exposes them to new kinds of vulnerability. The nature of audience interaction also presents a paradox: although viewers are quick to consume YouTube content, they hardly ever convert this engagement into financial or professional assistance for artists. Because of this, visibility is attained but stays superficial and unrelated to the more significant investments required for long-term employment. These conflicts highlight the logic of the “platform society,” as defined by van Dijck et al. (2018), in which global infrastructures influence cultural involvement by empowering local actors while also restricting their autonomy. This indicates that YouTube is both helpful and limiting for Mizo musicians; it increases reach but fragments attention, democratizes access but increases precarity, and generates symbolic capital but infrequently offers material security. These inconsistencies are structural rather than incidental, indicating platforms’ inherent nature as profit-driven middlemen. Understanding these conflicts is crucial to comprehending YouTube’s benefits as well as the risks it poses to musicians in minority-language region like Mizoram.

In conclusion, for Mizo musicians, YouTube has emerged as a key exposure platform, providing them with previously unheard-of chances to share their work, connect with fans, and get noticed. By allowing artists to circumvent conventional gatekeepers, the platform democratizes visibility and dissemination. However, this chapter’s findings also draw attention to these affordances’ limitations. Despite being highly prized, visibility is brittle and influenced by computational factors outside of artists’ control. Because YouTube monetization is inadequate and audience interaction seldom translates into financial sustainability, career development opportunities on the platform are still restricted. The complicated realities of digital music production in Mizoram are encapsulated in the tensions at the core of platform use: independence against dependency, visibility versus sustainability, and recognition versus precarity. YouTube has become a vital exposure

tool for Mizo musicians, giving them hitherto unheard-of opportunities to share their work, interact with followers, and get recognition. Through the platform, artists can bypass traditional gatekeepers, democratizing visibility and distribution. Nevertheless, the results presented in this chapter also highlight the limitations of these affordances. Visibility is fragile and impacted by computational elements outside the artists' control, even though it is highly valued. Career growth options on YouTube remain limited due to the platform's poor profitability and the infrequent conversion of audience involvement into financial sustainability. The contradictions at the heart of platform use—independence vs dependence, visibility versus sustainability, and acknowledgment versus precarity—encapsulate the complex reality of digital music production in Mizoram.

CHAPTER V

CREATIVITY, STRATEGY, AND SURVIVAL IN THE PLATFORM ERA

5.1 Introduction

The results of the second research goal—to comprehend how digital platforms, particularly YouTube and Instagram, impact Mizo artists’ creative, strategic, and financial decisions—are presented in this chapter. This chapter examines how artists modify their content, control their image, and attempt to make a living within the framework of platform culture using data from interviews.

Today, a large number of artists in Mizoram create digital content in addition to music. They need to consider how their music will appear on screens, how it will function on platforms, and how online audiences will react to it. This chapter examines how these choices are made and how platforms influence both financial survival and artistic freedom. Themes include identity management, cross-platform strategy, innovative platform trend adaptation, and monetization challenges. The results demonstrate that platforms both empower and challenge artists. More freedom to publish and promote music is provided by digital platforms, but they also come with pressure to keep up with trends, stay involved, and handle financial and technological unpredictability. By focusing on real experiences from Mizo artists, this chapter helps to understand the daily realities of making music in a platform-driven world.

5.2 Creativity Under Platform Pressure

The way Mizo artists approach creativity has changed significantly as a result of digital media. A number of participants talked about the transition from creating music as a means of expression to creating content that could attract internet attention and views. Their songwriting, video production, and distribution tactics have been significantly impacted by this change in creative orientation, which is

mostly due to the way that YouTube, Instagram Reels, and Shorts favour brief, interesting formats. One participant thought back on this change: “We just wrote songs we loved before YouTube. Now I’m thinking more along the lines of ‘Will people watch this? Will they forego it?’”. “Instagram Reels changed how I compose,” another person added. Since I am aware that people scroll quickly, I start strong and avoid lengthy introductions. These observations demonstrate how artists adjust fundamentally to the speed and style of algorithm-driven consumption by condensing information and front-loading hooks.

This change extends beyond the creation of music. Additionally, artists alter their topics and lyrics to steer clear of unfavourable responses or internet criticism. One artist shared: “I wanted to write a protest song, but I stopped because I didn’t want drama. YouTube comments can be cruel”. Another said, “Even my Christian songs—I try not to be too emotional or sad because people won’t share them. They like happy content.”. These illustrations show how artists respond to platform standards by compromising and engaging in subtle forms of self-censorship. Perceived platform logic also influences language and genre. Although artists realized that platform prominence frequently rewarded particular trends, they nonetheless stated a wish to remain adaptable: “Slow acoustic songs are my favourite, but I started incorporating trap beats because they get more clicks” one artist explained. To reach a wider audience, others started using bilingual lyrics, frequently combining English and Mizo. “I occasionally include English verses merely to facilitate communication with those outside of Mizoram. I am aware that YouTube suggests more if the title contains English,” said another.

It’s interesting to note that not everyone views these choices as restrictive. Platform-driven limitations are seen as creative difficulties by certain artists. One participant remarked, “I like to make something short but still emotional—it’s like a game.” This viewpoint demonstrates that artists actively change their techniques within the constraints of digital space rather than being passive victims of algorithms. Many still struggle with how much to change. “I want to be real, but I also want people to listen,” one musician stated, “The current conflict is between wanting to be seen and

wanting to be yourself.” The core of music-making in the platform era is this creative tension between visibility and authenticity, art and algorithm. To put it briefly, digital platforms influence the form, content, and tone of music in addition to hosting it. These dynamics are well known to Mizo artists, who use a combination of strategy, compromise, and imaginative reimagining to deal with them.

Mizo musicians’ use of YouTube has been characterized by their creativity in both musical expression and content presentation. Artists frequently stressed that the platform gave them the freedom to experiment with form, style, and genre in ways that were rarely possible with traditional media. YouTube allowed for diversity and experimentation, such as acoustic versions, cover songs, or hybrid mixes of local and international sounds, in contrast to radio and television, which tended to promote polished, mainstream productions. This artistic freedom is a reflection of the “networked self,” as defined by Papacharissi (2010), in which people curate and project identities via digital platforms. For musicians, expressing themselves creatively on YouTube turns into a purposeful display of identity that appeals to a variety of audiences rather than only being an artistic act. However, the platform’s design also places limitations on inventiveness. Many participants acknowledged feeling under pressure to modify their work to fit what they thought the algorithm would reward or to adhere to “trending” forms.

The paradox of digital creativity ’s ex’mplified by this tension: YouTube promotes flexibility but yet enforces subtle forms of uniformity (Burgess & Green, 2018). Some artists talked about purposefully creating “catchy” or “shareable” content since they understood that metrics like views, likes, and comments were used to determine the worth of their work. This supports the finding made by Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2011) that cultural workers are increasingly framing creativity in terms of business logics. Artists in Mizoram, a region with little resources, also demonstrated incredible creativity in making music videos on a shoestring, frequently improvising using available technology or personal networks. These tactics emphasize both precarity and resilience: creativity is both shaped by and thrives under limits. In conclusion, musicians in the Mizo YouTubesphere reconcile the needs of platform

prominence with their own creative expression in a dynamic interaction between autonomy and adaptability.

5.3 Strategic Use of Multiple Platforms

Mizo artists are using multi-platform tactics more frequently as digital platforms become more widespread in order to increase their visibility, keep their audiences interested, and take advantage of each platform's unique affordances. Many musicians use Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and occasionally Spotify or TuneCore in complementing ways rather than depending on just one medium.

A number of individuals stressed that their primary source for lengthy audio files and music videos is YouTube. "YouTube is the main place," one person clarified, "We drop the genuine thing there. However, we must hint at it wherever else." In this marketing strategy, Instagram in particular has taken centre stage. Because it is designed for short-form engagement, artists utilize it to create anticipation through Reels, story countdowns, or behind-the-scenes videos. "One day prior to the YouTube debut, I share a teaser video on Instagram", and according to one artist, "sometimes that gets more excitement than the release itself." These platforms play a variety of functions in the artists' approach. Facebook serves as a hub for engagement, while Instagram and YouTube are used for official, long-form material. "The content lives on YouTube," one person clarified, "You can keep it alive on Instagram." This division of labour demonstrates how artists intentionally match the tone, frequency, and style of their work to the platform's technological and cultural requirements. In addition to promotional activities, platforms are utilized differently based on the objectives of the artist. Instagram, for instance, is thought to be superior at developing para-social connection with followers. "I can't respond to everyone on YouTube," a singer-songwriter posted, "However, I interact with fans and share stories on Instagram. They seem more connected." Fans who feel intimately attached are more inclined to share songs, go to events, and stick with a band for the long run, so this closer engagement has strategic significance.

Utilizing Facebook for local visibility is another tactic. Facebook continues to have an impact on Mizo audiences between the ages of 30 and 50, including church groups and community organizations, despite its decline among younger viewers worldwide. One performer clarified: “I have older listeners on Facebook when I perform gospel or traditional tunes. They hardly ever use Instagram.” This demonstrates how artists divide up their fans into different platforms and adjust their work accordingly. Additionally, a few users indicated distributing their music to Spotify, Apple Music, and other international streaming services using TuneCore or DistroKid. Nonetheless, many agreed that these services are more beneficial for completeness or prestige than for real revenue or reach. According to one musician “I upload on Spotify just to say I’m there, not because I earn much.” Others pointed out that these channels support the branding of artists: Another remarked, “When people look for you and find you on all platforms, it makes you look serious.” Artists admitted that running several channels may be time-consuming and sometimes intimidating, even with their strategic understanding. One member acknowledged that posting everywhere is exhausting and said, “There are moments when I think I spend more time organizing posts than actually producing music.” In conclusion, Mizo artists intentionally choose where, when, and how to interact with various platforms rather than publishing content at random. Trial, error, and observation have produced an emergent platform literacy, which is reflected in their approach. In the rapidly evolving digital music landscape, this multi-platform approach aids artists in preserving visibility, broadening their fan base, and remaining flexible.

In addition to inventiveness, a common feature in artists’ approaches to YouTube was strategy. Participants talked about deliberately creating strategies to increase exposure and audience involvement, such as planning uploads for the best times and aggressively pushing content via cross-posting on social media. These behaviours are a reflection of what academics refer to as “algorithmic imaginaries” (Bucher, 2017), in which users create their own conceptions of how platforms work and respond to them strategically. Even after acknowledging that they were not entirely familiar with YouTube’s algorithm, artists continued to learn by trial and error, modifying their tactics in response to audience reaction trends. Some focus on

partnerships as a means of combining audiences and expanding reach, while others experimented with thumbnails, titles, and tags. These behaviours show that artists are active agents who creatively negotiate uncertainty rather than passive recipients of platform dynamics. However, these tactics also highlight the drawbacks of self-promotion. The distinction between artistic labour and entrepreneurial hustling is becoming increasingly hazy as cultural workers take on the burden of marketing themselves, as noted by Banks and Hesmondhalgh (2009). This self-promotion frequently conflicts with Mizo artists' limited time, energy, and financial resources. Concerned that their exposure might suffer if they weren't active, several participants described feeling pressured to maintain an "active presence" online, even if they didn't have any new content to offer. This pressure is an example of the temporal demands of platform labour, where the speed at which content is transmitted is constant. Furthermore, techniques weren't always equally successful. This reflects the unpredictable nature of algorithmic visibility, as some artists were able to create sizable followings while others saw little return despite identical efforts. Thus, strategic techniques become both powerful and draining, providing musicians with tools to increase their visibility while also trapping them in a never-ending optimization cycle that reflects larger platform capitalism dynamics.

5.4 Managing Digital Identity and Branding

Managing one's internet identity has become a crucial aspect of the creative and professional lives of many Mizoram artists. Social media sites like YouTube and Instagram serve as stages for artists to create, preserve, and perform their artistic identities in addition to being distribution methods. This section examines how Mizo musicians intentionally construct their image, strike a balance between strategy and authenticity, and manage the conflict between their personal and professional identities.

The significance of maintaining a recognizable and consistent image across platforms was discussed by a number of participants. According to one, "My brand now includes my logo, colour scheme, and the attire I wear in my videos...Prior to

YouTube, I had not considered these possibilities.” This indicates a growing understanding that one’s visual and personal presentation is just as important to digital success as their musical abilities. For this type of identification work, Instagram in particular has emerged as a crucial medium. It enables artists to communicate carefully chosen tidbits about their personality, interests, studio work, and way of life. “Sometimes people connect more with my stories and my everyday life than my songs,” a female artist said, “They seem to know me because of it.” When followers feel emotionally connected to the artist despite not having direct touch, this type of carefully controlled visibility fosters parasocial ties. Artists understand, however, that their online persona must be consistent with the type of audience they hope to attract. Gospel musicians, for example, typically maintain a more chaste and spiritual public persona. “I steer clear of certain kinds of content because I know my audience is from the church community,” one person clarified, and added, “That must even be reflected in my posts.”

To appeal to youth culture, younger pop or hip-hop artists, on the other hand, frequently use more informal, experimental, or edgy aesthetics. A lot of attendees also stressed how important storytelling is to branding. “Whenever I release a new song, I share why I wrote it, who inspired it, or what I was going through,” one participant shared, “People are more concerned as a result.” This strategy illustrates how branding encompasses emotive storylines that lend the music a personal significance in addition to images. However, there are pressures associated with managing one’s digital identity. Artists frequently believe that in order to stay relevant, they must maintain appearances and be active on the internet. “I feel like people forget me if I don’t post for a week,” one person commented, “Being fascinating all the time is stressful.” Others acknowledged that maintaining a polished image of themselves can occasionally make them feel false or worn out. “Even when we’re having difficulties, we must pretend everything is fine on the internet. That is challenging.”

Nonetheless, the majority of musicians concur that maintaining one’s online persona has become an essential aspect of being a working musician, particularly in regions

like Mizoram where traditional media provides little visibility. Instagram profiles, hashtags, YouTube thumbnails, and even the tone of responses are all considered to be a part of a well-crafted image. In conclusion, Mizo artists are developing a more calculated approach to the creation, performance, and defence of their online persona. This promotes audience loyalty and exposure, but it also necessitates ongoing self-monitoring and emotional labour. In the platformized music industry, digital branding is becoming a necessary talent rather than an optional one.

5.5 Income, Monetization, and Frustration

At first, a big draw for a lot of Mizo artists was the possibility of making money on websites like YouTube. A fresh revenue source that circumvented the constraints of Mizoram's tiny and dispersed music industry appeared to be promised by the platform's monetization approach, particularly the YouTube Partner Program (YPP). But the majority of artists now understand that platform monetization is more difficult and annoying than they initially thought.

Despite having enabled monetization on their YouTube channels, a few of interviewees stated that their earnings were insignificant. "Even though my channel has over a thousand subscribers, I still make less than two hundred rupees a month," said one member plainly, "My internet expenses aren't even covered by it." YouTube's requirements, including 1,000 subscribers and 4,000 watch hours, were seen as difficult to meet in a region like Mizoram where the audience is tiny and divided by age, language, and genre. "I had to wait almost two years just to qualify for monetization," another artist stated, "When I was eventually accepted, the salary was insignificant." In response to this, some artists explored alternative revenue strategies. A few reported receiving sponsorships or paid promotions from local brands. "I don't earn much from YouTube itself, but sometimes a clothing brand pays me to wear their t-shirt in my video or tag them on Instagram," said one young artist. Others offered online music classes, vocal coaching, or did freelance editing work to support their creative careers.

These initiatives, however, frequently rely on personal networking and ongoing promotion, both of which can be draining. “It’s like I have to keep marketing myself every day just to get one small deal or class,” one singer said, “There is no steady source of revenue.” A few artists also looked into regional sites that provide a more localized monetization strategy, such as Thulkhung and Darbu, although even in these cases, the profits were not very high. “The numbers are minimal, but they pay you based on views or downloads.” However, one musician on Darbu said, “I appreciate the effort because at least they’re trying to help Mizo artists.” Frustration was a recurring element in all of the interviews. Artists believed that YouTube and similar platforms promoted major artists and viral content while creating the appearance of equal opportunity. “While serious bands like us struggle to garner views, I’ve seen folks who post humorous videos or goofy dance routines become popular”, one person remarked, “It’s unfair, but that’s how the algorithm works.”

A number of musicians also noted how opaque YouTube’s payment system is. “I have no idea how they figure out the money. I occasionally receive 10,000 views with no revenue”, one irate singer remarked, “There are other occasions when I get paid more for fewer views.” Certain artists questioned if commercialization was worth the effort because of this ambiguity and the fact that certain payments were either delayed or missing. Furthermore, artists’ revenue tactics were impacted by cultural influences as well. For instance, gospel performers frequently felt uneasy about making money off of their work. “Charging people for worship songs feels wrong”, one participant who is interested in church-based music stated, “I publish them for ministry, not money.”

In conclusion, internet platforms rarely give Mizo artists financial sustainability, even though they do offer some avenues for revenue. Unpredictability, algorithm dependence, and unequal monetization are common. Because of this, the majority of artists use YouTube and Instagram as promotional tools rather than as sources of income, use them to connect with followers, grow their name, and land jobs. Their tactics and emotional connection to platform culture are still shaped by the discrepancy between expectations and reality in digital profits.

5.6 Summary of Findings

This chapter examined how Mizo musicians' creative, strategic, and financial decisions are influenced by digital media, particularly YouTube and Instagram. Twenty-one people were interviewed, and the results show that whereas platforms provide effective means of connection and exposure, they also introduce new types of labour, constraints, and demands.

One of the main conclusions is that social media sites like YouTube and Instagram influence artists' creations and frequency of production in addition to how they portray themselves. Artists are compelled by the logic of visibility, which is fuelled by algorithms and popular formats, to use tactics like publishing content frequently, improving thumbnails and titles, and researching platform metrics. To remain "relevant," a number of musicians stated altering their presentation, musical style, or upload schedules. This illustrates how digital visibility is algorithmically conditioned rather than neutral. Platforms are often viewed by artists as branding tools, places to develop a recognizable online persona. In particular, Instagram has emerged as a crucial platform for sustaining a visual presence, interacting with followers, and developing a distinctive personal brand. However, this approach necessitates ongoing self-promotion, meticulous image management, and emotional labour, particularly for individuals who experience pressure to project professionalism and cheerfulness online. For the majority of Mizo musicians, YouTube's revenue strategy continues to be financially frustrating. Although many have made monetization possible, relatively few generate a sizable income. Mizoram's small population and narrow audience reach make it challenging to reach the engagement and criteria required for YouTube's AdSense to be profitable. Some artists use side jobs, online courses, or sponsorships to augment their income, but these possibilities are erratic and require entrepreneurial abilities outside of their creative work.

The results also point to a conflict between platform economies and cultural values. Particularly, gospel and church-based singers said they were uncomfortable with

their content being marketed. Their approach to monetization is further complicated by the fact that they view platforms as instruments for outreach and ministry rather than for financial gain. All things considered, this chapter demonstrates how internet platforms have evolved into both necessary and challenging environments for Mizo artists. They provide exposure and artistic flexibility, but they also come with demands to change, advertise, and participate continuously. Algorithmic systems, cultural norms, and financial limitations influence strategic decisions, making artists' platformized lives both empowering and draining. Finding methods to continue their creative work in the absence of a steady pay check was more important to many artists than surviving on YouTube. Despite the fact that YouTube offered visibility and sporadic chances, participants emphasized time and again that it could not take the place of other sources of income. Some artists worked at other jobs, while others were dependent on their families or viewed music as a hobby rather than their main source of income. Precariousness is the rule rather than the exception in discussions of cultural labour around the world (Gill & Pratt, 2008). The problem of sustainability was even more acute in Mizoram's little market: institutional support for music was still scarce, and audience participation frequently did not result in financial assistance. But it wasn't only about money to survive.

According to a number of artists, YouTube is a means of symbolic survival—a means of continuing to be visible, relevant, and creatively active even in the face of meagre financial gain. This is how YouTube operated as what Hesmondhalgh (2019) refers to as a site of “hope labour,” where people spend time and effort hoping for returns that might never come to pass. Collective tactics were also necessary for survival; musicians regularly worked together, shared gear, or helped each other out with releases, underscoring the value of unity in risky situations. Many artists declared their resolve to keep making art in spite of these obstacles, portraying survival as a sign of resiliency and cultural dedication. This emphasizes how survival in the Mizo YouTubesphere has two meanings: it is a fight against precarity and evidence of the lasting importance that musicians attach to music as a means of community, identity, and expression. YouTube is therefore essential to Mizo musicians' capacity to

manage the delicate balance between ambition and perseverance in their creative lives, even though it cannot guarantee sustainability on its own.

CHAPTER VI

LOCAL PLATFORMS IN A GLOBAL LANDSCAPE

6.1 Introduction

Examining the advantages and disadvantages of regional digital platforms (such as Darbu and Thulkhung) in comparison to YouTube and other international services is the third study goal covered in this chapter. Growing interest in developing regionally relevant platforms that represent local culture, values, and pragmatic needs has coincided with the Mizo music industry's rising adoption of digital media. Two noteworthy initiatives to localize music distribution and consumption in Mizoram are Darbu and Thulkhung, which provide musicians with alternatives to popular platforms controlled by international algorithms and Western standards.

Darbu and Thulkhung seek to give local voices and visibility precedence over YouTube and Spotify, which are enmeshed in a global logic of virality and algorithmic ranking. These platforms were intended as cultural interventions as well as technological solutions, places where artists could share their work with familiar audiences, make use of local language features, and get around the difficulties and restrictions of international monetization systems. These attempts were well received by artists. "With Darbu, I feel like the platform understands where I come from," one participant said, "It is designed for us, not only for opinions and fashions." But even with the best of intentions and initial enthusiasm, there is still a lack of widespread adoption and real-world use of these platforms. Their expansion and impact are nevertheless hampered by problems with usability, sustainability, audience size, and promotion. Institutional voices provide helpful background information to comprehend the goals and difficulties of the platforms, especially those of Music Domain Mizoram and the app developers. This chapter aims to comprehend not only how artists utilize these services but also what they mean within Mizoram's larger digital ecology by contrasting platform managers' insights with artist interviews.

6.2 The Rise of Local Platforms

In the history of Mizoram's music ecosystem, the emergence of regional internet platforms like as Darbu and Thulkhung represents a significant turning point. Both platforms arose in reaction to the structural constraints, particularly those related to profitability, visibility, and cultural representation, that many Mizo artists encountered when utilizing international platforms such as YouTube or Spotify. The goal of these in-house services was to localize digital infrastructure and establish an environment that would allow Mizo material to flourish on its own terms.

One of the first streaming services created specifically for the Mizo community was Darbu, which debuted in 2021. According to media reports and institutional interviews, its originator envisioned it as "a platform made by Mizos for Mizo musicians," with a focus on equitable compensation and copyright protection. "We felt that artists were giving away their work for free," remembered one of its developers, "Unless you reach a certain number of views, there is no assurance that you will make money on YouTube. Darbu was our method of giving the artist back control." Several artists, some of whom joined Darbu in its early stages of promotion, shared this ambition for independence and sustainability. Mizo gospel and modern music were the main focuses of Thulkhung, which was created under the auspices of Music Domain Mizoram (MDM). It attempted to conserve genres that are frequently ignored by commercial algorithms and permitted handpicked submissions. "We wanted to protect the songs that matter to our community" one MDM official explained.

At first, a number of musicians had high hopes for the platforms. "I was thrilled to upload to Darbu because it felt like it was ours," a teenage singer-songwriter wrote, "They even assisted in the first promotion of my song." Thulkhung feels like a safe place, according to another gospel performer, "Unlike YouTube, I don't have to worry about copyright violations or content regulations." But scepticism frequently tempers enthusiasm. The duration of these platforms was uncertain to certain artists.

According to one participant, “Apps have come and gone. People simply quit utilizing them if there aren’t a solid plan or any upgrades.” Concerns about user traffic were voiced by others. “Uploading is easy, but who’s going to listen?” said one, “YouTube is still used by everyone.”

Darbu and Thulkhung are noteworthy attempts to create digital environments that embody regional goals and values in spite of these reservations. They demonstrate how digital innovation can have a local foundation and be driven by both cultural stewardship and business concerns. Early users were artists who valued the support and sense of ownership these platforms offered. They explained how, unlike worldwide platforms, platform administrators were approachable and eager to help. “I messaged the Darbu admin and got help within minutes,” one artist posted, “Try using YouTube for that—it’s not possible.” In conclusion, the ascent of Darbu and Thulkhung is indicative of a larger Mizo music scene yearning for platforms that are adapted to local conditions. Their presence signifies a significant movement towards digital self-determination and community-driven content infrastructure, despite the numerous obstacles they encounter.

The establishment of Darbu and Thulkhung serves as an example of how Mizoram’s local businesspeople and cultural stakeholders attempted to recover online space for native music. Their ascent stemmed from two primary goals: first, to meet the unfulfilled demands of Mizo artists who were dissatisfied with YouTube’s ambiguous revenue scheme; and second, to provide a culturally grounded substitute that would protect Mizo identity in the face of the worldwide digital revolution. Darbu was designed to be a platform for music distribution and monetization where musicians could post their work, get paid for downloads or streams, and have more control over their content. In contrast, Thulkhung placed a strong emphasis on music sharing and social engagement, establishing itself as a platform for independent musicians to promote themselves as well as a cultural repository. Participants commended both platforms for their symbolic meaning, which showed that Mizoram could create rather than merely adopt technologies from around the world. But structural weaknesses also played a role in their development. As consumers returned to

YouTube for convenience, Thulkhung suffered with user retention, whereas Darbu, for instance, depended mainly on a small team and lacked the financial resources to scale properly. Notwithstanding these obstacles, the very rise of these platforms highlights what academics refer to as “platform nationalism” (Jin, 2015), in which local areas strive for sovereignty in digital ecosystems controlled by global capital. The emergence of Darbu and Thulkhung gave Mizo artists optimism that digital tools could be redesigned to represent local priorities, whether through integration with local payment systems, Mizo-language information, or culturally familiar design aspects, in addition to new distribution channels. Therefore, their ascent might be interpreted as a technological and symbolic intervention in the larger fight for autonomy, visibility, and acknowledgment in digital music cultures.

6.3 Artists’ Perceptions and Experiences

Regarding regional internet platforms such as Darbu and Thulkhung, artists in Mizoram have conflicting opinions. Although they generally agree with the concept of a local platform and understand the rationale behind it, there are significant differences in how they actually use and perceive these services. Although the concept of a platform created especially for Mizo artists appeals to many on an emotional level, real-world obstacles frequently prevent regular use.

Positive comments were made by a few artists who were actively involved in the early development of these platforms. “Darbu contacted me when they were about to launch and explained how they were trying to protect our music and give us a share of the revenue,” one participant explained, “I appreciated that they came up to us directly.” Some musicians’ early trust was bolstered by this type of outreach and open communication. “I was among the first group of musicians who signed up,” remembered another performer, “The team’s small size and willingness to help at any time pleased me.” Particularly for gospel artists, Thulkhung has been regarded as a useful location. One Christian artist shared, “Thulkhung gives space for songs that may not be very commercial but are important in our culture. On YouTube, gospel music sometimes doesn’t reach many people unless it goes viral.” This participant

valued the sense of spiritual and cultural purpose behind the platform, even if the audience size was smaller than YouTube. However, many other artists expressed doubt or reluctance. A recurring concern was the limited user base. “You can post your songs on Darbu, but most people still check YouTube,” one rapper stated. Others concurred, stating that even though they were aware of Thulkhung, they were unsure if anyone paid attention there, thus they were unmotivated to learn more. Some artists just didn’t know how the platforms worked. “I’ve heard the name Thulkhung, but I’ve never used it,” one participant wrote, “I already have YouTube and Instagram, but no one has explained how it operates.” Others pointed out that when these platforms first emerged, there was no official workshop or orientation, which caused uncertainty and hesitancy. They decided to stick with what they already knew in the absence of appropriate direction.

The technological and aesthetic experience presented another difficulty.’ Some participants thought the apps’ functionality and design fell short of their expectations. “I like the idea, but the app doesn’t look very modern,” one artist commented. If they want people to take it seriously, they need to improve the design. “It’s slow sometimes, and if the user experience is not smooth, we can’t expect people to keep using it,” another person said. Some were more deeply concerned with sustainability. “In Mizoram, we’ve seen many apps or platforms start with energy but then disappear after a few months,” one participant stated, “I need reassurance that Darbu and Thulkhung will survive, but I also want to encourage them.” This shows that while emotional support exists for local initiatives, artists are also practical—they want consistency and long-term commitment before investing their time and content. It’s interesting to note that some artists expressed a preference for local platforms’ sense of community. “On YouTube, there are too many people and too much competition,” one teenage singer clarified, “Darbu has a more intimate atmosphere. In the algorithm, you are more than simply another name.” Another said she was more satisfied with being on Darbu’s first page than she was with trying to get views on international platforms.

Though varied, artists' reactions to Darbu and Thulkhung were instructive. As places where they felt appreciated, respected, and represented, many embraced these platforms. By selecting and classifying songs in ways that are culturally appropriate, Darbu and Thulkhung increased the visibility of local artists, in contrast to YouTube, where Mizo content frequently vanishes in the algorithmic sea of worldwide music. One attendee emphasized Darbu's function in lessening sentiments of exclusion by describing it as a location where "even small artists matter." Others praised the sense of community these sites fostered, stating that they seemed "closer to home" than YouTube's impersonality. Artists were realistic about the constraints at the same time. Many pointed out that profits were still modest, audiences were small, and occasionally, technical issues eroded confidence. Some even acknowledged that they mostly relied on YouTube for visibility and only uploaded music to Darbu as a symbolic gesture. This dual approach exemplifies what could be called "platform hybridity" (Nieborg & Poell, 2018), in which artists blend local and international platforms to optimize cultural resonance and reach. While mid-career and established musicians were more grateful for the local acclaim and symbolic validation that Darbu and Thulkhung provided, younger artists were more eager for worldwide exposure, viewing YouTube as the ultimate goal. Crucially, some participants also emphasized how local platforms helped them escape the moral ambiguity that comes with generating money off of religious or gospel content on YouTube, as Darbu audiences frequently saw such content as a means of sharing culture rather than making money. In general, the experiences of artists show a harmony between zeal and prudence, optimism and reality. Although they recognize the symbolic importance of local platforms, they are nevertheless dependent on global services for broader reach and career advancement.

In conclusion, there is a conflict between cultural devotion and digital pragmatism in the way that artists view Darbu and Thulkhung. In actuality, people frequently go back to YouTube and Instagram because of their larger audience and better user experience, even though they theoretically embrace the idea of local platforms. Local platforms need to make investments in improved design, more effective

outreach, and more transparent artist communication if they are to become genuinely vital to Mizo music culture.

6.4 Affordances of Local Platforms

Despite the numerous obstacles they encounter, local digital platforms such as Darbu and Thulkhung present a number of special advantages that are frequently unavailable on global platforms, particularly for artists operating in a particular regional and cultural context like Mizoram. The main factors that keep certain artists supporting and using these local businesses are these affordances, which range from accessibility and monetization to cultural significance and emotional connection.

Localized Monetization Opportunities: Many participants mentioned that one of the key strengths of local platforms is their potential to provide monetization options tailored to regional realities. While YouTube requires creators to meet specific thresholds—such as 1,000 subscribers and 4,000 watch hours—before earning money through AdSense, Darbu and Thulkhung reportedly offer simpler and more immediate models. One artist explained, “Darbu shares revenue from the beginning. Even if you’re not famous, you still get something if people stream your song.” This model, though modest in scale, gives creators—especially newcomers—a more achievable entry point into earning from their content. Another added, “I may not get millions of views like in YouTube, but Darbu gives something, and they also give updates about the revenue and usage. That feels honest.” This sense of transparency and fairness was repeatedly emphasized by those who engaged with Darbu’s monetization system.

Cultural and Linguistic Relevance: Participants also highlighted the comfort and connection they felt when uploading to platforms that are designed around Mizo cultural norms and the local language. A gospel artist shared, “My music is for local listeners, and it feels good to be on a platform where everyone understands the lyrics without subtitles.” For many, this kind of linguistic inclusivity was seen as an emotional and symbolic validation of their work. Similarly, another participant noted,

“On YouTube, I have to think if I should write in English or Mizo. On Darbu or Thulkhung, I don’t need to translate myself.” These platforms become culturally safe spaces where artists don’t feel the pressure to conform to global styles or languages just to gain attention.

Closer Communication and Support: Artists appreciated the accessibility and responsiveness of the local platform teams. While YouTube or Spotify have massive global support systems that often feel impersonal, Darbu and Thulkhung offer more direct relationships. “I can call them if there’s a problem,” one participant said. “They know me, and they want to help. That’s something you can’t get from YouTube.” This close connection helps build a sense of community and trust, making artists feel valued as contributors rather than just data points. Another artist mentioned that Thulkhung helped them upload and organize a full album: “I didn’t know how to format the files. They helped me step by step. That was something new for me.” Such experiences reflect how local platforms act as collaborative partners, not just distribution tools.

Greater Content Control and Representation: Participants also noted that they had more control over how their music is presented. Unlike YouTube, where the platform decides how and where your content appears (often through algorithmic curation), Darbu and Thulkhung offer curated spaces where artists can be highlighted by choice rather than chance. An interviewee explained, “My song was on the homepage of Darbu for two weeks. It made me feel like someone noticed my work.” This kind of attention can be especially important in smaller music communities where public recognition has symbolic and career value.

Nurturing Community-Based Genres: One recurring point was that local platforms help sustain musical styles that may not thrive globally, such as gospel, traditional, and folk music. Artists in these genres felt that YouTube favours “trendy” content or polished music videos, leaving little space for culturally rooted or less commercial styles. “Thulkhung is good for Christian songs, and there are people who still look

for that kind of music,” said one gospel musician. “On YouTube, it gets buried, but here it’s easier to find.”

Emotional and Cultural Ownership: Finally, some artists described the experience of being on a local platform as a form of emotional ownership. One participant put it simply: “It’s ours. It may be small, but it’s made for us.” For creators who often feel invisible in larger digital spaces, local platforms offer not just distribution, but recognition and respect.

The main advantages of Darbu and Thulkhung are their accessibility and cultural uniqueness. Unlike YouTube’s algorithm-driven popularity, these platforms provided carefully curated places that highlighted and honoured Mizo material. Linguistic accessibility was one of the main advantages mentioned by participants. Both platforms had Mizo-language interfaces, which made them easier to use for local audiences who might not speak English well. Another was monetization design: Darbu experimented with direct download payments and subscription models, which allowed artists to make money in ways that seemed more open and equitable than YouTube’s ad-based approach. Equally important was social affordances, which enabled users to participate in conversations, distribute local music throughout networks, and foster a feeling of communal ownership. For artists, these affordances aligned with what Gibson (1979) calls the “possibilities for action” embedded in platforms: Darbu afforded earning opportunities and legal recognition of ownership, while Thulkhung afforded visibility, networking, and cultural connection. Additionally, a number of participants noted that these channels gave rise to prospects for specialized genres, such as traditional, patriotic, and gospel songs—all of which have a terrible YouTube performance. Local platforms encouraged diversity rather than following international trends by offering genre-specific filters and culturally appropriate categories. Furthermore, because these platforms were smaller, they had what some artists referred to as “a friendlier algorithm,” meaning that new songs were not quickly buried but instead stayed visible for a longer period of time. These affordances demonstrate how local platforms can promote equity,

inclusivity, and cultural preservation in ways that are frequently disregarded by global platforms.

6.5 Limitations and Challenges

Although local platforms like Thulkhung and Darbu were praised for their relevance and vision, artists also expressed a number of grave concerns that restrict their usefulness in contrast to international platforms like YouTube and Instagram. Despite their dissatisfaction with algorithmic systems and commercialization obstacles, the majority of artists continue to rely more heavily on global platforms, which can be explained by these technical and cultural issues.

Small User Base and Limited Reach: The most frequently mentioned issue was the limited audience size. Several artists explained that while they respect what local platforms are trying to do, their content doesn't reach enough listeners to make it worth the effort. One artist put it bluntly: "I uploaded my EP on Darbu, but only a few people streamed it. On YouTube, even if I get 1000 views, that's already more people." Another artist echoed the same concern: "If no one is using the app, what's the point? It's hard to build a fanbase when people don't even know the platform exists." This limited visibility impacts not only exposure but also motivation. Some artists expressed that they no longer upload regularly on local platforms because they feel like they are "releasing into a void."

Technical Issues and Poor User Experience: Many participants also pointed out technical problems with the apps, including bugs, crashes, or poor design. One participant who initially tried Darbu said: "It looked good at first, but the app was slow, and sometimes it didn't load. I stopped using it because it made me frustrated." Artists who use visual branding—like cover images, teasers, or promo materials—said that local platforms don't support such elements very well. As one artist noted: "On YouTube, I can schedule a release, I can premiere, I can add links. On Thulkhung, I just upload and wait. It feels very basic." This lack of professional

functionality makes it hard for artists to use these platforms as part of a broader promotional strategy.

Weak Promotion and Low Discoverability: Local platforms typically rely on manual discovery or word-of-mouth, in contrast to YouTube, which provides algorithmic discovery and tailored recommendations. A number of musicians revealed that although their music was posted, audiences never discovered it unless they provided the direct URL. One artist said: “Even my regular listeners didn’t know my new single was on Thulkhung until I told them. There’s no push.” Another remarked: “There’s no trending list, no way to find new artists unless you already know them. So, people don’t explore.” This lack of internal discoverability means that artists must do their own promotion, often directing people to an unfamiliar or unused app—something that is much harder than simply sharing a YouTube or Instagram link.

Uncertainty About Longevity and Growth: Some artists expressed doubts about whether platforms like Darbu or Thulkhung will be sustainable in the long run. One participant shared a past experience: “We had other local apps before, and they disappeared. That makes me afraid to invest time and energy again.” This sense of instability makes many artists hesitant to prioritize these platforms, especially when they are already juggling multiple commitments and channels. Another artist commented: “If the people behind the platform are not consistent, it won’t last. I don’t want to depend on something that may disappear.”

Lack of Training or Support: Another key challenge is the lack of onboarding or technical guidance for artists. Several participants shared that they didn’t know how to get started or didn’t receive any support. “I messaged the Darbu page, but no one replied for weeks,” said one participant. Another mentioned: “I want to join, but I don’t know the process. And no one is explaining.” This lack of clear communication and technical guidance discourages new artists from participating, especially those who are not very tech-savvy.

Comparison with Global Platforms: Several participants openly compared their experience with local platforms to YouTube or Instagram and found the local ones lacking in many areas—from analytics and real-time feedback to ease of sharing and engagement. One summed it up: “YouTube may be hard, but at least I know how it works. With Thulkhung, I’m still confused.” For most artists, digital platforms are not just about hosting music—they are tools for identity, branding, interaction, and growth. Unless local services catch up in these areas, their usage is likely to remain niche.

Notwithstanding their potential, Darbu and Thulkhung were beset by serious problems that threatened their long-term survival. Low adoption rates were the most commonly mentioned issue by both artists and institutional representatives. Due to habit, convenience, or a sense of global connectedness, audiences frequently turned to YouTube, underutilizing local channels. Without a large user base, monetization models remained unsustainable: as one participant put it, “You cannot earn when only a few hundred people download your song.” Another significant obstacle was technical problems. A number of artists recalled issues that prevented frequent use, such as lag, sluggish interfaces, or trouble uploading content. Another significant issue was piracy; according to several participants, music that were released on Darbu swiftly surfaced on YouTube without authorization. Financial instability made these issues worse. Local platforms found it difficult to sustain servers, employees, and marketing campaigns because they lacked YouTube or Spotify’s advertising revenue, financial support, and worldwide exposure. Furthermore, cultural difficulties also surfaced. Compared to YouTube, some younger users thought Darbu and Thulkhung were “less cool,” linking them to localism rather than cosmopolitanism. Their aspirational value was diminished by this notion, which made it challenging to draw in young, aspirational artists looking for more recognition. These difficulties are consistent with more extensive research on regional platforms, which indicates that local platforms are frequently overshadowed by global competitors in the absence of robust institutional or governmental backing (Lobato & Meese, 2016). Although Darbu and Thulkhung offered symbolic value in Mizoram, they were unable to compete with global services’ strong infrastructure,

financial incentives, and aspirational appeal. Thus, these shortcomings draw attention to the systemic injustices of platform capitalism, as smaller projects find it difficult to compete with multinational behemoths.

6.6 Institutional Perspectives

Although the majority of this research focuses on the opinions of artists, it also incorporates perspectives from institutional representatives, such as employees of Zonet, Akashvani Aizawl, and Music Domain Mizoram (MDM), who provided insightful opinions on the possibilities of regional platforms. From an institutional standpoint, local platforms were generally seen as necessary innovations, driven by the cultural and economic needs of Mizo artists. A member from Music Domain Mizoram (MDM), the group behind Thulkhung, explained: “We don’t have any control when we use YouTube. The money goes to big companies, not to the artists. We wanted something that gives back to our community.” MDM representatives highlighted how Thulkhung was born out of frustration with platform rules, piracy, and the algorithmic neglect of niche genres such as gospel or traditional Mizo music. The goal was to create a platform that reflected local values, language, and taste. “We wanted a space where Mizo music is not pushed aside by dance videos or foreign hits. A clean, dedicated place.”

However, even from within, the challenges of sustaining such a platform are clear. “We’re still small. It’s hard to keep up when people want features like Spotify or YouTube. But we’re trying to educate our artists and grow slowly.” A representative from Zonet offered a more cautious take. While recognizing the cultural role of local platforms, they questioned whether such platforms can survive in the long term without stronger infrastructure and policy support. “Right now, artists still use YouTube because that’s where the people are. Unless you change public behaviour, the platforms will struggle.” At Akashvani Aizawl, there was appreciation for local apps as digital archiving tools—a way to store and circulate Mizo songs beyond traditional radio. “Not everything fits on the airwaves. These platforms can help us keep our heritage alive in a modern format.” Overall, institutional voices supported

the intent behind local platforms but recognized that they face steep competition, technical limitations, and low public awareness.

Important insights regarding the function of local platforms in Mizoram's music ecosystem were provided by audience members and institutional officials. Although Darbu and Thulkhung were seen as worthwhile attempts to boost the local music industry by artist associations such as Mizo Zaimi Insuihkhawm Pawl (MZI) and Music Domain Mizoram (MDM), they also exposed weaknesses in infrastructure, copyright enforcement, and audience education. Institutional actors stressed that local platforms would continue to be niche experiments in the absence of concerted measures, such as official copyright protection, government assistance, and collaborations with telecom carriers. Conversely, audiences' opinions were not entirely consistent. Many, especially elderly listeners who cherished gospel music and Mizo-language content, loved the local platforms' accessibility and cultural focus. Nonetheless, YouTube's ease of use, worldwide connection, and compatibility with common digital habits like sharing links on WhatsApp or streaming on smart TVs tends to draw in younger audiences. Some users acknowledged that, "in principle," they wished to support Darbu or Thulkhung, but they kept returning to YouTube because of its better design and vast amount of content. This conflict between pragmatic convenience and cultural devotion exemplifies what academics refer to as "platform dependency" (Helmond, 2015), in which international services turn into infrastructure defaults that local alternatives are unable to replace. Institutional voices also pointed out that local platforms' ability to survive hinged on a wider ecosystem's support, which included community involvement, local sponsors, and advertising, in addition to audience adoption. Overall, institutional and audience viewpoints emphasize that although local platforms are regarded as cultural endeavours, their viability is uncertain unless they are included into more robust institutional and policy frameworks.

6.7 Summary of Findings

In contrast to international services like YouTube, this chapter looked at the advantages and disadvantages of local digital platforms, especially Darbu and Thulkhung. Several important conclusions are drawn from prior audience studies, institutional viewpoints, and artist interviews. The results of this chapter show that the rise of regional platforms like Darbu and Thulkhung in Mizoram needs to be viewed as placed interventions within the broader dynamics of platform capitalism rather than just as technology experiments. These platforms demonstrate how the logics of exposure, monetization, and connectedness are reinterpreted when placed in a tiny, linguistically and culturally distinct context, drawing on platform studies (van Dijck, Poell, & de Waal, 2018). By incorporating culturally specific affordances such as Mizo-language interfaces, community-oriented design, and monetization mechanisms that are more accessible to artists with minimal resources, Darbu and Thulkhung tried to localize the global digital environment. These characteristics can be viewed as intentional attempts to increase the “possibilities for action” accessible to Mizo artists, which were previously limited by YouTube’s opaque algorithmic systems and globalized monetization standards, according to affordance theory (Gibson, 1979; Bucher & Helmond, 2018). Many artists found that these affordances translated into real advantages including increased exposure for specialized genres, more control over ownership, and a sense of cultural recognition that was lacking from global platforms.

However, these local platforms’ shortcomings and difficulties also draw attention to the systemic injustices present in the global platform ecosystem. The long-term success of Darbu and Thulkhung was hindered by a number of issues, including low user uptake, technological instability, piracy, and the belief among younger audiences that international platforms like as YouTube were more “authentic” places for professional growth. This reflects what platform studies refer to as the global platforms’ infrastructural dominance, which makes it hard for smaller alternatives to compete, even when they offer culturally relevant features. These platforms serve as default infrastructures in daily digital life (Helmond, 2015; Lobato & Meese, 2016).

From the standpoint of affordance, Darbu and Thulkhung's affordances were both made possible and limited by larger socioeconomic circumstances. Although they provided community and recognition, they lacked the structural affordances of scale, stability, and aspirational capital that define global platforms. In this way, local platforms highlight the paradoxical character of affordances: while they create opportunities, they are constantly framed by broader structures of inequality and power.

This picture is further complicated by audience and institutional viewpoints. While acknowledging the symbolic value of local platforms, artist associations and media organizations stressed that sustainability necessitated more robust legal frameworks, copyright enforcement, and ecosystem-wide support. In theory, audiences indicated a preference for local platforms, but in reality, they turned back to YouTube due to its accessibility, ease of use, and compatibility with their daily digital habits. The relational nature of affordances is highlighted by this conflict, which arises from both the design of the technology and how people understand and incorporate it into their daily lives. Their affordances were respected but not always used by Darbu and Thulkhung, highlighting the discrepancy between platform adoption and symbolic cultural validity. Furthermore, the results imply that local platforms in Mizoram inhabit a transitional area, being both unstable as economic infrastructures and significant as cultural interventions. They represent efforts to defy the standardizing logics of global platforms, yet they are nonetheless reliant on the very systems they are trying to set themselves apart from. This chapter demonstrates that the success or failure of local platforms cannot be solely attributed to technological factors by utilizing affordance theory and platform research. Rather, their paths demonstrate the intricate interplay between audience practice, culture, design, and structural inequity that shapes digital music economies in small, non-metropolitan settings. These observations add to more general discussions about how platformization works differently in different places and how affordances are regionally conceived, appropriated, and limited in the global digital order.

First, the need for independence, cultural preservation, and more equitable monetization is the driving force behind local platforms. In order to give Mizo artists access to digital venues that respect local languages and values, give them ownership over their work, and liberate them from exploitative algorithms, platforms such as Darbu and Thulkhung were developed. These platforms have a strong connection to local identity, and their growth is a reflection of attempts to recover digital agency in an externally dominated media landscape. Second, these platforms are appealing in theory due to their affordances, which include language-specific functionality, localized monetization structures, and direct artist engagement. Artists valued these apps' non-competitive character, cultural relevance, and individualized support. For many users, these are platforms that have emotional and symbolic significance in addition to being alternative distribution channels. However, significant constraints frequently overwhelm these affordances. More importantly, these platforms aren't a major part of most artists' plans because of their tiny user base, technological unreliability, and lack of awareness. Because YouTube and Instagram have a wider audience, a more seamless user experience, and a more familiar audience, even artists who support the idea of local platforms frequently find themselves giving them priority. Put another way, pragmatism frequently triumphs over idealism. While acknowledging these constraints, institutional officials underlined that in order to assist these platforms develop, sustained investment, legislative backing, and digital education are required. They emphasized that local platforms might continue to be specialized tools rather than practical alternatives in the absence of coordinated efforts from creators, institutions, developers, and legislators.

Local platforms' rise in Mizoram is indicative of a larger worldwide trend in which smaller areas try to build digital infrastructures that value cultural uniqueness while challenging the power of global behemoths like Facebook, YouTube, and Spotify. According to van Dijck, Poell, and de Waal (2018), this section presents the notion that platforms are not neutral instruments but rather are infused with economic and cultural logics. For Mizoram, Darbu and Thulkhung were cultural interventions as well as technology experiments meant to preserve regional music customs and give musicians the opportunity to interact with audiences within recognizable social,

religious, and linguistic contexts. Their presence is a response to artists' dissatisfaction with international platforms, specifically with algorithmic marginalization, low revenue, and cultural invisibility. A number of participants emphasized how these regional platforms appeared to "speak their language," both literally and figuratively, by utilizing Mizo-language user interfaces, culturally relevant categories, and simpler payment methods than YouTube's ad-supported business model. But the emergence of these platforms also highlights more profound conflicts between local realities and global ambitions. They fight against systemic issues like piracy, poor adoption rates, and scarce funding even as they work to promote a feeling of community and local ownership. Thus, local platforms are positioned in this chapter as significant examples of "platform localization" (Lobato, 2016), in which the global platform economy is reframed in regional terms but is nonetheless limited by economic and infrastructure disparities. The chapter concludes that although Mizoram's local platforms present a compelling promise of digital autonomy, they presently occupy a neglected position within the larger platform ecosystem. They are symbolic but practically limited; significant but undeveloped. Beyond the purview of individual artist choices, structural, technical, and cultural initiatives are needed to close this gap.

CHAPTER VII

TRADITIONAL MEDIA AND INSTITUTIONAL INFLUENCE IN THE YOUTUBE ERA

7.1 Introduction

The layered and uneven nature of media change in Mizoram is demonstrated by the persistence of traditional media and institutions in the digital age. Even if YouTube has taken over as the primary distribution and visibility medium, radio, television, newspapers, and artist groups still have significant, if changing, roles to play. Platform studies (van Dijck, Poell, & de Waal, 2018) urge us to view YouTube as a component of a larger ecosystem in which established institutions cooperate, adapt, or resist rather than as a total replacement of earlier systems. Jenkins (2006) refers to this hybridity as “convergence culture,” where new and traditional media forms coexist, interact, and have an impact on one another. This implies that there are still several routes to recognition for Mizo artists: YouTube provides direct access and autonomy, but traditional media and associations still serve as cultural bridges that influence legitimacy, audience size, and employment prospects (Bourdieu, 1993; Hesmondhalgh, 2006). Therefore, this chapter looks at how artists view their responsibilities, how institutional players maintain influence in the YouTube era, and how the interaction between international platforms and local institutions changes access, visibility, and recognition in Mizoram’s music scene.

The fourth study goal, to examine how artist groups and traditional media institutions continue to influence access, visibility, and recognition in tandem with YouTube’s growth, is covered in this chapter. In the Mizo music ecosystem, traditional establishments like Akashvani Aizawl (All India Radio), Zonet Cable TV, and the Vanglaini newspaper, as well as organizations like Music Domain Mizoram (MDM), continue to have symbolic and strategic significance, even though YouTube and Instagram have taken over as the primary platforms for content distribution and artist engagement in Mizoram. In Mizoram, traditional media has a long history of

cultural influence. Long before the media became more platformized, many of these organizations were instrumental in bringing artists to a larger audience. Their ongoing existence gives artists a feeling of legitimacy, continuity, and approval. “YouTube is for now, but AIR is forever — they archive your work and it’s a kind of history,” one participant clarified. This sentiment, which has been repeated in a number of interviews, emphasizes how important institutional status and legacy are, even in the digital music economy. Digital platforms are frequently praised for their instantaneity and accessibility, but they also necessitate constant self-promotion and algorithmic modification. Traditional media organizations, on the other hand, offer curated, organized, and culturally grounded modes of interaction. Through organized shows, television appearances, and official features, they continue to mould artist narratives, all of which have social capital in Mizoram’s close-knit church and music communities.

7.2 Overview of Key Institutions

A number of important organizations support Mizoram’s media and cultural infrastructure, including newspapers, radio stations like AIR Aizawl, television networks like Zonet and LPS, and artist associations like Music Domain Mizoram (MDM) and Mizo Zaimi Insuihkhawm Pawl (MZI). In the past, these organizations served as gatekeepers, choosing which artists were acknowledged and given attention. They continue to be significant cultural bridges by providing legitimacy and institutional support, even as YouTube challenges their hegemony. Such organizations try to maintain authority by combining digital practices—live-streaming, uploading programs to YouTube, or integrating social media promotion—while also maintaining older structures of selection and control, according to the institutional theory perspective (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991). To bridge the gap between broadcast and platform logics, Zonet, which was formerly the primary gateway for televised music videos, now operates a YouTube channel. Similar to this, MZI still manages copyright and royalties, establishing itself as an advocate for artists in a world of platform-driven commercialization and piracy. In this way, the media institutions in Mizoram represent what Couldry and Hepp (2017) refer to as

the “deep mediatization” of society, in which conventional actors are unable to abandon platform logics but must instead modify their methods in order to remain relevant.

All India Radio’s regional station, Akashvani Aizawl (AIR), is run by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. Many participants attributed their first public platform to AIR. One seasoned vocalist stated, “My gospel songs were broadcast on AIR before I was on YouTube. I gained self-assurance and a certain standing in the community as a result.” A sense of permanence that many digital platforms lack is provided by AIR’s preservation value and systematic selection procedure. One institutional representative claim that AIR has demonstrated its willingness to adjust to platform-era workflows by accepting digital contributions as well. The biggest private broadcaster in Mizoram, Zonet Cable TV, has a history of introducing new musicians to the public through exclusive interviews, music video airplay, and televised performances. A number of participants discussed the influence Zonet had on them early in their careers. “Everyone in Mizoram knew you if you were shown on Zonet,” one participant observed. Even though artists now primarily use YouTube for daily exposure, being on Zonet is still regarded as a sign of legitimacy, particularly by older or more conservative audiences.

The most popular daily newspaper in the area, Vanglaini, has two functions: it documents culture and acts as a media platform. Artists still like being featured in print, even though it has less of an immediate effect on views or engagement. According to one singer-songwriter, “My family called to congratulate me when Vanglaini wrote about my concert...It seemed formal and serious.” The newspaper’s institutional standing frequently results in greater visibility across generations. An important player in both the traditional and digital music scenes is Music Domain Mizoram (MDM), an artist organization established to assist and represent musicians throughout the state. MDM oversees the Thulkhung platform, plans showcases and prizes, and mentors up-and-coming artists. “We want to ensure that Mizo musicians are respected both online and offline,” an MDM representative clarified, “We strive to improve standards, whether it is through an award ceremony or an app.” MDM’s

efforts to establish a foundation for music-making were valued by artists, who also indicated a wish for even more robust mentoring, particularly in managing the digital transition. According to interviewees, these organizations served as links between traditional and modern media practices. They use documentation, reputation, and community involvement to authenticate artists' careers in ways that automated criteria cannot.

7.3 Artists' Views on Institutional Support

Even if digital platforms like YouTube and Instagram have taken over as the primary means of creating and sharing music, many Mizo musicians continue to have strong beliefs about how conventional institutions should promote their recognition and visibility. The interviews uncovered a complex but nuanced perspective that recognizes the limitations of institutional assistance in the digital age while also appreciating its symbolic and practical importance.

Several artists described traditional media institutions as “foundational” to their careers. Akashvani Aizawl, for instance, was often remembered as a stepping stone. One male gospel artist shared, “My first recording was with AIR. At that time, it was the only way to be heard outside your own church or street.” Another participant recalled how getting airplay on AIR made his parents take his music seriously: “They didn’t understand YouTube, but when they heard me on the radio, they were proud.” Zonet, likewise, was viewed as a prestige platform, especially in earlier years when it had little competition. Some younger artists, though now more active on YouTube, still seek recognition from Zonet to validate their progress. “My first music video went viral online, but when it was shown on Zonet, even my grandmother called,” one participant said, smiling. Another added, “YouTube gives you numbers; Zonet gives you respect.”

But not all of the comments were favourable. Some artists believed that institutional backing favoured more well-known individuals and was biased and bureaucratic. “I applied to perform at a Zonet show, but they never responded,” said one independent

female musician, expressing her frustration. “They are too slow and rigid, and they don’t understand how fast music is moving today,” said another participant, who gave up on trying to get included in newspapers or AIR. The presence of Music Domain Mizoram (MDM) introduced a different kind of institutional dynamic. Artists appreciated the peer-led and music-focused approach of MDM more than government institutions. One participant noted, “At least MDM understands what we are going through as musicians today. They try to help with copyright, streaming, and even mental health.” Several artists said they would like to see MDM evolve into something stronger and more proactive — not just as an award-giving body but as a platform for training, funding, and advocacy.

Artists’ reactions to conventional institutions show both admiration and conflict. Many agreed that, especially before to YouTube’s advent, radio and television used to offer vital visibility. According to older participants, being on Zonet or AIR Aizawl was a significant milestone that denoted legitimacy. However, in contrast to the instantaneity of YouTube uploads, younger artists often questioned the value of such institutions, calling them “slow,” “bureaucratic,” or “less exciting.” Interpreting these perspectives is made easier by the idea of cultural intermediates (Hesmondhalgh, 2006), which holds that while institutions continue to serve as validators, their symbolic capital has diminished due to platform-driven visibility. Uneven access was also observed by artists. Some felt left out because, in line with Bourdieu’s (1993) theory of field-based hierarchies, institutional support frequently hinged on affiliations, reputations, or relationships. Many musicians also thanked organizations like MZI for providing live performance opportunities and copyright protection. The conflict between freedom and reliance was a recurrent theme: YouTube made autonomy possible, yet institutional assistance was still required for legal protection, financing access, and recognition. Artists thus manage what might be referred to as “dual legitimacy”—balancing the symbolic authority of established institutions with the algorithmic acknowledgment of platforms.

In general, the opinions of artists show a generational gap in the way that institutions are seen. Traditional platforms like AIR and Zonet are more trusted by older or

religious performers. Despite their preference for self-managed visibility, younger, digitally native performers nonetheless appreciate the legitimacy and legacy that come with institutional support. Many people want a hybrid system, where digital strategy and traditional recognition work together. These revelations demonstrate that while institutional assistance is still important, it needs to change to meet modern demands.

7.4 YouTube vs Traditional Media: Visibility and Access

The emergence of YouTube has fundamentally altered the way Mizoram musicians obtain access and visibility. YouTube has become the preferred medium for both established and up-and-coming musicians, whereas in the past, conventional media like Akashvani Aizawl (AIR), Zonet, and Vanglaini served as the primary gatekeepers of recognition. But as the interviews showed, this change is a complex balancing act between two distinct systems of reach and validation rather than a complete replacement. YouTube is a symbol of immediateness and independence for a lot of up-and-coming artists. One artist stated, “With YouTube, I don’t have to wait for permission or pass any audition. I just upload, and it’s out there.” Another echoed, “Even if only 100 people watch, they are real people who can comment, like, and share. That feels more alive than radio or TV.” This sense of direct connection with an audience gives YouTube an advantage in terms of emotional and strategic value.

In contrast, traditional media is still associated with credibility and official recognition, especially among older audiences or those outside digital-native circles. A gospel singer noted, “My parents don’t use YouTube, but they listen to AIR every morning. When they heard my song there, they were happy in a different way.” Similarly, Zonet was described by some artists as a “status marker.” As one participant put it, “Getting on Zonet means you’re serious. YouTube is easy to start, but harder to be respected in.” However, many artists also pointed out that traditional media has limitations in terms of access and speed. One participant shared, “Even if I want to get on TV or radio, there’s a long process. Sometimes they don’t even reply.

YouTube is just easier.” Another added, “On YouTube, even if your video is simple, you can be seen. But Zonet won’t take your work unless it’s polished and fits their standards.” The notion of visibility itself differs between platforms. While YouTube provides quantifiable metrics (views, likes, comments), traditional media offers symbolic capital (prestige, legitimacy). One artist summarized it well: “YouTube is democratic, but Zonet is respected. Both are needed, but for different things.” There were also insights about audience segmentation. Artists reported that different demographics access their music through different platforms. “My YouTube fans are mostly youth. But older people recognize me from Zonet or AIR,” said one artist. Another mentioned, “Vanglaini wrote about my single, and that helped me reach people who don’t follow me online.” This highlights how the platform divide also reflects generational and media literacy gaps within the audience. A few artists admitted that they now purposefully blend platforms. For example, it was standard practice to release a song on YouTube and simultaneously look for AIR exposure or a mention in Vanglaini. One added, “To grow here, you need both offline and online recognition.” According to these answers, conventional media continues to have a significant influence on access and visibility in Mizoram, even though YouTube currently controls the media landscape. The platforms appeal to various demographics and fulfil distinct purposes. The most well-known artists are frequently those who are able to successfully negotiate both areas.

YouTube and traditional media comparisons by artists reveal disparate logics of visibility. Since anybody may upload anything and visibility is determined by algorithmic engagement rather than institutional selection, YouTube offers transparency and immediacy. This is an example of “platformization,” as defined by Nieborg and Poell (2018), in which access is decentralized but subject to platform logics. Traditional media, on the other hand, still operates through gatekeeping, providing targeted visibility that is still significant for some audiences, especially older viewers. According to a number of musicians, being featured in local newspapers or on television shows offered prominence that YouTube by itself could not match. However, they also highlighted the drawbacks: YouTube provides diasporic and worldwide exposure, while traditional media’s reach is limited by

geography and less interactive. From the standpoint of affordance, television offers legitimacy and affiliation with established cultural authority, but YouTube offers scalability, personalization, and worldwide connectivity. The conflict between these affordances demonstrates how Mizoram artists strategically use both platforms: conventional media to establish legitimacy and establish connections with local organizations, and YouTube to reach a larger audience and experiment with identity. Therefore, becoming visible in the YouTube era means navigating several overlapping regimes of access rather than displacing traditional media.

7.5 Role of Artist Associations

The framework and support system of the local music scene in Mizoram are significantly influenced by artist associations. Organizations like MDM (Music Domain Mizoram) and the Mizo Zaimi Insuihkhawm (MZI) serve as institutional and community centres, providing musicians with chances to network, market their work, and occasionally obtain funding or technical assistance. These associations find themselves in a situation where they have to strike a compromise between their old functions and the new demands in a digital world as a result of the growing popularity of digital platforms like YouTube.

Numerous artists who participated in the interviews stated that associations provide a feeling of acceptance and professional validation. “I felt like I was part of something bigger when I joined MZI,” one member remarked. Respect is more important than money alone. Artists had greater credibility when interacting with media outlets, religious institutions, or event planners if they were members of a registered group or association. This also included assistance with copyright management, concert planning, and performance fee negotiations. Artists did admit, though, that the groups have not entirely adapted to the digital revolution. Although they value the assistance, a number of respondents stated that these groups continue to prioritize more traditional forms of promotion, such as live events or radio appearances. “Our association still focuses on getting us gigs and playing at government functions,” one participant stated, “That’s great, but they don’t discuss YouTube very often.”

There were also examples of some associations adapting to platform culture. MDM was praised by multiple artists for creating Thulkhung, a local streaming platform aimed at promoting Mizo music. A participant who works closely with MDM noted, “They understand that digital is the future. They teach us how to upload, how to title our songs, and even help us record.” This kind of digital mentorship was seen as valuable, especially for older or less tech-savvy musicians. However, the overall picture was mixed. While some artists found their associations helpful, others felt they were slow to embrace change. One participant commented, “I don’t think they understand how YouTube works. Younger artists are figuring it out on their own.” Another added, “We need training—how to use social media, how to monetize videos, how to promote ourselves. Right now, we’re just guessing.” Some artists suggested that associations could do more by hosting workshops, creating shared digital resources, or negotiating collective deals with platforms. There was a clear sense that the institutional knowledge and network of these groups could be powerful if properly connected to the new tools of the platform era. One participant summarized it: “Associations should become bridges—not just between musicians and the government, but between musicians and platforms.”

The institutional aspect of Mizoram's music business is greatly influenced by artist associations like MZI and MDM. They serve as copyright defenders, collective bargaining agents, and live event planners, guaranteeing that musicians have a voice in a world where digital platforms are taking over. According to platform studies, these groups might be interpreted as efforts to express communal forms of governance in an effort to rebalance power between platforms and artists. According to Duffy (2017), these actions are consistent with the idea of “cultural labour organizing,” in which creative workers look for unity in reaction to unstable platform economies. According to interviews, artists criticized their poor digital literacy and sluggish adoption of platform logics, even as they acknowledged the protective function of associations. According to several participants, associations ought to do more to inform artists about digital branding, commercialization, and algorithms. The associations are under pressure to embrace digital tactics in order to stay relevant

as they navigate institutional isomorphism (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991). To put it briefly, Mizo artist groups still mediate legitimacy and access, but their ability to effectively balance their protective roles with the needs of the platform era today determines how effective they are.

In conclusion, Mizoram's artist associations continue to play a significant role in the music industry. They offer social support, legitimacy, and structure. In addition to their usual responsibilities, they must provide advice on digital strategy, platform usage, and online branding in order to remain relevant in a rapidly digitizing environment. The strength of the collective mechanisms surrounding local artists is just as important to their success on YouTube as their individual skill.

7.6 Institutional Adaptation to Digital Change

Traditional institutions like radio stations, television networks, and artist groups are facing pressure to change as YouTube and other digital platforms continue to transform the creation, distribution, and economics of music in Mizoram. Based on information obtained from artists and institutional officials, this section examines how these institutions are reacting to the ongoing digital transition. A readiness to change has been demonstrated by several institutions. Zonet and Akashvani Aizawl (All India Radio) representatives acknowledged the trend toward internet platforms and said they are taking action to remain relevant. One staff member from Zonet said, "We know that many people now watch music on YouTube, especially the younger generation. So, we also try to upload some of our shows and music content on our Facebook and YouTube channels." This effort signals a growing understanding that visibility now depends on multi-platform presence, not just traditional broadcasting.

Likewise, Akashvani Aizawl has begun to digitize its archives and occasionally features local artists whose popularity is growing online. One institutional representative explained, "We try to stay connected with local artists. Some of them become famous on YouTube first, and then we invite them to perform on our radio

shows. We're learning to follow the trend." However, the level of adaptation varies widely between institutions. Some organizations are still struggling with digital transition, due to limited technical skills, budget constraints, or lack of strategic vision. An artist who previously worked with a local TV channel said, "They are doing the same format for the last ten years. It's like nothing has changed. They're not really engaging with online trends." Another participant observed that some media houses treat digital platforms more like "secondary archives" rather than primary spaces for engagement. There are also concerns about hierarchy and bureaucracy in these institutions, which slow down the process of innovation. One artist mentioned, "When you want to try something new—like a music show on Instagram Live—they don't know how to handle it. They still think everything must be recorded in studio and broadcast at a fixed time." This tension between old workflows and new demands often discourages younger artists from collaborating with traditional outlets.

However, Music Domain Mizoram, or MDM, was often cited as an illustration of a local organization that aims to meet musicians where they are. In addition to creating Thulkhung, MDM also advises artists on how to tag content, title YouTube videos, and even handle comments and community interaction. According to one musician, "They teach us, not just promote us." It makes a difference if they comprehend YouTube. The significance of collaborations between traditional and digital media organizations was also highlighted by artists. Some people proposed that there might be a win-win scenario if TV and radio stations actively selected YouTubers' content or assisted them in reaching new viewers. "I think they need to stop seeing YouTube as competition," one participant stated. We can collaborate, but they must first change.

A trend of cautious adaptation can be seen in Mizoram's traditional media organizations' reactions to digital disruption. Instead of going extinct, radio stations, TV networks, and artist groups have worked to incorporate digital activities, such as live-streaming concerts, posting performances to YouTube, or cultivating Facebook fan bases. This hybridization reflects the blending of ancient and modern logics in

what Chadwick (2017) refers to as the “hybrid media system.” However, the procedure is not uniform. According to interviews, organizations struggled with scarce resources, technological know-how, and strategy clarity even while they recognized that digital revolution was inevitable. For example, Zonet’s YouTube channel provides continuity, but artists argued it lacks the interactivity and dynamism of independent uploads. Similarly, associations like MZI face challenges in enforcing copyright in a platformized ecosystem where piracy and unlicensed uploads are rampant. From a theoretical perspective, this demonstrates how institutions operate within what Couldry and Hepp (2017) call “deep mediatization”: they cannot retreat from platforms, but their adaptation is shaped by structural inequalities, resource constraints, and cultural expectations. Importantly, the persistence of these institutions shows that platformization does not simply erase older media forms but forces them into new roles, where their authority is reconfigured rather than dissolved.

In conclusion, Mizoram has unequal institutional adaptability. Some businesses, like MDM, are still using antiquated models, while others are experimenting with platform-centric strategies. The necessity of adapting is becoming more widely recognized, but more work is needed, particularly in the areas of training, purchasing digital tools, and reconsidering audience interaction. The ability of traditional media and artist institutions in the Mizo music business to adapt to the realities of platform culture rather than fight against them will determine their destiny.

7.7 Summary of Findings

According to this chapter’s findings, traditional media and institutions in Mizoram have been pushed to adapt, negotiate, and reconfigure as a result of YouTube’s growth rather than being displaced. Instead of a straightforward “replacement” story, a hybrid media ecology is revealed (Chadwick, 2017), in which platforms coexist with radio, television, newspapers, and artist associations, each of which plays different but related functions. This hybridity demonstrates how platform logics—algorithmic exposure, on-demand access, and direct creator-audience interaction—

are transforming older institutions without making them obsolete, according to platform studies (van Dijck, Poell, & de Waal, 2018). In order to remain relevant, all cultural actors in Mizoram's conventional media must align themselves with platform infrastructures, a process known as "deep mediatization" (Couldry and Hepp, 2017). The purpose of this chapter was to examine how, despite the dominance of YouTube and other digital platforms, traditional media organizations and artist associations still influence access, visibility, and recognition in the Mizo music industry. The results imply that although there is no denying the digital revolution, traditional institutions have not vanished but are instead going through a difficult and uneven transition process.

First of all, Mizoram artists continue to cherish the acclaim that comes with appearing on conventional media like radio and television. Even though Zonet and Akashvani have lesser audiences than YouTube, many artists, particularly those just starting out in their careers, consider them as stepping stones to respectability, as the interviews demonstrate. Some musicians, who frequently saw it as a kind of cultural validation, were proud to have their music played on the radio or on local television. As one participant put it, "YouTube gives you numbers, but Zonet gives you respect." But institutional authority is no longer unchallenged. YouTube has paved the way for new avenues of recognition that circumvent conventional gatekeeping. According to a number of artists, their web videos helped them get recognition, fan support, and even invitations to perform—sometimes without any help from radio or television. Nowadays, a lot of people use YouTube to establish a foundation that could someday result in coverage on other platforms, viewing it as the beginning rather than the conclusion.

The summary of Important organizations demonstrates how, despite YouTube's democratization of access, they still act as cultural bridges, giving artists validity and symbolic worth (Bourdieu, 1993; Hesmondhalgh, 2006). For instance, television networks like Zonet and LPS continue to be prestigious and offer carefully chosen visibility, especially to older or rural viewers. Newspapers and radio stations still broadcast music-related content, and organizations like MZI and MDM continue to

have power over collective organizing and copyright laws. These organizations, however, are under pressure to embrace digital techniques at the same time; they utilize social media to expand their reach, have YouTube channels, and live-stream events. This process exemplifies institutional isomorphism (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991), in which businesses adjust to new settings not just for creative reasons but also in order to maintain their legitimacy. Though with differing degrees of success, institutions themselves are also making an effort to adapt to this change. Some have been sluggish to update, but others, like MDM, have embraced platform logic by offering artists guidance on metadata, tagging, and audience involvement. These institutions' adaptation plans frequently rely on internal elements including technological know-how, leadership styles, and resource availability. Artists noted that although certain employees are progressive, these institutions' general organizational structure is still inflexible and hierarchical. Although their function is sometimes restricted to offline coordination, event management, or song copyright issues, artist groups such as Mizo Zaimi Inzawmkhawm (MZI) were also seen to have the ability to assist creators in the digital age. Artists expressed that they would benefit more if these organizations could offer training in digital skills, help with content promotion, or advocate for fairer revenue-sharing models from both local and global platforms.

This split world is confirmed by the senses of artists. Younger musicians acknowledged the ongoing significance of institutional support for recognition, legal protection, and access to specific audiences, even as they praised YouTube's independence and immediacy. Numerous artists characterized a state of dual legitimacy, whereby institutional backing offered credibility and algorithmic visibility on platforms offered reach. This conflict emphasizes how affordances are interrelated (Gibson, 1979; Bucher & Helmond, 2018). While conventional media offers credibility, cultural authority, and a link with viewers that are less engaged online, YouTube offers openness, scalability, and diasporic reach. The layered nature of exposure and access in Mizoram's music business is reflected in the coexistence of various affordances. An especially significant place in this hybrid environment is held by artist associations. They organize live opportunities and serve as guardians

of group interests, but they also have trouble adjusting to platform logics. Their fight serves as an example of the larger problems facing cultural labour in the digital age: platforms make it easier to be independent, but they also make it more precarious, which makes collaborative forms of governance more crucial than ever (Duffy, 2017). The need for organizations that can operate as a mediator between the stability of organized cultural support and the unpredictable nature of algorithmic visibility is evident from the fact that artists both praise and criticize these associations.

One important realization is the rise of hybrid models. Many musicians are now seamlessly juggling their online and offline lives, performing at events organized by organizations like MDM or appearing on AIR in addition to releasing music videos to YouTube. Artists strategically employ both, depending on the situation, target audience, and intended results, rather than favouring one over the other. To put it briefly, conventional institutions are still relevant today, but their ability to serve the changing demands of modern musicians and integrate with digital logics will determine how well they do so. The chapter emphasizes the growing need for old and new media to work together rather than compete. Institutions need to reevaluate their responsibilities as development facilitators in a more democratized and networked cultural world, rather than gatekeepers, as platforms like YouTube become increasingly important for visibility and revenue. Lastly, Mizoram's institutional response to digital transformation serves as an example of the larger dynamics of media convergence (Jenkins, 2006). Instead of becoming extinct, traditional institutions are evolving into hybrid actors that connect the local and the global, the analog and the digital. Their power has changed; it is no longer as exclusive as it once was, but it still has a big impact on access and recognition. Therefore, the results imply that platformization in Mizoram is a narrative of negotiation rather than rupture. Traditional institutions remain influential, but their survival depends on how well they embed themselves within platform ecologies while sustaining their symbolic and protective roles.

This chapter concludes by demonstrating how the music industry in Mizoram is influenced by a plural visibility regime, in which musicians balance freedom and reliance, algorithmic affordances and institutional support, and international platforms and local institutions. The analysis uses affordance theory, platform studies, and institutional theory to show that cultural creation in Mizoram involves more than just embracing YouTube; it also entails rearranging long-standing institutional structures in the platform era. This multi-layered hybridity is essential to comprehending the unequal platformization geography in smaller cultural contexts as well as the tenacity of conventional media.

CHAPTER VIII

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

8.1 Introduction

The study's primary findings are presented and discussed in this chapter, which compiles the seven topics that arose from the thematic analysis of interviews done with five institutional officials and twenty-one Mizo musicians. The four research objectives serve as the framework for the discussion, which is also informed by the more general theoretical frameworks of affordances, platform studies, and the networked self (van Dijck, Poell, & de Waal, 2018; Papacharissi, 2010). The intention is not only to summarize what artists said, but to interpret these accounts in relation to structural conditions, cultural contexts, and theoretical debates about digital media in non-metropolitan settings.

The general tone of the musicians was one of the most noticeable trends in the interviews. Most presented their musical practice as a side project or supplementary interest rather than a full-time career. Instead of describing their musical talents as their main source of income, even those who were obviously gifted or had developed sizable fan bases spoke of their personal fulfilment and service to the community. Although there were certain obvious annoyances, especially with regard to monetization or lack of acknowledgment, artists generally were happy with the way things were. This ambivalence is consistent with the idea put forth by Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2011) that creative labour is both precarious and sustaining, with cultural work frequently being in conflict between enthusiasm and meagre financial gain. The interviews also showed how musicians are becoming more and more integrated into a platformized music landscape, where being visible on YouTube or Instagram is practically required. For many, posting music online was more about being present in a digital culture that today defines what constitutes participation than it was about aiming for stardom. This is consistent with the networked-self theory put forth by Papacharissi (2010), which holds that even when

online engagement is not directly related to money, it nevertheless serves as a means of maintaining one's identity. In summary, this chapter examines how artists in Mizoram navigate the interplay of global platforms, local initiatives, and traditional institutions. The discussion highlights the tensions between aspiration and limitation, visibility and sustainability, and global digital logics and local cultural values.

8.2 YouTube as the Primary Outlet for Music Distribution

YouTube is now the most popular site for music distribution in Mizoram, according to one of the study's most obvious conclusions. YouTube was cited by all of the artists as their primary and most significant platform for song sharing. This held true for all genres, genders, and levels of skill, suggesting that YouTube has established itself as the standard location for Mizo music to be "released" and preserved. For a lot of participants, a song is practically non-existent if it isn't posted to YouTube. This finding directly addresses the first research objective: to explore how music-makers in Mizoram use and perceive YouTube as a platform for visibility, promotion, and career development. The accessibility of YouTube—anyone can upload anything for free with little technical knowledge—was stressed by participants time and again. In Mizoram, where artists frequently lack access to professional studios, management, or marketing infrastructure, this accessibility is particularly important. YouTube's participatory logic, which democratizes creative production, however unevenly, is reflected in the capacity to upload directly without institutional gatekeeping (Burgess and Green, 2018).

However, YouTube has more significance for Mizo musicians than just dissemination. The platform was characterized by a number of participants as a personal "archive" or "timeline" of their work. According to one singer-songwriter, they utilized their channel as a portfolio to demonstrate their development and reliability to possible partners or event planners. This illustrates YouTube's dual function as a platform for broadcasting and a repository for creative evolution. It also supports Lobato's (2016) finding that YouTube functions as a personal media library where producers control their own visibility in addition to being an

entertainment website. Additionally, the platform serves as a venue for reputation-building and validation. Many acknowledged that view counts, likes, and subscriber numbers influenced how they and others saw their accomplishment, even though the majority of artists said they were not too preoccupied with metrics. One participant, for instance, mentioned that “people started talking” and that it opened doors for invites to performances after a video hit 10,000 views. These behaviours demonstrate how YouTube’s measurements are ingrained in social recognition, supporting the claim made by van Dijck and Poell (2013) that platform logics normalize cultural value that is based on facts.

Participants were also conscious of YouTube’s restrictions at the time. The challenge of hitting the monetization threshold (1,000 subscribers and 4,000 watch hours) was a source of irritation for many. Many people find it impossible to reach these criteria in a small state like Mizoram, where the audience is small and the majority of the content is in the Mizo language. According to one artist, monetization was an impossible goal because, even though they had been uploading often for years, they only had a few hundred followers. This is in line with Hesmondhalgh’s (2010) criticism of user-generated content economies, which conceal structural disparities in visibility and compensation behind the promise of profits. From a reflective standpoint, the researcher observed that artists frequently discussed YouTube in a matter-of-fact manner rather than with enthusiasm or aspiration. They saw the platform as an essential step to stay visible and relevant in the modern music environment, rather than as a means of achieving stardom. This implies that YouTube is now a part of Mizoram’s music-making culture, which is taken for granted. YouTube has become the baseline of presence, the bare minimum needed to be identified as an active artist, much way radio used to represent legitimacy.

In conclusion, YouTube is essential to Mizoram’s music dissemination since it provides accessibility, preservation capabilities, and a way to gauge societal approval using metrics. Its monetization and algorithmic visibility constraints, however, draw attention to the uneven advantages of involvement. For Mizo musicians, YouTube is

more about maintaining recognition inside their local linguistic and cultural community than it is about breaking into the international music scene.

8.3 Instagram and Visual Culture in Artist Promotion

In Mizoram, Instagram has become the main platform for musicians' visibility and promotion, while YouTube has taken the lead in music distribution. Participants defined Instagram and YouTube as complementing channels, with Instagram serving as the promotional "hallway" that steered audiences into full-length releases and YouTube as the "main stage" for such releases. In actuality, this split mirrors global trends in cross-platform marketing, where visually appealing and short-form apps like Instagram are becoming more and more important in maintaining audience interest (Baym, 2018).

According to the interviews, Instagram is especially appreciated for its immediacy features, such as Stories, Reels, and Highlights, which let artists stay visible between releases. Because audiences quickly lose interest in a world of digital abundance, artists stated that these elements were essential for maintaining engagement. This is consistent with the idea of social media logic put forth by van Dijck and Poell (2013), according to which visibility is more dependent on ongoing circulation than on discrete acts of publication. Even if a song was posted on YouTube, "without posting on Instagram, people may not notice," as one participant stated in an interview. Age and genre played a significant effect. Younger musicians and those working in modern genres like indie pop and rap have a tendency to focus on Instagram, creating polished feeds and experimenting with Reels to develop visually appealing personalities. Many older or gospel artists, on the other hand, were rarely active on Instagram, frequently using it more as a formal announcement channel than as a platform for identity expression. According to the researcher, this generational divide is a reflection of different perspectives on visibility: older musicians continue to rely on more conventional means of recognition, while younger artists view their online presence as a sort of branding and labour. Although it is negotiated differently among cohorts, this distinction is consistent with Papacharissi's (2010) concept of

the networked self, in which one's online persona becomes an extension of one's professional identity.

In spite of Instagram's focus on aesthetics, Mizoram artists tended to portray themselves in a more subdued manner. Few made the investment in ornate makeup, costumes, or set designs, opting instead to perform in casual clothing and natural environments. However, they embraced platform-specific practices like carefully planned grid layouts, selfies that take into account lighting, and stylish lyric excerpts for Stories. This implies that even if artists shunned luxury, they nevertheless adjusted to Instagram's visual lingo to make sure their work felt relevant and up to date. According to one participant, they wanted to strike a balance between genuineness and trend-following so as not to come across as "too artificial." Based on the researcher's field findings, Instagram has emerged as one of the most popular platforms among Mizo youth in a variety of industries. In addition to musicians, curated presences are maintained by businesspeople, designers, athletes, and even churches. To maximize involvement, some people employ social media managers, although relatively few of the musicians in this study had this kind of assistance. Rather than using systematic digital training, the majority relied on trial-and-error posting tactics and learned by imitation. Because artists must be performers, marketers, and content providers all at once, this absence of official direction underlines the infrastructure gaps in digital literacy (Morris, 2020).

The pressures of visibility were further exacerbated by Instagram. Many participants acknowledged that they were nervous about posting frequently because they were afraid of being forgotten if they were silent for an extended period of time. Others discussed comparing their engagement and follower counts to those of their colleagues, reiterating Baym's (2018) claim that platforms ensnare musicians in intimate economies that require ongoing upkeep. However, the majority acknowledged these demands as a natural component of modern music-making, characterizing them as "necessary work" despite their emotional toll. In conclusion, Mizo artists now rely heavily on Instagram as a medium for identity development and promotion. Creating ongoing visibility, maintaining fan relationships, and

forming artistic personalities within platform-defined logics are more important to it than publishing complete works. Instagram presents artists in Mizoram with both opportunities and challenges: while it helps them reach a wider audience and become more relevant, it also necessitates constant work, digital knowledge, and adjustment to the standards of visual culture.

8.4 Creative Choices Shaped by Platform Culture

One of the study's most striking conclusions is that digital platforms like YouTube and Instagram are cultural settings that influence the creative process itself rather than just serving as distribution and promotion channels. More and more Mizoram artists are modifying their songs and videos to fit the logics of platform culture. These adaptations demonstrate how platform affordances impact not only creation but also circulation, reflecting both practical visibility techniques and more profound changes in artistic vision. The value of immediacy and conciseness emerged as a common theme throughout the interviews. According to the participants, digital consumers form snap decisions and can end their viewing in a matter of seconds if they are not captivated by a compelling hook. "People decide in the first 10 seconds whether to continue," as one participant put it. Bucher and Helmond's (2018) analysis of algorithmic culture, in which information is designed for interaction numbers rather than inherent creative rhythm, is consistent with this demand to garner attention. As a sign that digital temporality is redefining musical and visual form, the researcher noted that many musicians purposefully used catchy visual cues, prolonged choruses, or shortened intros.

This trend has been further supported by the culture of short-form videos, especially YouTube Shorts and Instagram Reels. Younger musicians in particular talked about crafting songs with viral excerpts in mind, such as memorable hooks or catchy lyrics that could be tacked onto a 15-second loop. Some agreed that their creative decisions were now impacted by how well a song might perform in these formats, even if none of them admitted to specifically creating music for platforms. This exemplifies what Baym (2018) refers to as the "intimate work of connection," in

which artists produce not just with artistic intent but also with the audience's attention span and sharing habits in mind. Production strategy was another area that underwent change. Many artists created several lower-cost outputs, including lyric videos, teaser clips, and live performance snippets, rather than concentrating on a single well-produced music video. They were able to stay active on platforms that encourage regular posting thanks to their modular strategy. As artistic output was influenced by algorithmic demand rather than long-term creative vision, the researcher observed that although this method reduced obstacles to visibility, it also brought about a sense of fragmentation.

Creative choices were also impacted by cultural setting. Self-censorship and content filtering were influenced by Mizoram's very conservative society, which still heavily relies on church networks. To avoid criticism online or in their communities, a number of participants said they steered clear of controversial themes, exposing costumes, and inflammatory lyrics. "Church people also watch," one person explained. This supports Couldry and Hepp's (2017) idea of deep mediatization, in which media use interacts with cultural norms and identity performance, by implying that digital platforms are not neutral global venues but rather are mediated by local values. The researcher noticed a conflict between strategy and sincerity. While many artists acknowledged that they follow internet trends in sound or images to get popularity, many also stated that they want to stay true to their artistic traditions. Adapting the presentation for digital appeal while maintaining poetic or stylistic components has been referred to as a compromise. Others voiced their frustration, saying that "if I don't adapt, people don't listen, but sometimes I feel like I'm not being true to myself." These observations support the claims made by Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2011) regarding creative labour, which holds that cultural activity is characterized by a balancing act between market logics and self-expression.

In conclusion, platforms in Mizoram are dynamic places that foster innovation rather than being inert areas. They immerse artists in a loop of exposure optimization by influencing aesthetic choices, video format, song length, and lyrical emphasis. These

modifications produce pressures that limit artistic creativity even as they create new avenues for participation. The creative process for Mizo musicians is now inextricably linked to platform cultural logics, which involve a constant balancing act between algorithmic expectations, global trends, and local identity.

8.5 Local Platforms and the Desire for Cultural Ownership

Although YouTube is the primary music distribution channel in Mizoram, the rise of regional digital platforms like Darbu and Thulkhung draws attention to a crucial aspect of the digital music ecosystem: the need for platforms that represent local identity and cultural ownership. These programs were created by Mizo organizations and businesses with the goals of preserving music in a local context, offering artists greater control over their work, and offering easily accessible income options. According to the findings, these platforms have great symbolic and practical significance in the continuous balancing act between local cultural goals and global digital logics, even though they are now unable to compete with YouTube in terms of functionality or reach.

The majority of artists had positive things to say about Darbu and Thulkhung. Many expressed prides in Mizoram's ability to create its own platforms, seeing them as attempts to stave off reliance on multinational companies. According to one participant, artists should band together to support these kinds of projects because "it is for our own good." Particularly older artists appeared excited about these platforms, frequently urging their contemporaries to embrace and extensively publicize them. This hope stems from an awareness of the systemic injustices present on international platforms (Hesmondhalgh, 2010) as well as a need to develop digital environments that are more sensitive to regional customs, languages, and values. The results do, however, also point to a discrepancy between symbolic worth and actual use. The majority of artists admitted that YouTube continues to be their top choice due to its large audience, cultural hegemony, and user-friendliness. Due to Darbu and Thulkhung's drawbacks, including their small user numbers, technical issues, and little exposure, many were reluctant to focus their efforts

primarily on these platforms. Thulkhung was not entirely operational at the time of the interviews, which further diminished its immediate significance. This dynamic is consistent with Lobato's (2016) concept of platform intermediation, which holds that local, smaller platforms may still be able to carve out valuable niches inside ecosystems controlled by global giants, although they struggle to compete.

The researcher found that artists see local platforms as possible supplements to YouTube rather than as a substitute. Some had the idea to continue using YouTube for promotional visibility while using Darbu as a revenue-generating website for music sales. Early indications of this hybrid model are evident, as some well-known musicians are already using Darbu to sell their songs while driving traffic from their YouTube channels. This demonstrates how artists deliberately try out cross-platform tactics in an effort to support regional projects while utilizing the reach of international platforms. Baym's (2018) theories on strategic intimacy, in which musicians balance various types of exposure and involvement across several locations, are echoed by such activities. These platforms are highly symbolic in culture. Artists emphasized that they felt better understood and represented on Darbu than on YouTube because of its Mizo-language interface and focus on regional genres. According to one participant, "people already know our music culture on Darbu." This feeling of inclusion is consistent with the idea of "deep mediatization," as defined by Couldry and Hepp (2017), in which media platforms are integrated into the construction of cultural identity and meaning. The platforms are reminders of the potential for digital sovereignty in a globalized media market, even when there is no practical utility for them.

Artists were realistic about the difficulties at the same time. They admitted that these platforms might not maintain momentum in the absence of further institutional support, user acceptance, and technical advancement. Many were worried about what would happen to previous local digital projects that didn't succeed. The general tone, however, was cautiously optimistic: although not currently at the forefront of artists' tactics, Darbu and Thulkhung are significant trials in localizing digital media and, with the right support, may develop into complementary resources to YouTube.

In conclusion, local venues have two meanings for Mizo musicians. They provide culturally relevant places and minimal commercialization in practice; symbolically, they stand for pride, ownership, and defiance of the homogenizing forces of global platforms. The results imply that while these projects might not be direct rivals of YouTube, they might flourish as complementary systems, especially if institutions and artists band together to increase their uptake and sustainability.

8.6 The Enduring Role of Traditional Institutions

In Mizoram's music ecosystem, visibility and legitimacy are still greatly influenced by traditional media organizations and artist groups, even in the face of the growth of YouTube and Instagram. These organizations continue to play a significant role as gatekeepers in formal or community-based settings, sources of cultural validation, and symbolic acknowledgment, even when artists no longer rely on them for distribution.

According to the interviews, artists hardly ever go straight to organizations like Vanglaini or Akashvani Aizawl (AIR). Rather, these establishments typically approach artists they want to showcase in a selective manner. While Vanglaini traditionally only publishes biographies of well-known musicians, frequently through institutional affiliation, radio DJs frequently get in touch with musicians to ask for permission to play their songs—usually without paid remuneration. According to one spokesperson, attention is rarely obtained by artists who are not affiliated with groups such as MDM or MZI. This implies that established identities and institutional connections are valued more highly than grassroots access in traditional institutions, which nonetheless function as carefully managed venues of visibility. Differences between generations were especially apparent. Older musicians, particularly those over 30, who are frequently involved in gospel genres, are still interested in getting their name out there through print or radio media. Many continue to apply for grading at AIR, where being a graded artist confers symbolic power and reputation. In contrast, younger artists are less interested in institutional approval and instead rely on Instagram for self-promotion and YouTube for reach.

The study found that older participants were more intentional, frequently outlining the specifics of their presentation and excitedly providing information for coverage, whereas younger people were more carefree with how they appeared in publications. This age gap demonstrates the continued validity of old institutions, particularly among audiences and artists associated with formal or religious cultural domains.

Ongoing conflicts between traditional and modern orientations are also seen in artist groups like Music Domain Mizoram (MDM) and Mizo Zaimi Inzawmkhawm (MZI). The rivalry between the two groups irritated a number of people, and others decided to completely disassociate themselves. Others joined as a result of invites or peer pressure. According to the researcher, MZI serves older, more seasoned musicians, whereas MDM has positioned itself as more youth-oriented and technologically conscious. However, because cultural institutions and event planners frequently depend on them to choose performers, both organizations continue to have sway. By doing thus, they preserve institutional authority within the live performance circuit and serve as gatekeepers of opportunities. The dual system of recognition that defines Mizoram's music scene is shown by these institutions' tenacity. Digital platforms enable artists to circumvent gatekeepers and democratize distribution. However, conventional institutions still offer legitimacy in ways that internet visibility by itself cannot. Joining MDM or MZI, or being featured on AIR or Zonet, is frequently seen as a "badge of legitimacy"—a declaration that an artist is a part of the official cultural realm. Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital, which holds that symbolic acknowledgment has value separate from financial or technological accomplishment, is echoed by this dual system.

For up-and-coming or minor artists, who gain from the legitimacy that comes with institutional affiliation, the study found that institutions are crucial. Institutions offer cultural weight and credibility, whereas YouTube offers numbers. In order to guarantee that these organizations continue to influence stage access and exposure in offline contexts, organizers regularly turn to MDM or MZI for artist recommendations at significant cultural festivals and even smaller community gatherings. In conclusion, older institutions continue to be durable nodes of

legitimacy and access, even as younger artists increasingly gravitate toward platforms. Although their reach is not comparable to YouTube's, they continue to have an impact on symbolic authority, event participation, and cultural awareness. According to the findings, conventional institutions in Mizoram have not been replaced but rather have evolved into complementary places, providing recognition in offline settings while digital platforms control online visibility.

8.7 Navigating Income, Monetization, and Gig Work

One of the most obvious conflicts in the research is revealed by the economic aspect of music-making in Mizoram: although websites like YouTube and Instagram offer visibility, they seldom ever result in steady revenue. The majority of the musicians in this study stated that their main source of income was still live concerts and gigs, with little to no digital monetization. Visibility does not always translate into viability in the cultural sectors, as this illustrates (Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2011).

A small number of participants have made some money after reaching the YouTube monetization threshold, although these instances were uncommon. Artists understood that exposure on Instagram could indirectly lead to opportunities, but Instagram did not directly generate any revenue. Most people viewed monetization as more of an idealized prospect than a tangible reality. Despite the fact that “most of us haven't reached that level” where payments are conceivable, one participant pointed out that submitting music to YouTube is crucial for notoriety. Hesmondhalgh's (2010) criticism of the digital free labour economy, in which user contributions enhance platforms without ensuring returns, is highlighted by this discrepancy between involvement and payment. Artists instead relied largely on live performances. Invitations to office gatherings, birthday parties, weddings, and even political campaign events were cited as important sources of revenue. Rather than being bargained through established systems, these gigs were frequently informal. The dependence on such performances draws attention to Mizoram's gig economy, which is a sort of creative labour where musicians operate on a project-by-project basis without stability or security (Morris, 2020). Church gatherings reinforced the

significance of religious networks in maintaining cultural work by providing significant platforms for visibility, even though they occasionally offered modest honoraria.

The majority of participants characterized music as a secondary activity that goes hand in hand with primary jobs or goals, aside from performances. Many were involved in modest company endeavours, teaching, research, or college. Some went on to work in fields other than music, like real estate. This diversification illustrates how music was viewed more as a hobby or extracurricular activity than as a possible career option. The researcher found that most musicians preferred sporadic single releases over investing in whole albums. This implies that many musicians were happy to “have their moment” in the music industry while concentrating on other sources of income rather than developing ongoing professional identities. This dynamic, seen from a structural standpoint, mirrors what Baym (2018) refers to as the intimate task of connection, in which musicians strive to be visible on the internet but infrequently convert this into financial security. Platform economics make this precarity worse in Mizoram, where linguistic barriers restrict global access and the potential audience is relatively tiny. YouTube provides symbolic credibility, but it is not a viable source of income. The lack of robust institutional support and collective bargaining mechanisms exacerbates this precarity, making musicians dependent on their own initiative and social capital.

In conclusion, the results show that platform visibility and offline gig employment, neither of which generates steady or adequate revenue, combine to shape Mizoram’s music economy. In order to adapt, artists broaden their sources of income and view music as a side hobby rather than their main source of income. Though it is exacerbated in regional contexts where scale, infrastructure, and monetization prospects are constrained, this mirrors broader dynamics of precarity in creative sectors. The researcher noticed that most artists appeared to accept this fact. Most people viewed music as a passion project rather than a viable career, however some people complained about the lack of income. This acceptance implies that the value of music for many Mizo performers is derived more from community

acknowledgment, personal fulfilment, and cultural engagement than from monetary gain. Instead of taking the place of other career paths, the pursuit of music complements them.

8.8 Cross-Theme Discussion and Theoretical Reflection

The study's conclusions show that a number of conflicts that highlight the potential and constraints of platform-based music production in a local setting have moulded the Mizo YouTubesphere. The greatest recurring paradox across all seven topics was that income is not always correlated with visibility. Although YouTube and Instagram give artists unparalleled exposure, this visibility rarely results in long-term profits due to revenue criteria, tiny audience sizes, and restricted business structures. Visibility is still important, though, as having an online profile frequently opens up offline chances like performing at political campaigns, church events, or weddings. In this sense, platforms serve as entry points to legitimacy by indicating recognition that can be translated into offline chances rather than by immediately generating revenue.

The idea of platform logic, as proposed by van Dijck and Poell (2013), is reflected in this dynamic, according to which digital infrastructures reorganize cultural creation by organizing visibility, engagement, and value. Platform algorithms serve as the new cultural gatekeepers for Mizo artists, influencing what is noticed, what becomes popular, and what gets around in society. In a number of instances, artists received unexpected recognition for amusing, unusual, or even “cringe-worthy” content. Such virality resulted in invites and performance possibilities in the real world, even though it wasn't always in line with conventional standards of artistic worth. This demonstrates how local hierarchies of recognition can be altered by algorithmic visibility, even when it is arbitrary. However, artists are not helpless objects of platform pressure. The results demonstrate a deliberate balancing act between local cultural expectations and platform demands. By designing songs and films for brief attention spans and using particular color schemes, hooks, and aesthetics to appeal to algorithms, artists are, on the one hand, adjusting to global digital trends. However,

they continue to pay close attention to what Mizo fans anticipate, especially when it comes to presentation, vocabulary, and lyrics. For instance, lyrical material frequently remains rooted in Mizo values, Christianity, or regional cultural allusions, even though video length may match platform requirements. This delicate balancing act exemplifies what Couldry and Hepp (2017) refer to as deep mediatization, in which local customs and media logics collide to create hybrid creative practices.

The transition from Institutional control to personal accountability is another trend that runs across the results. Digital platforms have removed established gatekeepers, unlike previous decades where visibility was contingent on approval by AIR, Zonet, or associations such as MZI. Artists can now publish on their own. They must work as one-person teams, managing not only composition and performance but also production, editing, branding, and promotion, which is the price they pay for this freedom. Many find it difficult to bear this responsibility in the absence of an industrial structure to assist them. The researcher found that although artists value the independence that YouTube and Instagram offer, they also acknowledged their weariness and the necessity for additional industry participants and infrastructure to maximize their output. This echoes Hesmondhalgh and Baker's (2011) argument that creative labour in the digital age often shifts responsibility onto individual workers, intensifying precarity and self-exploitation.

The results also show how local institutional factors interact with platform culture. Even while artists are increasingly eschewing traditional organizations like MZI and MDM in favor of digital platforms, they continue to hold sway by offering credibility and performing chances. The outcome is a dual system rather than a straightforward replacement, with platforms controlling visibility while institutions still offer offline access and cultural validation. This is consistent with research by Sharma and Singh (2021) on music scenes in Northeast India, where digital tools increase accessibility while coexisting with long-standing social structures. Overall, the Mizo YouTube sphere is portrayed as being small but diversified, with little infrastructure but high levels of involvement. The ecosystem is divided into independent producers, artists affiliated with MDM, and artists linked

with MZI, each of whom navigates digital areas in a unique way. Audiences are relatively small compared to global standards, but they remain engaged and supportive. In this sense, the Mizo YouTubesphere resembles a microcosm of the global platform economy: it reflects the same logics of visibility, algorithmic pressure, and precarious labour, but in a more intimate, community-oriented scale.

Theoretically, these results add to the conversation on creative labour and platformization in local settings. They demonstrate that although platform affordances like audience reach, free distribution, and accessibility create new opportunities, they also perpetuate vulnerabilities and inequality. The Mizo case is significant because it shows that platforms are not culturally neutral. They create distinctive patterns of resistance and adaptation by interacting with regional social, linguistic, and religious institutions. By insisting on Mizo lyrics, some musicians defied platform pressure and put communal importance ahead of wider appeal. Others chose independence over institutional politics, even if it meant being less visible. In a system where global logics predominate, these minor actions of negotiation represent agency.

Overall, the results indicate that Mizoram's digital platforms are both enabling and limiting. They create opportunities for innovation, networking, and visibility, but they also bring with them performance demands, algorithmic adaptation, and financial instability. With practicality, artists manage this dichotomy, seeing music as a passion-driven endeavour in addition to other professions. Resilience and hybridity are thus characteristics of the Mizo YouTubesphere: small but active, fractured but alive, influenced by global platform culture but grounded in local cultural concerns.

8.9 Summary of Chapter

The study's main conclusions have been presented and analysed in this chapter, which also identifies seven interrelated themes that show how local projects, digital platforms, and conventional institutions work together to influence Mizoram's music business. The conversation showed that YouTube serves as the main platform for

music distribution, providing musicians with accessibility, visibility, and archiving features that they now take for granted. In turn, Instagram functions as a promotional platform where sustaining fan engagement and a professional brand depends heavily on visual culture and consistent presence.

The results also showed that platform culture has a significant impact on creative decisions. In order to satisfy the demands of algorithms and short-form attention economics, artists modify their songs, films, and visual aesthetics. At the same time, they must navigate Mizo cultural norms about language, lyrics, and presentation. The intricate interaction between local cultural values and global digital logics is reflected in this tension. At the same time, the rise of regional platforms like Thulkhung and Darbu brought attention to the practical and symbolic significance of cultural ownership. These projects reflect continuous efforts to create digital places that are more responsive to Mizo requirements, despite the fact that their acceptance is still restricted. Cultural gatekeeping is important even in the digital era because traditional media organizations and artist associations still offer offline possibilities and symbolic credibility. However, the results demonstrated that the distribution of institutional power is now unequal, with younger artists prioritizing digital tactics while older artists and gospel musicians rely more on established structures.

The chapter emphasized how unstable music production is in Mizoram from an economic standpoint. Few musicians make their living only from platforms; instead, they depend on side employment, church concerts, and live performances. The majority of people pursue music as a side activity in addition to other jobs, which reflects the larger dynamics of precarity in creative labour. Artists show tenacity in the face of these obstacles, however, by striking a balance between offline possibilities, cultural expectations, and platform demands. When combined, the results indicate that the Mizo YouTube sphere is small but active, with little infrastructure but a high level of involvement and innovation. It exemplifies the platform economy's larger paradoxes: providing autonomy without structural support, visibility without stability, and potential intertwined with limitations. Building on these discoveries, the following chapter makes final judgments,

considers theoretical ramifications, and provides suggestions for further study and application.

CHAPTER IX

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

9.1 Introduction

The main research findings are compiled in this last chapter, which also considers their wider significance in light of the study's goals. It also lists the study's shortcomings, highlights its contributions to the body of knowledge, and provides helpful advice for academics, artists, and institutions. Examining how digital media influences the experiences, choices, and creative processes of Mizoram musicians was the main goal of the research. In doing so, it gave special attention to YouTube as the most popular platform, while also looking at Instagram's impact, new local platforms like Darbu and Thulkhung, and the ongoing function of traditional media organizations.

The overall tone of the Mizo music scene was strikingly Inactive, according to the fieldwork. There was little feeling of industry-wide goal or collaborative energy, despite the fact that artists were receptive and open in sharing their experiences. Rather, the majority of participants saw their musical endeavours as pastimes or side projects, frequently taking a backseat to other professions or academic pathways. This influenced how they interacted with digital platforms; few showed a consistent interest in comprehending platform algorithms or strategic promotion, and many just copied trends rather than coming up with original ideas. This image of a fragmented market that is still in its infancy, characterized by association competition and a lack of infrastructure for professional development, was repeated by the institutional representatives. The study discovered that digital media has become essential for Mizo artists in spite of this inactivity. Traditional industry organizations are unable to offer the visibility and recognition that platforms such as YouTube and Instagram do. Despite their reluctance to identify as professionals, artists continue to have a strong stake in the recognition, audience, and sporadic possibilities that come with digital media. One characteristic that distinguishes the Mizo YouTubesphere is the

conflict between treating music as a hobby and relying on digital platforms for recognition.

What the researcher refers to as the Platform Ladder Model is among the most significant revelations that have come out of this study. This model outlines the three sequential phases that Mizo artists take when navigating digital media. First, artists use easily available social media sites like Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp to get rapid exposure and buzz. Although these areas can offer unexpected spikes in attention and are rather simple to employ, they don't directly bring in money. Artists try to draw that audience's attention to YouTube and other streaming services at the second level. In this case, visibility becomes more enduring and quantifiable, providing the potential for future monetization in addition to social benefits (views, likes, shares, and subscribers). At the third level, musicians attempt to parlay this notoriety into more measurable financial gains by pointing viewers to live performances and gigs, where earning potential is greatest, or to regional streaming services like Darbu. Although many artists stay at the lower rungs of this ladder, it illustrates the general process by which internet visibility in Mizoram is converted into cultural legitimacy and financial worth. The Platform Ladder Model also draws attention to the existing music ecosystem's shortcomings. Few artists make it to the top of the ladder because it's difficult to move from one step to the next. Many people are still in the first or second stage, creating awareness but finding it difficult to turn it into steady revenue. Others are caught between competing forces, such as the cultural requirements of Mizo audiences and the algorithmic demands of global platforms. The ladder serves as both a limit and an opportunity in this sense. In addition to highlighting the vulnerability of professions that rely on digital platforms, it offers a framework for comprehending how these platforms shape artistic trajectories.

When considered collectively, these observations show that although Mizoram's music business might not have the same infrastructure, energy, or industrial maturity as larger contexts, its musicians are intricately linked to the dynamics of digital media. They create jobs that are unstable but culturally significant by adjusting,

negotiating, and sometimes defying platform demands. This chapter makes the case that the Mizo YouTubesphere is significant not just because of the visibility it creates but also because it is changing how artists manage their identities, envision their possibilities, and continue to be creative in a setting with high expectations and few resources.

9.2 Summary of Major Findings

With a specific focus on YouTube as a major distribution and promotion tool, this study aimed to investigate how digital platforms are changing the music industry in Mizoram. Seven interrelated topics that directly address the research objectives were established through interviews with five institutional officials and twenty-one artists. These results provide a nuanced view of how Mizoram artists manage their careers in a digital landscape that is both empowering and limiting.

YouTube as the Primary Outlet for Music Distribution

Examining how Mizo musicians utilize and view YouTube for exposure, promotion, and career advancement was the primary goal of the study. Results indicate that YouTube has solidified its position as the go-to platform for music distribution. It was frequently referred to by participants as the “main stage,” where songs must perform in order to be accepted as authentic. Regardless of whether it circulates on other platforms, a song that is not published to YouTube is essentially invisible to many. However, the industry’s general lethargy is reflected in the way musicians use YouTube. Although they appreciate the visibility it offers, few use the site in a methodical manner. Many artists rely more on organic audience finding than on optimization or promotion, post infrequently, and put less effort into video production. There was a clear follower mentality at work: rather than trying out new techniques, artists frequently imitated the formats, styles, or tactics they observed others doing. This trend highlights YouTube’s accessibility as well as its limitations in Mizoram: while it democratizes distribution, it rarely results in long-term career advancement.

Instagram and Visual Culture in Artist Promotion

The second theme, which looks at how Instagram influences artist identity and promotion, is strongly related to both Objectives 1 and 2. According to the interviews, Instagram complements YouTube by acting as the primary promotional tool and YouTube as the distribution centre. Instagram, according to artists, is where personalities are developed, audiences are involved, and exposure is actively maintained. Short videos, stories, and reels are used to build anticipation and drive viewers to YouTube releases. Here, the gaps between generations were glaring. While older or gospel-focused artists kept more formal and simple presences, younger artists were more interested in following trends, experimenting with aesthetics, and building an online profile. However, Instagram use was frequently reactive rather than planned, particularly among younger musicians. The low level of digital literacy in the scene is further evidenced by the fact that few individuals paid close attention to the technical parts of algorithms or promotion. Instagram has proven essential for staying relevant in spite of these obstacles, providing a simple way to get started with what this thesis refers to as the Platform Ladder Model, which is an initial step that creates buzz but rarely yields immediate financial gain.

Creative Choices Shaped by Platform Culture

The third topic, which emphasizes how platform culture affects creative decision-making, has a strong connection to Objective 2. According to the interviews, Mizo artists have a keen understanding of what functions well in the digital world. In response to the expectation of quick audience attention, they shorten intros, write songs with memorable choruses, and organize films around visual appeal and conciseness. In instance, YouTube Shorts and Instagram Reels promote the creation of material that has immediate effect rather than depth. The degree to which platform logics permeate local inventiveness is demonstrated by this adaptive behaviour. But it creates tension as well. Artists acknowledged that adhering to trends can jeopardize cultural uniqueness or authenticity. They must strike a balance between meeting algorithmic requirements and accommodating the Mizo audience's inclination for

traditional aesthetics, gospel themes, or modesty. The end effect is a creative landscape influenced by what may be called twin gatekeeping: content is governed by cultural norms, while form is determined by algorithms.

Local Platforms and the Desire for Cultural Ownership

Examining the advantages and disadvantages of regional platforms like Darbu and Thulkhung was the third goal. The results show that these platforms have little real-world use but significant symbolic value. Although artists were proud of local applications and conceptually supported them, their uptake was uneven because of technological problems, low user numbers, and a lack of awareness. Because they viewed these platforms as culturally important places that could shield local music from piracy and neglect, older musicians were frequently more eager to promote them. On YouTube, where audiences were already focused, younger artists, on the other hand, continued to be largely disconnected. Crucially, the interviews indicate that local platforms are viewed as possible complements to global platforms rather than as rivals. This dynamic is explained by the Platform Ladder Model, which states that artists start with Instagram visibility, gain YouTube popularity, and then, if at all possible, steer fans toward Darbu or live performances in order to make money. The third rung of this concept is occupied by local platforms, which stand for cultural ownership and financial sustainability, but most artists still find it challenging to access them.

The Enduring Role of Traditional Institutions

The fourth research goal examined the ongoing impact of artist associations like MZI and MDM, as well as more conventional establishments like Zonet, Vanglaini, and All India Radio (Akashvani Aizawl). These institutions continue to have symbolic authority in spite of the dominance of digital platforms. Recognition is still given by being mentioned on radio, television, or in print, particularly by older audiences. When artists featured on these platforms, they talked about how their families or communities were proud of them, indicating that institutional support conveys a

different kind of cultural capital than online visibility. Concurrently, institutional politics became a major impediment. Many viewed the rivalries between MZI and MDM as harmful and polarizing in an environment where industrial power might be achieved by collective organization. Membership in these groups occasionally led to media prominence or access to gigs, but it also came with annoyances and a feeling of being embroiled in political controversies. This demonstrates the contradiction of Mizoram's institutions, which offer access and credibility yet run the danger of upsetting an ecology that is already delicate.

Navigating Income, Monetization, and Gig Work

For Mizo artists, generating revenue continues to be one of the biggest obstacles. Since the majority had not attained the necessary thresholds, few participants reported making significant sums of money through YouTube monetization. Instagram served as a visibility tool rather than a source of direct revenue. Live performances, weddings, church gatherings, and sporadic sponsorships were the primary revenue streams. This dependence on offline revenue is a reflection of both potential and constraint. On the one hand, gigs offer consistent community visibility and a feeling of continuity with conventional performing techniques. However, it also highlights how unstable digital music production is in Mizoram, where internet platforms generate attention but infrequently result in long-term financial viability. Thus, the sector is defined by what Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2011) refer to as precarious creative labor, where involvement is motivated by identity and passion even in the lack of steady financial compensation.

Resilience, Identity, and Community

Lastly, the study discovered that in spite of structural obstacles, artists demonstrate resiliency and a strong sense of cultural identity. Many people kept making music for spiritual expression, community duty, or personal fulfilment rather than for fame or financial gain. Friends, church groups, and other musicians are examples of informal support systems that are crucial for maintaining artistic endeavours. This is

in line with what Baym (2018) refers to as the “intimate work of connection,” in which creating art involves both sustaining relationships and creating material. The tenacity of Mizo artists further emphasizes the distinctive nature of this sector, which is more concerned with cultural continuation than with financial success. However, this very resilience also runs the risk of concealing the structural problems of institutional fragmentation, precarity, and inadequate infrastructure. The scene might stay inactive in the absence of more robust support networks, functioning at the grassroots level but failing to develop into a viable enterprise.

Synthesis

When combined, these results show that the Mizo music industry is best viewed as a developing ecosystem in which musicians manage their careers by utilizing a mix of local, international, and conventional infrastructures, and digital platforms offer visibility but not stability. The Platform Ladder Model provides a conceptual framework for comprehending this process: artists start with short-lived Instagram fame, build their YouTube following, and aim for financial gain through gigs or local platforms. However, the majority continue to occupy the lower rungs, demonstrating the potential and limitations of platform-based professions in limited cultural contexts.

9.3 Contribution to Knowledge

By investigating how musicians in Mizoram use YouTube, Instagram, and locally created platforms like Darbu and Thulkhung, this thesis adds several novel insights to the study of digital platforms, creative labour, and regional music economies. This study broadens the discussion by highlighting a tiny, linguistically different, and underrepresented cultural context, even though the majority of the work currently in publication has examined the effects of platformization in large or worldwide companies. The main contribution is the creation of what this study refers to as the Platform Ladder Model, which illustrates how Mizoram artists move via various platforms in pursuit of fame, recognition, and financial gain. The approach, which is

based on interview data, outlines a step-by-step procedure whereby artists initially create buzz and attention on user-friendly but non-profitable platforms like Instagram, Facebook, or WhatsApp. They then make an effort to establish credibility on YouTube, where income is a far prospect and metrics like views, likes, and subscribers have social and symbolic significance. Lastly, the most driven musicians attempt to transform this exposure into real profits by attracting fans to live performances and concerts, where there is the most earning potential, or to regional streaming services like Darbu. While sustainability can be found in a single platform in global contexts, the Mizo scenario illustrates how careers rely on this ladder-like advancement across several media environments. The Platform Ladder Model therefore provides a conceptual tool that can be applied in other regional or non-metropolitan settings where artists rely on multiple, interconnected platforms rather than a single dominant one.

The research's classification of the Mizo music business as a moribund industry is another noteworthy contribution. Artists are still putting out songs and there is a lot of inventiveness, but there isn't much structural ambition, industrial infrastructure, or group enthusiasm to enable long-term growth. Many participants defined their music-making as a side gig or pastime rather than their main job, and this ambivalence was reflected in how they used digital platforms. Frequently, there were sporadic posts, little marketing, and tactics that were essentially copying what others were already doing. Although anybody can contribute content, few take the time to treat it as a career path. This following mindset highlights the platforms' accessibility as well as their limitations. Existing research on precarious creative labour, which frequently highlights instability and exploitation, gains subtlety from the idea of dormancy. In Mizoram, the problem is not just instability but also inertia: although artists are active, the scene as a whole lacks the drive and institutional frameworks necessary to advance from an amateur or informal level. This realization provides a useful framework for examining other cultural economies that are still thriving at the local level but have reached a standstill in terms of industrial growth.

The study also makes a contribution by presenting the concept of twin gatekeeping, in which Mizo artists are subject to simultaneous limitations imposed by local cultural norms and platform algorithms. On the one hand, artists modify their work to meet platform logic requirements, such as condensing song openings, creating music with immediate impact, and selecting eye-catching footage for reels and shorts. However, artists continue to be constrained by the cultural standards of their audience, which discourage experimenting with contentious subjects or ostentatious aesthetics and instead prioritize modesty, restraint, and gospel inspirations. Due of these two limitations, a large portion of the music that is created comes across as conservative, traditional, and trend-driven. Artists work within limited parameters, balancing cultural acceptability with algorithmic requirements. While global scholarship has highlighted the power of algorithms in shaping creativity, this study shows that platforms do not act alone. In Mizoram, algorithms intersect with strong cultural traditions to produce a unique form of conservatism in digital creativity. This double gatekeeping not only restricts experimentation but also illustrates how digital logics and cultural values can work together as powerful arbiters of visibility and legitimacy.

Lastly, the study contributes by emphasizing methodological techniques, cultural continuity, and resilience in circumstances that have received little attention. Artists still create music for purposes other than profit, such as self-actualization, volunteer work, or spiritual expression, even though the industry is dormant and revenue is unstable. The significance of non-monetary incentives in creative labour is demonstrated by the fact that informal support systems, such as friends, churches, families, and other musicians, are essential for maintaining artistic practice. By demonstrating how cultural work endures via principles of resilience and belonging, this challenges the notion in international research that creative activity is largely motivated by market logic. In addition, the study shows how useful thematic analysis is as a method in a bilingual context. A detailed image of the ecology was obtained by interviewing artists and institutional representatives in Mizo, translating the conversations into English, and conducting the interviews. The approach was also influenced by the researcher's positionality as a musician and scholar, which

required reflexive awareness of potential bias while enabling deeper interaction with participants. The study demonstrates how qualitative research may capture the intricacies of local, culturally specific music industries in the internet age by fusing insider insights with methodical analysis. The Platform Ladder Model, the framing of dormancy, the acknowledgment of double gatekeeping, and the focus on resilience and methodology collectively expand on current discussions in platform studies and cultural industries, providing fresh perspectives on how creativity develops in tiny but dynamic digital ecosystems.

9.4 Implications of the Study

The conclusions of this thesis have several significant ramifications for musicians, organizations, legislators, and scholars that study digital media and music. Broadly speaking, the study shows that digital platforms are not neutral instruments but rather cultural and economic contexts that influence how artists produce, share, and maintain their work. These settings have produced both opportunities and constraints in Mizoram. Although artists now have more visibility than ever because to platforms like YouTube and Instagram, the fundamental issues of financial instability and a lack of industry infrastructure remain unresolved. Rather, the data indicates that Mizo artists' digital success is based on what this study has called the Platform Ladder Model. The fragmented nature of digital careers in smaller cultural contexts is highlighted by this sequential pattern, where artists start by garnering attention on Instagram or other short-form applications, build legitimacy on YouTube, then hope to make money through local platforms or gigs. This model highlights the necessity for artists to comprehend that visibility on its own is insufficient and that, in order for careers to be sustained, migration across platforms must be both intentional and planned.

Additionally, the report recommends that artists develop a higher degree of digital literacy. Instead of trying out unique tactics, many participants adopted a reactive strategy, posting sporadically and depending on trends or imitating what others were doing. The low vitality of what has been characterized as a dormant industry—

where there is creative activity but little structural ambition or innovation—is reflected in this follower mentality. Being more proactive in organizing content releases, knowing algorithms, and maintaining an internet presence could help Mizoram musicians overcome this inertia. However, individual artists cannot bear this burden alone. Peer networks, educational organizations, and institutions may all do more to help fill the skills gap by providing workshops, training, or group support systems. Without these kinds of interventions, artists run the risk of staying stuck at the bottom of the Platform Ladder, unable to convert visibility into long-term results.

The results show both potential and challenge for local platform developers. Artists praised platforms like Darbu and Thulkhung for their symbolic and cultural significance, but their limited use and low adoption have kept them from becoming widely used. Crucially, the information indicates that these platforms are unlikely to directly compete with YouTube; rather, they work best as supplementary venues where financial backing and cultural ownership may be highlighted. Developers must therefore change their approach from competing with multinational behemoths to developing specific value propositions, such as more straightforward monetization for small audiences, carefully selected gospel or traditional music collections, or improved ties with regional cultural organizations. Artists' symbolic support indicates that there is a significant desire for culturally controlled platforms, but this desire won't come to fruition until these platforms are technically sound, effectively advertised, and regarded with confidence by audiences. As a result, local developers must spend money on communication tactics that increase legitimacy and visibility in addition to app design.

These findings have consequences for traditional media organizations as well. Platforms like Zonet, Vanglaini, and Akashvani Aizawl still have symbolic authority, but their delayed adoption of digital culture is endangering their continued relevance. Artists characterized the procedures as antiquated, constrained, and occasionally politicized, but they also valued the exposure that came with being included on these platforms. An already delicate environment becomes even more fragmented as a result of institutional politics between artist organizations like Music Domain

Mizoram (MDM) and Mizo Zaimi Insuihkhawm Pawl (MZI). The consequence for institutions is clear: they need to look for integration rather than compete with digital platforms. There are chances to leverage print, television, and radio as intergenerational bridges—for instance, by utilizing Instagram to promote traditional programming or by promoting popular YouTubers on traditional channels. By doing this, organizations might embrace the reality of digital culture while retaining their symbolic importance. At the same time, artist organizations must put aside their political differences and concentrate again on group support and advocacy. Institutional competition runs the potential of undermining rather than enhancing the creative community in a nascent sector.

The findings point to a lack of support systems for artists in Mizoram that should be taken into consideration by educators and policymakers. The Mizo setting is still somewhat fragmented, in contrast to larger urban centres where music businesses could profit from institutional backing or pre-existing infrastructures. The Platform Ladder Model demonstrates that although artists are resourceful, it is challenging to move up past the second rung of visibility due to a lack of integrated infrastructure. Legislators might step in by establishing minor incentives for the production of digital material, encouraging the growth of regional platforms, or incorporating instruction in media literacy into school curricula. At a more structural level, digital music must be included into larger cultural policy frameworks, acknowledging its significance as cultural labour with social, economic, and identity-building implications in addition to its role as entertainment. Artists will continue to rely on unofficial networks and individual tenacity in the absence of such acknowledgment, which is commendable but restricts the industry's long-term development.

The study offers significant theoretical ramifications as well. It demonstrates that global platformization frameworks cannot be blindly applied to more localized, smaller settings. The Mizoram case demonstrates how algorithmic pressures and double gatekeeping, in which artists concurrently adjust to platform logics and cultural norms, affect digital careers. This emphasizes how important it is for platform studies to consider cultural specificity. Theories created in urban settings

frequently make assumptions about professional aspirations, entrepreneurialism, and individual freedom that might not hold true in smaller, localized businesses. The unwillingness of artists in Mizoram to depart from cultural norms shows that visibility is negotiated in social and digital contexts. This realization implies that future platformization research should take into account both algorithms and the cultural norms that influence how those algorithms are perceived and applied in various contexts.

The study's methodology highlights the importance of qualitative, reflective research in understudied and multilingual environments. Through Mizo interviewing, English translation, and the use of thematic analysis, a realistic portrayal of artists' experiences with platform culture was made possible. The results were further enhanced by including institutional representatives with artists, demonstrating how organizations and infrastructures influence opportunities and limitations. Although it necessitated cautious reflexivity to prevent bias, the researcher's positionality as a musician also contributed to greater rapport and insight. In addition to highlighting the value of insider knowledge in cultural study, this method shows how openness is necessary to recognize the ways in which positionality affects interpretation. The conclusion for future studies is that, rather than depending exclusively on universalized frameworks or quantitative measurements, methodologies for analysing digital labour in smaller industries must be sensitive to language, culture, and community dynamics.

Lastly, the results have implications for a broader perspective on the future of music-making in small digital ecosystems. The idea of a dormant industry is helpful not only for characterizing Mizoram but also for comprehending other creative economies in the region where there are potential but industrial structures are not up to speed. The study's identification of this dormancy highlights the significance of creating networks, infrastructures, regulations, and platforms that can turn creative endeavours into long-term professions. Mizo artists' tenacity and cultural continuity are admirable, but they shouldn't overshadow the structural obstacles that restrict their possibilities. The implication is that promoting regional industries necessitates

putting sustainability above visibility for academics, practitioners, and politicians alike. The narrative of Mizoram's YouTubesphere thus encompasses more than simply music videos and algorithms; it also explores how a community navigates institutional limitations, creative aspirations, and cultural identity in the digital era.

9.5 Challenges and Limitations

It is important to recognize that this research, like any qualitative study, has limitations and obstacles. These highlight the results' breadth and highlight areas that require more research, without diminishing the significance of the findings. Geographical and scope-related limitations are a major one. The majority of the interviews took place in Mizoram's capital, Aizawl, which has better access to the internet than many rural areas. Even though some of the participants were initially from outside of Aizawl, the study mostly represents an urban viewpoint and does not fully represent the views of artists who live in rural areas or are less tech-savvy. Further study that expands to district-level contexts may uncover further dynamics.

There were difficulties with language and translation as well. The Mizo-language interviews were subsequently translated into English for analysis. Even if great care was taken to ensure meaning was retained, it's possible that subtleties of tone or cultural idioms were lost or changed during translation. This is an inevitable problem in multilingual research and emphasizes the importance of being sensitive when interpreting identity and expression-related concerns. Another restriction is the makeup of the sample. With five institutional representatives and twenty-one artists, the survey was broad but not exhaustive. Although a variety of popular, independent, and gospel performers were represented among the participants, some viewpoints are still neglected. The primary purpose of including institutional voices was to provide background; their perspectives were not as thoroughly examined as those of artists. It's also critical to recognize how digital platforms are evolving. The results show a specific period of dominance by YouTube and Instagram (2022–2024). But user trends, algorithms, and platform policies change rapidly. Additionally, local platforms like Darbu and Thulkhung are still in their infancy and may become more

or less relevant in the future. Therefore, rather than providing a permanent record, the study provides a snapshot.

Lastly, the research was also influenced by the institutional politics and the nature of the sector. Many musicians said they had no desire to pursue music as a full-time job and instead saw it as a side gig. Because of this “dormant” characteristic, data frequently showed resignation rather than long-term planning. At the same time, conflicts between groups like MDM and MZI prevented certain artists from identifying with either organization, which reduced the potential for group viewpoints. The procedure was further impacted by time and resource limitations because the research was carried out without substantial funds or support personnel. The study offers deep and well-founded insights into how Mizo artists interact with and experience digital media in spite of these drawbacks. Documenting these difficulties as a part of the lived reality of a tiny but vibrant creative ecosystem is exactly what makes it valuable.

9.6 Recommendations

9.6.1 For Artists and Music Creators

The study’s conclusions imply that Mizo artists frequently adopt a follower mentality when using platforms, imitating trends or uploading sporadically without employing effective growth or visibility techniques. This restricts the potential of digital platforms to produce consistent attention or revenue, even though it makes sense in a “dormant industry” where music is frequently viewed as a side gig. As a result, artists must develop a higher level of digital literacy, not just in the technical facets of editing or uploading, but also in the areas of algorithmic analysis, audience reaction to content, and cross-platform strategy creation. Moving audiences from one platform to another is essential for sustainability and visibility, as the Platform Ladder Model created in this study makes clear. Artists should see platforms like Darbu or live performances as the point of money conversion, YouTube as the stage for legitimacy and archiving, and Instagram and WhatsApp as the entry point for

publicity. It is possible to close the gap between revenue and visibility by consciously working across these stages.

Artists must simultaneously strike a balance between platform requirements, authenticity, and cultural continuity. According to the statistics, artists are nonetheless constrained by the expectations of Mizo audiences, who place a high value on modesty, lyrical clarity, and cultural rootedness, even though they frequently modify their work to conform to platform logics—shorter intros, attention-grabbing images, or trendy sounds. It is crucial for artists to properly manage this twin gatekeeping: adjusting to algorithms without sacrificing cultural values. Sharing resources for production and promotion, forming small teams, or working with colleagues can all help artists cope with the pressure of being “one-person industries.” More significantly, artists must embrace digital channels as possible means for professional growth rather than merely places to share hobbies. They must also stop accepting inactivity passively.

9.6.2 For Local Platform Developers

Despite being significant symbolic venues, Darbu and Thulkhung are still underutilized because of technological issues, poor marketing, and small user bases. Instead of competing with YouTube, developers can work to enhance it by providing specialized affordances that are unavailable on global platforms. This might involve smaller-scale monetization, carefully selected gospel or folk music compilations, or special YouTube channels for local genres that run the risk of being overlooked. Even though they were reluctant to rely on these platforms, the survey revealed that artists were emotionally supportive of them. Developers must capitalize on this symbolic goodwill by offering a dependable and intuitive user interface.

Promotion is just as crucial. According to the majority of musicians, their fans either didn't know about these sites or weren't interested in downloading them. To establish credibility, developers must thus fund awareness efforts via traditional media, churches, youth organizations, and schools. Collaborations with groups like

MDM and MZI may also contribute to the development of trust. These platforms could become significant additions to YouTube if artists work together to persuade viewers to support Darbu or Thulkhung as part of the last rung of the Platform Ladder. Financial incentives that demonstrate real support for artists, including competitions, minor grants, or rewards for frequent uploaders, should also be taken into account by developers.

9.6.3 For Cultural Institutions

The results showed that cultural institutions faced both opportunities and difficulties. On the one side, groups like MDM and MZI are crucial in providing credibility, suggesting performers for events, and providing a sense of community. However, their internal conflicts and politics frequently drive artists apart and impede the development of the group as a whole. Such fragmentation might be harmful in a sector as delicate as Mizoram's. Institutions must put cooperation above rivalry and develop cooperative projects that benefit the larger artist community. Tensions could be decreased and trust could be raised via joint training sessions, group marketing initiatives, or an impartial council that recommends artists for events.

Particularly with elderly audiences, traditional media like Akashvani Aizawl, Zonet, and Vanglaini continue to have symbolic value. For artists, their acknowledgment frequently feels more "official" than social media visibility. But if these sources don't adapt to digital culture, they run the risk of becoming obsolete. Here, bridging the gap between old and modern media is advised. For instance, Vanglaini might devote room to digital music trends, AIR could organize sessions with viral musicians, and Zonet could showcase YouTube performers in televised shows, as they sometimes do. By doing this, conventional institutions would increase their digital presence while simultaneously maintaining their symbolic importance. The gatekeeping procedures used by these organizations, which can favour more seasoned or established artists, also need to be reviewed. Younger or experimental musicians could get access to institutional platforms with a more open attitude.

9.6.4 For Educators and Policy-Makers

A notable policy deficit in Mizoram's music ecosystem is brought to light by the study. Despite their resourcefulness and tenacity, artists continue to be torn between precarity and exposure in the absence of institutional support. In order to support the sector, educators and policymakers can be extremely important. Including music literacy and digital media in courses, especially at the higher secondary or college level, might be one approach. Younger musicians would be better prepared to view digital platforms as professional tools rather than casual pastimes if they took courses in video creation, copyright knowledge, social media management, and audience engagement.

For emerging musicians or collectives, policymakers might also offer startup funds and minor subsidies, allowing them to invest in promotion, rent studio space, or buy equipment. By supporting technical development and offering subsidies for internet connectivity in rural areas, governmental or non-governmental organizations could assist local platforms. Furthermore, digital musicians should be officially acknowledged by cultural policy as belonging to the state's creative economy. This would enable them to access programs and advantages that are typically only available to traditional or folk musicians. In addition to investing in people, infrastructure, training, and institutional cooperation are also necessary to support this shift from dormancy to dynamism.

9.6.5 For Future Researchers

The importance of researching digital platforms in small, underrepresented contexts has been demonstrated by this thesis. It did, however, also highlight a number of holes that can be filled by further study. Including the viewpoint of the audience is a crucial step. Although some questionnaire data was used in this study, more in-depth qualitative research with Mizoram music listeners may provide insight into how audiences select platforms, interact with indigenous music, and assess legitimacy. It would also be beneficial to do comparative studies throughout North-East India to

determine whether Mizoram has distinct features or if the Platform Ladder Model is applicable to other minor music industries.

In order to track trends in visibility and interaction, future researchers may investigate mixed-method approaches that combine digital analytics and interviews. Additionally, longitudinal studies that track artists over a number of years might shed light on how careers develop at various platform ladder rungs. Lastly, it is still crucial to use reflective methods that incorporate insider information, as this thesis has done. In order to establish rapport and gain a deeper grasp of cultural contexts, researchers should be open and honest about their positionality. The suggestions made here are based on the actual experiences of Mizo institutions and artists. They emphasize the value of planning, genuineness, and teamwork for artists. They emphasize cultural relevance and technical dependability for local developers. They urge institutions to overcome barriers and adjust to the digital culture. They highlight policy recognition and structural support for educators and policymakers. Additionally, they give academics additional avenues to explore local digital innovation. All of these suggestions point to a more vibrant and long-lasting music scene in Mizoram, one that emerges from slumber and starts to rise up the ladder in the direction of increased awareness, respect, and financial security.

9.7 Final Reflections

This study's conclusion provides a chance to consider the results in isolation as well as their wider implications for comprehending creativity, digital media, and cultural life in small yet vibrant areas like Mizoram. The narrative that comes out of this research is neither one of complete pessimism regarding precarity nor one of unequivocal optimism regarding digital opportunities. Rather, it is a tale of ambition restrained by realism, inventiveness within bounds, and endurance under duress.

One of the most obvious takeaways is that, while digital platforms are essential, they are not enough to help Mizoram musicians develop long-term careers. Artists mostly depend on YouTube and Instagram as exposure tools in order to share their music,

engage with fans, and build credibility. However, money does not always follow from visibility. Instagram provides minimal direct financial return, and many artists are still below the YouTube monetization threshold. Instead, the platforms offer confirmation, acknowledgment, and even the possibility of receiving invitations to perform offline. In this way, visibility serves more as a means to an aim than as a goal in itself. This dynamic is encapsulated in the Platform Ladder Model created in this thesis: artists first garner notice on easily accessible platforms, then build their following on YouTube, and lastly, frequently with difficulty, try to turn exposure into revenue through local apps or live performances. This ladder demonstrates the fragmented and multi-layered nature of small music enterprises' efforts to achieve sustainability.

The industry's perception of inactivity is equally evident. Even though musicians still create and distribute music, they frequently have a passive attitude toward it, viewing it more as a pastime or side gig than a formal vocation. The absence of industrial momentum does not imply that creativity is non-existent; rather, it indicates that it is still dispersed and inadequately encouraged. Artists openly discussed emulating colleagues, following trends, or completely ignoring promotion. Few expressed interests in learning algorithms or creating methodical plans. Both the limits of infrastructure and the ambivalence of people who juggle music with other careers, academic pursuits, or familial responsibilities are reflected in this inactivity. Artists choose pragmatism—continuing to produce without high expectations of growth—in an environment where career paths are unclear.

The study also demonstrates how artists deal with two aspects of gatekeeping: the demands of Mizo society's cultural norms and platform algorithms. Shorter films, attention-grabbing hooks, and visually striking content are encouraged by algorithms, but modesty, clarity, and spiritual resonance are valued by local audiences. Careful creativity is frequently the result of navigating these two filters. In order to conform to both algorithmic trends and cultural conservatism, many musicians shunned contentious lyrics, ostentatious images, or dangerous aesthetics. The end effect is a recognizable and safe style that occasionally lacks originality. This is not to imply

that artists lack inventiveness, but rather that they are always working within limitations. We can better understand how platforms influence artists' ideas about what is appropriate and sustainable in their local contexts by acknowledging this dual strain.

The situation is complicated by local politics. Mizo Zaimi Insuihkhawm Pawl (MZI) and Music Domain Mizoram (MDM) are two organizations that offer crucial networking, credibility, and chances. However, their competition frequently deters musicians from giving their all to either, and others decide to be independent in order to stay out of the fray. Conventional organizations like Zonet and Akashvani Aizawl are still important because they provide symbolic acknowledgment that seems more "official" than YouTube views. However, they continue to rely on outdated gatekeeping methods and are sluggish to adjust to digital culture. When taken as a whole, these dynamics demonstrate how important institutions—new or old—remain in determining visibility, yet they are also places of conflict and marginalization.

The study emphasizes the adaptability and tenacity of Mizo artists in spite of these limitations. Many people still produce without anticipating significant financial gains because they are driven by spiritual service, cultural pride, or personal fulfilment. Peer networks and unofficial support systems are essential: families promote involvement, church groups fund concerts, and friends work together on video productions. This serves as a reminder that the ideals of identity, belonging, and community are just as important to creative labour as markets. In this way, the music industry in Mizoram exhibits a kind of silent perseverance, where musicians make a living by creating meaning rather than making money. The study also emphasizes the value of insider viewpoints and reflexivity in research from a methodological point of view. Depth and authenticity were added by conducting interviews in Mizo, translating them into English, and referencing the researcher's dual identities as a musician and scholar. The voices of the participants had to be kept at the forefront of the study, but caution had to be taken to prevent prejudice.

Finding commonalities across a range of experiences while preserving room for individual nuance was made possible by thematic analysis.

To sum up, this thesis's conclusions depict a small but vibrant, limited but inventive, and resilient but inert music business. Artists in Mizoram are navigating a digital environment that presents both opportunities and constraints, resulting in careers that are disjointed, spontaneous, and intricately entwined with cultural life. Their experiences demonstrate that platformization does not always develop in the same manner; in outlying areas, it interacts with regional customs, political systems, and infrastructures to generate unique kinds of innovation. In situations when resources are limited but skill and passion are many, it is hoped that this research will add to both scholarly discussions and real-world discussions on how to help and maintain artists.

ANNEXURE I: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Artist Interview Guide (Music Creators)

This semi-structured interview guide was used to explore how Mizo music artists use and perceive digital platforms, especially YouTube, in their music careers. The interviews were conducted in Mizo and later translated into English. Questions were open-ended, with flexibility to adapt based on participant responses.

Section 1: Background and Music Practice

- Can you briefly introduce yourself and your journey as a music artist?
- What kind of music do you create (genre/style)?
- Are you working independently or under a label or group?

Section 2: Use of Digital Platforms

- Which digital platforms do you use to share your music?
- Why did you choose YouTube (or other platforms) as your main platform?
- Can you describe your experience with YouTube—what do you like/dislike about it?

Section 3: Promotion and Engagement

- How do you promote your songs after uploading them?
- Do you use platforms like Instagram, Facebook, or WhatsApp to share music?
- How do you interact with your audience online?

Section 4: Creative Process and Platform Influence

- Has using YouTube or Instagram changed the way you make music or videos?
- Do you think about audience preferences, algorithms, or trends when creating content?
- Have you ever adjusted your lyrics, length, or visuals to suit a platform?

Section 5: Local Platforms and Institutions

- Have you used local platforms like Darbu or Thulkhung? Why or why not?
- What do you think are the benefits or problems with these local platforms?
- How do you see the role of local media like Zonet, AIR, or newspapers in your music career?

Section 6: Challenges and Opportunities

- What are the biggest challenges you face as a music artist in the digital age?
- What keeps you motivated to keep creating and sharing music?
- What kind of support would help you as an artist?

Institutional Interview Guide

This guide was used for interviews with representatives of institutions such as AIR Aizawl, Zonet, Vanglaini, and Music Domain Mizoram.

- Can you describe your organization's involvement in promoting or supporting local music?
- How has the rise of YouTube and social media changed the music landscape in Mizoram?
- Does your organization collaborate with digital platforms or local artists?
- What role do you see for local platforms like Darbu or Thulkhung?
- What challenges do Mizo artists face in gaining recognition today?
- In what ways could institutions better support digital music creators?

ANNEXURE II: LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

This appendix presents a summary of the participants involved in the research. A total of 21 music artists and 5 institutional representatives participated. Artist identities have been anonymized using participant codes. Information such as musical genre, platform usage, and achievements are included to reflect diversity and depth in the sample.

Participant Code	Gender	Genre/Style	Primary Platforms Used	Notable Info
P1	Male	Acoustic/Folk	YouTube, Instagram	Known for emotional live recordings
P2	Female	Contemporary Gospel	YouTube, Facebook	Local gospel award winner
P3	Male	Hip-hop/Rap	YouTube, Instagram	Featured in regional rap collaborations
P4	Female	Pop/R&B	YouTube, Instagram, TikTok	Participated in a regional music reality show
P5	Male	Indie Pop	YouTube, Instagram	Self-produces and edits all own content
P6	Male	Electronic/Experimental	YouTube, SoundCloud	Active in online remix culture
P7	Female	Gospel/Pop	YouTube, WhatsApp	Often performs at church and charity events
P8	Male	Reggae/Folk Fusion	YouTube,	Known for blending

Participant Code	Gender	Genre/Style	Primary Platforms Used	Notable Info
			Instagram	local sounds with reggae
P9	Male	Hip-hop	YouTube	Youth influencer with strong visual identity
P10	Female	Ballad/Traditional	YouTube, Facebook	Receives consistent local media coverage
P11	Male	Pop/Rock	YouTube, Instagram	Part of a small studio collective
P12	Female	Indie/Experimental	YouTube, Instagram	Recently signed to a small creative agency
P13	Male	Folk/Christian	YouTube, Thulkhung	Member of church media team
P14	Male	Rock/Alternative	YouTube, Instagram	Regular performer at local music festivals
P15	Female	Contemporary Gospel	YouTube, Instagram	Holds annual gospel music concert
P16	Male	Indie Pop/Acoustic	YouTube, Facebook	Popular for narrative-based songwriting
P17	Female	Christian/Soft Rock	YouTube, Thulkhung	Featured on local gospel streaming platforms
P18	Male	R&B/Alternative	YouTube,	Studio engineer and

Participant Code	Gender	Genre/Style	Primary Platforms Used	Notable Info
			Instagram	collaborator
P19	Male	Fusion/Folk	YouTube, Darbu	Strong offline presence through live gigs
P20	Female	Pop/Folk	YouTube, Instagram	Grew fanbase via viral teaser reels
P21	Male	Hip-hop/Trap	YouTube, Instagram, TikTok	Collaborates with visual artists for video art

Institutional Representatives (IR1–IR5)

Code	Affiliation Type	Role/Position	Notes
IR1	Music Streaming Platform	Admin (Darbu)	Involved in app development and artist outreach
IR2	Cultural Organization	General Secretary (MDM)	Supports platform creation and artist training
IR3	Television Broadcaster	Media Producer (Zonet)	Covers local music and artist promotion
IR4	Public Radio Broadcaster	Program Director (Akashvani)	Focus on traditional and Christian music
IR5	Newspaper Media	Editor (Vanglaini)	Offers press coverage and artist interviews

ANNEXURE III: THEMATIC CODING FRAMEWORK

This appendix outlines how initial codes from interview transcripts were grouped and refined into broader themes. Thematic analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step process. Codes were generated manually by reviewing and re-reading the transcripts. The framework below reflects the progression from **initial codes** to **grouped categories**, and finally to **seven major themes**.

Step 1: Initial Codes (Selected Examples)

- "I just upload it and share on WhatsApp"
- "I don't know about the algorithm"
- "Instagram is better for promotion"
- "Sometimes I adjust my lyrics to suit the vibe"
- "I don't get many views but I still post"
- "People outside Mizoram watch my videos too"
- "Darbu is good but not many people use it"
- "It's hard to earn money just from YouTube"
- "Church media still plays a role"
- "Zonet helped me promote one of my songs"

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Step 2: Grouped Categories

Grouped Categories	Description
Basic Digital Use	Everyday use of platforms with little technical focus
Visibility Practices	Strategies for gaining attention and

Grouped Categories	Description
	promotion
Emotional Motivation & Persistence	Why artists keep creating despite low views or money
Platform-Driven Creativity	Creative decisions influenced by digital trends or audience expectations
Community & Collaboration	Working with peers, studios, and family
Mixed Views on Local Platforms	Hopeful but cautious perspectives on Darbu and Thulkhung
Traditional Media Influence	Ongoing relevance of radio, cable TV, church support, etc.

Step 3: Final Draft Themes

Final Theme Number	Theme Title	Short Description
1	Everyday Digital Practices	Artists' casual, intuitive use of YouTube, WhatsApp, and Instagram
2	Strategic Visibility and Platform Learning	Artists' efforts to navigate visibility despite limited technical expertise
3	Motivation and Personal Meaning	Emotional and spiritual reasons artists continue to create
4	Creative Choices Shaped by Platform Culture	How YouTube and Instagram influence genre, visuals, and production

Final Theme Number	Theme Title	Short Description
5	The Role of Collaboration and Networks	Peer networks and studio groups as support systems
6	Local Platforms in a Global Artist Ecosystem	perceptions of Darbu and Thulkhung vs. global platforms
7	Enduring Role of Traditional Institutions	of Zonet, AIR, and churches as continuing sources of validation and support

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DIGITAL RESONANCE: EXPLORING THE INFLUENCE OF YOUTUBE ON AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT

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Abstract

The way we perceive, make, and consume music has changed as a result of YouTube and other digital media. The majority of the industry's revenue today comes from digital music, and musicians are often required to maintain an online presence. The main goal of this study was to identify the type and scope of these new (digital) platforms' influence on musical experiences. In this essay, we examine 250 respondents' (constant) internet music consumption patterns and the resulting shifts in how they view the creative process. The study uses a quantitative methodology and data gathered using survey (online questionnaire). The results of our study are consistent with other studies on the YouTube effect, which found that the widespread usage of digital streaming services—in particular, YouTube—changes users' general musical experiences. Additionally, these shifts are multifaceted: on the one hand, we observe a trend towards a more conventional "radio-mode" of music listening, while on the other, we observe a greater degree of engagement and active participation on the part of listeners (Like, Comment, Share, etc.). Additionally, for the majority of YouTube audiences, the audio and visual are interwoven. These findings open up new directions for research into digital marketing, production, consumption, and distribution.

Keywords: YouTube, Digital Media, Effect Analysis, Music, Audience Research

INTRODUCTION

The recorded music industry has seen a significant technical transformation during the 1990s as a result of the growth of information and communications technology (ICT), the Internet, and more recently, the digitization of services. In some circumstances, the value of conventional media has been reduced as a result of the advent of new digital and social media platforms (Kumar, 2021). The progressive media and technological change over the past century has led researchers to refer to this time as the "post-performance" period (Thibeault, 2012). In the media period of contemporary technology, the amount of music that an artist has created is largely limited to recordings and live performances. Both art and other streaming services like Apple Music and Spotify have been impacted by the YouTube effect. The same as the phonograph, record player, cassette tape, CD, and digital audio file, YouTube has had an impact on the musical art form. The way individuals use music videos serves as evidence of this. Particularly YouTube is a medium for mass communication that, like television, offers both audio and visual information. However, what distinguishes it from more traditional media is its ability to prompt a quick response or audience interaction (via Likes, Comments, Share, etc.), which may have an effect on content development in the future. According to Edmond (2014), music (videos) has moved from television to the internet and have become a vital part of society.

One of the best examples of how an innovation may completely disrupt an industry and render outdated established industry expertise is the quick transition of the music industry. The capacity to manage physical distribution was a major factor in the music industry's pre-Internet strength and influence. The incumbent large music corporations have had to reinvent themselves in order to survive as physical music distribution becomes more and more obsolete due to the internet (Wikstrom, 2014). We now perceive, make, and consume music differently thanks to YouTube and other

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Climbing the Platform Ladder: A Conceptual Model for Understanding Musicians' Pathways in Peripheral Contexts

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Abstract

Digital platforms have become central to the music industry, shaping how artists distribute, promote, and professionalize their work. While existing studies emphasize multi-platform strategies and the affordances of individual platforms, most focus on resource-rich contexts where artists engage with several platforms simultaneously. Less attention has been given to smaller or peripheral contexts, where musicians often face infrastructural and cultural constraints that make platform use more gradual and sequential. This article introduces the Platform Ladder Model (PLM) as a framework for understanding these pathways. The model integrates insights from platformization, affordance theory, and research on creative careers. It proposes that musicians experience platforms as rungs in a ladder: beginning with local base platforms, moving to YouTube as a global entry point, engaging audiences through social media, and aspiring toward professionalization via streaming services and industry networks. Each stage offers distinct opportunities but also presents barriers shaped by inequality and limited resources. Developed from the case of Mizoram in Northeast India, the PLM extends platform studies with a developmental perspective and provides a transferable tool for analysing creative practices in other global South contexts.

Keywords: Platformization, Creative Careers, Digital Music, Mizoram, Affordances

Introduction

Globally, the production, distribution, and consumption of music have all changed as a result of the quick development of digital technologies. Artists now rely heavily on platforms like YouTube, Instagram, and Spotify to reach fans and further their careers. Platformization is the term used by scholars to characterize this trend, in which the logic and infrastructure of digital platforms increasingly influence cultural creation and daily behaviours (Nieborg & Poell, 2018). Smaller or peripheral contexts have received less attention than larger markets and worldwide participants in the majority of platformization and music business study. Nonetheless, these settings offer valuable perspectives on how artists manage various platforms in the face of scarce resources, linguistic quirks, and regional cultural customs.

One such setting is the tiny state of Mizoram in northeastern India. In the absence of a robust local music industry infrastructure, Mizo musicians have resorted to internet platforms in recent years to maintain their creative practices as well as to increase their visibility. While other sites like Instagram and TikTok are used for promotion and fan interaction, YouTube has become the primary medium for distribution. At the same time, locally specific alternatives are being attempted by local digital projects like Darbu and Thulkhung, which follows a one-time purchase model where audiences can buy music or albums of their favourite local artists at a minimum price. Despite these advancements, conceptual frameworks that describe how artists navigate platforms, bargain for opportunities, and deal with constraints are still lacking. The Platform Ladder Model (PLM), a conceptual framework for comprehending musicians' multi-platform techniques in places like Mizoram, is introduced in this article. The PLM is predicated on the notion that artists advance through phases, or "rungs," of digital involvement, beginning locally and progressively making their way to greater recognition and professionalization. The PLM stresses a progressive and developmental process, in contrast to current paradigms that frequently characterize platform use as simultaneous or fragmented. It is particularly pertinent to non-dominant music ecologies since it also draws attention to the institutional obstacles and unequal access that influence this growth.

Therefore, this work has two goals: first, it presents the Platform Ladder Model as a contribution to the study of music and digital media; second, it uses the example of Mizo artists to demonstrate the model. The talk will demonstrate how the PLM may assist explain career routes in a digitalized music industry, how it can make sense of the affordances and constraints of various platforms, and how it might be adapted outside of Mizoram to other regional or global South contexts. By doing this, this

study aims to expand platformization discussions and offer a conceptual framework that is both empirically supported and conceptually beneficial.

Digital Platforms and Music Practices

Over the past 20 years, a lot of research has been done on the connection between digital platforms and the music industry. In these discussions, the idea of platformization is crucial. Platformization is the term used to describe how the governance, economic models, and infrastructures of online platforms are progressively influencing everyday activities and cultural production (Nieborg & Poell, 2018; van Dijck et al., 2018). Artists, fans, and organizations now rely on platforms like YouTube, Spotify, and TikTok for interaction, promotion, and distribution in the music industry as a result of this change. Platforms impose limitations including algorithmic visibility, commercialization guidelines, and unequal access to resources in addition to offering new opportunities. Thus, it is crucial for research to comprehend how these dynamics function in certain settings.

Scholars have demonstrated the many functions that platforms play in the global music economy. For example, it has been said that YouTube is the easiest way for musicians, both professional and amateur, to display their work (Burgess & Green, 2018). Artists from a variety of backgrounds can access audiences thanks to its low entry barrier, yet visibility is mostly dependent on computational logics and advertising-driven models (Cunningham & Craig, 2019). On the other hand, TikTok and Instagram are more concerned with audience engagement and short-form content. These platforms encourage artists to project a more personal or everyday image while also promoting branding and audience interaction (Leaver et al., 2020). Though they need institutional support like label partnerships, distribution networks, and marketing tactics, Spotify and other streaming services are linked to professionalization and worldwide recognition (Morris & Powers, 2015). These studies show that artists frequently use multiple platforms, each with unique affordances and limits.

The significance of multi-platform tactics in the creative industries is emphasized by another body of literature. According to Cunningham and Craig (2019), in order to thrive, digital producers need to be active across several channels. Accordingly, musicians are not only artists but also content producers who are always modifying their methods for various platforms. Nevertheless, rather than being sequential, the literature frequently characterizes these tactics as simultaneous or fragmented. In other words, it frequently presumes that artists use several platforms simultaneously rather than alternating between them. This presumption might be true in

environments with plenty of resources, but it fails to adequately represent the realities faced by artists in smaller markets, where advancement may be slow and reliant on resources, opportunities, and skill sets. Research on the cultural and creative industries has extensively examined the concept of career advancement. For instance, Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2011) demonstrate how precariousness, networks, and institutions determine the uncertain career routes that creative labor frequently takes. Banks (2017) explains how artists progress through several levels of opportunity and recognition using the concept of "creative careers." These models offer helpful analogies for considering how musicians progress in a digitalized setting, even though they are not particularly about digital platforms. Such growth is frequently compared to a ladder, where each rung entails increased resources, duties, and obstacles.

There are still gaps in the body of literature despite these contributions. Large markets with comparatively robust infrastructures and resources, like the US, Europe, or East Asia, have been the subject of the majority of research. Peripheral or small contexts, like Mizoram, where linguistic, cultural, and infrastructure factors differ greatly, have received far less attention. More research on the effects of platformization on regional music scenes and the global South has been demanded by academics (Lobato, 2019). Such research can offer new perspectives on the unequal dynamics of digital culture around the world. In this sense, conceptual models that capture the sequential and developmental nature of platform use in smaller ecologies are necessary in addition to describing multi-platform activities. The Platform Ladder Model (PLM), which is proposed in this paper, fills that gap. Although it adjusts them to the realities of non-dominant contexts, the PLM builds on insights from platformization, multi-platform strategies, and career progression research. It implies that artists advance via platforms in a manner like to a ladder, beginning with accessible or local bases and working their way up to greater recognition and professionalism. The PLM thus offers a paradigm that can explain the disparities and opportunities in the digital music market.

Conceptual Foundations of the Model

Platformization, affordances, and career advancement in creative sectors are the three main theoretical pillars around which the Platform Ladder Model (PLM) is based. These conceptual frameworks clarify why musicians' usage of platforms can be viewed as a ladder-like path, exposing both disparities and opportunities.

First, platformization describes how digital platforms are becoming more and more dominant in the creation of culture (Nieborg & Poell, 2018; van Dijck et al., 2018).

For distribution, promotion, and interaction, musicians now rely on YouTube, Instagram, Spotify, and other platforms (Cunningham & Craig, 2019). The PLM concentrates on the user perspective, demonstrating how musicians in smaller contexts view and use platforms as stages in their careers, whereas a large portion of this study emphasizes systemic changes. Second, platforms are experienced differently at each level, which can be explained by the affordances idea. The possibilities for action that an environment offers are known as affordances (Gibson, 1979). In digital media studies, these possibilities are used to illustrate how characteristics can facilitate or limit behaviours (Boyd, 2010). For instance, Instagram allows branding but requires regular activity, whereas YouTube offers low-cost worldwide access but limits monetization. These affordances combine with particular cultural and infrastructure factors in peripheral locales like Mizoram to influence musicians' strategic usage of platforms.

Last but not least, studies on professional advancement in the cultural sectors emphasize the ladder as a representation of ambiguous and uneven paths (Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2011; Banks, 2017). New networks, abilities, and recognition are needed at every stage. This concept is modified by the PLM, which frames platforms as rungs on a career ladder. This demonstrates how digital logics and cultural disparities interact to shape artistic trajectories, bridging the gap between theories of creative labor and platform studies. By integrating these viewpoints, the PLM enhances career studies by positioning platforms at the core of advancement and adds a sequential dimension to platform studies. It is applicable to different regional or global South contexts and provides a descriptive account of the practices of Mizo musicians.

The Platform Ladder Model

The Platform Ladder Model (PLM) is a conceptual paradigm that explains the sequential and developmental movement of artists across digital platforms in tiny or peripheral contexts like Mizoram. The ladder metaphor is used in the model, with each rung signifying a distinct degree of digital involvement. Even though musicians occasionally use several platforms at once, their career paths frequently exhibit a pattern of steady advancement, with each stage building upon the one before it. The realities of resource limitations, infrastructure restrictions, and strategic decisions that influence artistic activity in non-dominant ecologies are highlighted by this contrast with models that presume simultaneous presence across platforms.

Local base platforms, YouTube as a worldwide access point, social media engagement, and professionalization through streaming and industry integration are

the four key rungs of the PLM. Every rung has unique obstacles in addition to offering particular affordances. Access to technology, cultural capital, networks, and institutional support are some of the factors that influence movement between rungs; it is not a random process. As a result, the model is both diagnostic and descriptive; it identifies structural disparities that hinder upward mobility for certain artists while also describing how musicians generally advance.

Local Base Platforms

Local media and digital channels are the first rung of the ladder, providing musicians with a place to start. These include traditional distribution channels like local radio, television, and live events, as well as community-focused platforms like Darbu and Thulkhung in Mizoram. These venues offer early exposure to a local audience, frequently fostering a sense of recognition and community support. Their accessibility is what makes them affordable; in comparison to worldwide platforms, they require fewer resources and less technological know-how because they are near the artist's direct cultural and language surroundings. Local base platforms can have some serious drawbacks, though. They typically only reach a small audience and don't have the global visibility, monetization tools, or algorithmic amplification that larger platforms provide. Local platforms provide more as a proving ground or stepping stone than as a stable foundation for a career for many Mizo musicians. Although they rarely result in more extensive chances, they can assist artists in gaining self-assurance and recognition within their communities.

YouTube as a Global Entry Point

YouTube, the second step on the ladder, has emerged as the most crucial medium for Mizo singers to connect with fans outside of their surrounding area. Because it enables anyone with rudimentary internet access to contribute content without the requirement for expert industry help, YouTube is commonly seen as accessible. It serves as the hub of the Mizo YouTubesphere by giving musicians a platform to perform for both local and diasporic audiences. Low entry barriers, worldwide accessibility, and the potential for publicity through shares and recommendations are just a few of YouTube's obvious advantages. Additionally, it acts as a digital archive, extending the life of music beyond live performances. But there are drawbacks to the platform as well. High views and subscribers are necessary for monetization, but these are hard to come by in a tiny language market. Certain genres and styles are favored by algorithmic visibility, which frequently forces musicians to modify their work to suit fads rather than follow their own creative instincts. YouTube is both empowering and limiting in this way. It makes it possible to enter a transnational

media landscape, but it also exposes musicians to systemic injustices and competitive pressures.

Social Media Engagement Layer

The third rung consists of social media sites like Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok, which are mostly used by musicians for fan interaction, branding, and promotion. Although the primary material is typically not disseminated on these platforms, they are essential for increasing visibility and preserving connections with audiences. For instance, musicians might post a music video to YouTube but utilize TikTok videos and Instagram posts to promote it, engage with fans, and establish their personal brand.

Social media's intimacy and immediacy are its affordances. They enable artists to maintain interest in between big releases, build a relationship with followers, and reveal behind-the-scenes stuff. They also give musicians the chance to try out short-form formats that might not work with conventional methods used in the music industry. But the restrictions are just as severe. The constant activity required by social media networks can be taxing and divert attention from creative endeavors. Likes, shares, and follows are indicators that put pressure on users to obey platform guidelines. The effectiveness of these platforms is further influenced by Mizoram's uneven smartphone access and inadequate internet infrastructure. Because social media interaction frequently builds on content that has already been shared on YouTube, it is positioned after that platform in the PLM. Although musicians may create social media profiles at an early age, if they have a YouTube following, they often use these channels more strategically. This illustrates how distribution leads to involvement in a ladder-like fashion.

Professionalization and Industry Integration

Professionalization, which is represented by the fourth rung, happens when musicians join international streaming services like Spotify, Apple Music, or regional counterparts and when they are able to access industry networks like labels, sponsorships, or institutional backing. Increased visibility, possible income streams, and admission into international recognized circuits are all linked to this stage. Reaching this level frequently necessitates substantial outside assistance for Mizo musicians, such as distributor agreements, international artist collaborations, or interventions by local artist organizations like the Music Domain Mizoram (MDM) or the Mizo Zaimi Insuihkhawm Pawl (MZI).

Potential income, professional validation, and a wider audience reach are the affordances at this level. It is the most challenging rung to reach, though. Lack of awareness of distribution channels, a lack of funding for advertising, and systemic prejudices in international platforms that favour prevailing languages and genres are some of the obstacles. Despite having skill and local backing, many musicians are unable to make the whole leap to professionalization and are caught between the second and third rungs.

Movement and Barriers on the Ladder

Additionally, the PLM highlights that movement between rungs is irregular and influenced by a variety of circumstances. Not every artist moves smoothly from one level to the next. Some would spend their entire careers in the top two rungs, while others might advance thanks to institutional support or viral success. Not everyone can climb the ladder equally due to obstacles including inadequate infrastructure, limited funds, and cultural exclusion. However, the model also acknowledges that the ladder is not linear. Even after becoming successful on YouTube or streaming services, some musicians could stick with local outlets to stay in touch with local audiences. Others might be heavily active on social media before building a solid YouTube following. The basic trajectory of growth and artists' perceptions of varying degrees of professionalization and visibility, however, are captured by the ladder metaphor.

Summary of the Model

All things considered, the Platform Ladder Model highlights four primary rungs of digital engagement for musicians in non-dominant contexts: professionalization through streaming and industry integration, social media involvement, YouTube as a global entrance point, and local base platforms. Movement between the rungs is influenced by structural disparities, and each rung offers distinct affordances and restrictions. The model offers a means of comprehending how musicians envision and strive for professional advancement in a platformized setting, in addition to how they use platforms. As a result, it serves as a diagnostic tool for examining the difficulties of cultural production in smaller media ecologies as well as a descriptive framework for contemporary activities.

Discussion: Pathways, Inequalities, and Wider Relevance

By providing a sequential viewpoint on how artists use digital platforms, the Platform Ladder Model (PLM) adds to the body of research on platformization and the creative industries. The significance of multi-platform strategies has frequently been emphasized by previous research, wherein creators are required to simultaneously

maintain a presence across many platforms (Cunningham & Craig, 2019; Leaver et al., 2020). The experiences of producers in resource-rich settings, where using YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, and Spotify all at once is more practical, are reflected in these accounts. On the other hand, the PLM implies that musicians frequently take a more methodical, step-by-step approach in smaller or resource-constrained settings. The ladder metaphor highlights advancement by illustrating how artists usually begin with easily accessible platforms and work their way up toward greater recognition and professionalization.

The PLM builds on previous work on platform affordances in this way. Each platform has unique features and constraints that influence creative activities, according to previous research (Nieborg & Poell, 2018). While adding a temporal and developmental dimension, the PLM does not contest this. It illustrates how platforms' affordances are not only unique but also ordered in a perceived hierarchy of desire and accessibility. Although they provide less visibility, local base platforms are simpler to access. YouTube's global reach and openness are limited by algorithmic logics. Although social media sites offer chances for relationships, they also demand regular participation. Although they are aspirational, streaming services and industry integration are challenging to obtain. This sequential structure provides a clearer understanding of how artists perceive and prioritize their platform use, especially in contexts where resources and infrastructures are uneven.

Theories of professional advancement in cultural and artistic activity are likewise in line with the PLM. According to scholars like Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2011) and Banks (2017), artists frequently follow shaky and unpredictable career routes that are influenced by networks, opportunity, and institutional support. In these talks, the ladder metaphor has been used for a long time, but primarily to illustrate career paths in general rather than the usage of digital platforms. The PLM links discussions on platformization and creative careers by implementing the ladder to platform participation. It implies that platforms are stages within larger career trajectories rather than merely tools, and that each is connected to particular types of legitimacy, visibility, and money. The PLM's focus on disparities in advancement and access is another contribution. Not all musicians have equal access to the ladder. Who can go higher is mostly determined by structural hurdles including language, geography, financial means, and institutional assistance. For instance, Mizo musicians could become well-known on YouTube but find it difficult to transition to streaming platforms since they have few relationships with distributors or major players in the international market. This demonstrates how platformization is inequitable and frequently reinforces preexisting inequalities rather than creating an even playing

field. The PLM offers a more nuanced perspective of creative work in the global South by highlighting both opportunities and obstacles, avoiding overly hopeful myths of digital liberation.

Crucially, the PLM is not limited to Mizoram. Although this particular scenario served as the basis for the model's development, it may find use in other small-scale or peripheral media ecologies. Similar ladder-like paths may be followed by musicians in places like Nagaland, Bhutan, or portions of Africa and Latin America, beginning with local platforms and working their way toward international ones with differing degrees of success. As a result, the PLM provides a framework that can be used to compare digital music practices in a variety of settings. However, its focus on sequential progression could not work in many settings, especially in densely populated urban areas where concurrent multi-platform use is more prevalent. This suggests that the model should be applied with sensitivity to local conditions, serving as a heuristic tool rather than a universal law. Lastly, the PLM has real-world applications for educational institutions, legislators, and teachers. Through the identification of the ladder's stages and obstacles, the model can assist stakeholders in creating focused interventions. Cultural groups may, for instance, provide training, resources, or distribution networks to help artists transition from YouTube to streaming services. Programs for education can concentrate on getting musicians ready for the needs of social media advertising. By defining their function as stepping stones, local platforms could better position themselves inside the ladder. Thus, the PLM is a useful instrument for bolstering creative ecosystems in smaller areas as well as a theoretical contribution.

In conclusion, the conversation demonstrates that the Platform Ladder Model contributes in three key ways. First, it enhances current descriptions of multi-platform tactics by bringing a sequential viewpoint to the study of platformization. Second, by emphasizing how platforms shape artistic trajectories, it links discussions of platform affordances with theories of career advancement. Third, it emphasizes issues of unequal access and inequality, which makes it especially pertinent to the analysis of creative labor in ancillary contexts. These additions establish the PLM as a valuable foundation for upcoming studies and policy initiatives as well as an innovative conceptual model.

Conclusion

The Platform Ladder Model (PLM), a conceptual framework for comprehending how musicians in tiny or peripheral contexts utilize digital platforms, was presented in this research. According to the model, many artists proceed through the platforms in a

step-by-step manner, much like climbing a ladder, as opposed to using them all at once. The PLM illustrates the opportunities and challenges that influence artistic careers in the digital age. These include starting with local base platforms, expanding into YouTube as a global entry point, creating social media promotional strategies, and aiming for professionalization through streaming services and industry networks.

There are three primary areas where the PLM contributes. First, by stressing sequential advancement over instantaneous presence, it gives platform studies a developmental component. This makes it easier to comprehend how musicians choose platforms in settings with constrained infrastructure and resources. Second, it links theories of platform affordances to more general discussions about professional advancement, demonstrating how platforms are stages in a musician's journey rather than merely tools. Third, it draws attention to the ladder's uneven accessibility, highlighting the structural obstacles that keep many artists from climbing higher. The PLM provides a more impartial explanation of platformization in this way, taking into account both inequality and empowerment. Although the Mizoram scenario served as the basis for the model's development, its applicability is broader. Other global South and regional contexts are probably home to similar ladder-like progressions, where musicians start with easily accessible platforms and aim for worldwide recognition. While acknowledging that not all environments follow the same trajectory and that certain contexts promote simultaneous rather than sequential platform use, the model should be implemented flexibly.

Lastly, the PLM is useful in real-world situations. It gives politicians, educators, and cultural groups a diagnostic tool to create tailored support for artists by highlighting the ladder's rungs and obstacles. This entails resolving access disparities, bolstering regional infrastructures, and assisting artists in moving between platforms. By doing this, the model provides direction for creating more inclusive creative ecosystems in addition to advancing theoretical discussions on platformization.

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Algorithmic Dreams: Mizo Musicians in the Age of YouTube and Digital Platforms

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Abstract :

The digital practices of independent artists in Mizoram are examined in this research, along with how they use YouTube as a platform for music distribution, promotion, and production. In a country where the music business is still informal and mainly unsupported by institutions, YouTube acts as both an access point and a creative space, according to the study, which is based on in-depth interviews with eight Mizo musicians performing in a variety of genres and career stages.

According to the findings, most artists have challenges with monetization, algorithmic uncertainty, and the lack of professional infrastructure like labels, managers, or rights organizations, even though YouTube lowers the entrance barrier and provides widespread awareness. Social media sites like Instagram and WhatsApp are the primary means of promotion, frequently utilizing grassroots strategies and personal networks. The majority of artists are not well-versed in digital technologies, metadata optimization, or copy-

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right management, despite their increasing online visibility. The study also draws attention to conflicts between cultural identity and language. The choice between Mizo and English lyrics presents a challenge for many artists, who must strike a balance between the need to appeal to a larger, frequently international audience and maintaining local authenticity. By doing this, they make visible the constant struggles between visibility and vulnerability, heritage and modernity, and self-expression and survival in a rapidly changing digital environment.

This study advances knowledge of how digital media is changing artistic careers outside of traditional industry centres by placing the Mizo YouTube experience within larger conversations of platform capitalism and regional creative labour. It emphasizes the importance of creating capability in developing cultural regions and paying more attention to local contexts.

Keywords: Digital Music Culture, Independent Artists, YouTube in Northeast India, Cultural Identity

1. Introduction

By enabling anybody with internet access to publish, market, and distribute their work, YouTube has revolutionized the global music industry in recent years. Artists who operate outside of important industry hubs, such as those in Mizoram, a tiny, hilly state in Northeast India, have been particularly affected by this. Although the local music scene has gained a lot of attention, it still lacks many of the institutional frameworks that characterize a professional music industry. The majority of artists operate on their own, serving as their own distributors, marketers, and producers. Since there aren't many official record labels, music publishers, or professional managers in Mizoram, some people might be hesitant to refer to this as an "industry" at all.

The rise in local musicians' usage of YouTube in recent years

is among the most obvious developments in the region's musical landscape. In short, the cassette and CD period swiftly succeeded the traditional radio era, followed by local cable TV channels' domination and, more recently, streaming services like YouTube. Artists typically submitted their music videos to local providers such as Zonet or LPS during the cable TV era without anticipating royalties or reimbursements in return: exposure was the primary benefit. Nowadays, practically all distribution is done digitally, and very few artists sell physical copies. Mizo artists still have low levels of digital literacy in spite of this change. Many musicians lack a thorough understanding of how algorithms operate or how to promote their music online. Instead, people frequently imitate the actions of others and wish for the best. The lack of official support networks and training for music professionals is a larger problem in Mizoram's music scene that is reflected in this pattern. Because of this, even gifted artists could have trouble achieving long-term success. Few studies have concentrated on areas like Mizoram, despite the fact that there is some broad literature on digital media and independent music worldwide. This study aims to narrow that gap by examining the difficulties and obstacles Mizo artists face when using YouTube. In addition to recording their experiences, the objective is to pinpoint areas—like audience analysis, digital education, and equitable monetization—where the business requires assistance.

This study is significant because it provides information that can support the development of a more robust Mizoram music business. Policymakers, educators, and media professionals can better support creative workers in this region if they have a greater knowledge of how artists navigate the digital environment. According to Baym, musicians nowadays need to strike a balance between entrepreneurship, technological expertise, and emotional labour (Baym 42). For Mizo artists in particular, this is particularly relevant, as they must work in an environment where professional support is

still evolving.

Research Questions

- [1] How do independent musicians in Mizoram engage with YouTube for music production, promotion, and audience building in a context of limited industry infrastructure?
- [2] How do digital platforms shape Mizo artists' negotiations of cultural identity, language, and monetization?

2. Literature Review

The emergence of websites like YouTube has profoundly altered the production, consumption, and distribution of music, particularly for independent musicians. According to scholars, YouTube is a platform that influences cultural creation and audience interaction in novel ways, in addition to being a place for sharing media (Burgess and Green 6). YouTube gives musicians who don't have a label or industry support the means to post content, interact with fans, and make money from advertising—all in one location. Tech businesses are becoming important gatekeepers in cultural industries, a phenomenon known as “platformization,” which includes this type of platform-based ecosystem (Nieborg and Poell 427). Digital tools are increasingly being used by independent musicians to manage their careers. According to Baym, musicians nowadays need to be “intimate entrepreneurs,” managing the technical and promotional aspects of their careers while also fostering ongoing relationships with their fans (Baym 11). Because of this change, musicians are now required to be knowledgeable about social media marketing, streaming statistics, and platform algorithms in addition to creating music. But many artists don't know this, particularly in markets like Mizoram that are smaller or have fewer resources.

In order to explain how artists and media professionals frequently deal with unstable, low-paying, and emotionally taxing work environments, David Hesmondhalgh and Sarah Baker ex-



amine the concept of “creative labour” (Hesmondhalgh and Baker 31). The lack of official industry structures like unions, talent managers, or record labels frequently makes these pressures worse in Mizoram. From production to promotion, artists operate independently and may lack platform mechanics or marketing expertise. The way algorithms shape visibility is another significant issue in the literature. Despite the free and democratic appearance of sites such as YouTube, opaque recommendation mechanisms frequently limit visibility. Platforms favour material that generates a lot of clicks, likes, and engagement, according to Van Dijck, Poell, and De Waal. This can encourage artists to modify their original works to fit what the algorithm “wants” (Van Dijck et al. 36). For artists in Mizoram, where digital literacy is still developing, understanding and responding to such algorithmic systems remains a major challenge.

The impact of internet platforms on artistic expression in non-metropolitan or regional contexts is increasingly gaining attention. In order to comprehend how local producers use global platforms differently, Lobato highlights the importance of researching “peripheral” media industries—those that are located outside of global centres like Los Angeles, London, or Seoul (Lobato 99). This is particularly important in Mizoram, where artists have to balance indigenous cultural identity with international formats. For instance, some decide to perform in English in order to reach a larger audience, while others utilize Mizo to maintain ties to their heritage. The Mizo music scene itself has received relatively little scholarly attention, despite the fact that these studies provide insightful information. There is a knowledge vacuum about the use of digital media in less obvious contexts because the majority of current study concentrates on national or international trends. By examining how Mizo musicians utilize YouTube and other digital tools to manage their careers, promote their music, and develop their artistic identi-

ties, this research seeks to close that gap.

3. Methodology

This study investigates how independent musicians in Mizoram interact with YouTube and other online platforms using a qualitative research design. Understanding their artistic processes, marketing plans, and the more general difficulties they have as artists operating without official industry support is the goal. In-depth interviews served as the main technique of data collection because of the exploratory character of the study and its emphasis on individual experiences. For this study, interviews were conducted with eight participants in total. They were all Mizoram-based independent musicians, including band members, producers, DJs, and singer-songwriters. A combination of convenience sampling and snow-ball sampling was used to choose the participants. An artist the researcher knew personally was interviewed in the first instance, and recommendations were used to introduce the other participants. This sample technique helped include musicians with different degrees of professional expertise and digital participation, providing a more nuanced view of the Mizo music scene even while it does not permit generalizations.

In-depth, semi-structured interviews in the Mizo language were used to gather data. Key subjects, such as the participants' musical history, their usage of social media and YouTube, their promotional tactics, and their experiences with monetization, were the focus of an interview guide. The duration of each interview ranged from 60 to 80 minutes. The researcher used the Voice Memos app on an iPhone to record the discussions on audio, and then transcribed them verbatim into English. This made it possible to accurately and thoroughly depict the participant narratives while maintaining clarity throughout the analytical phase. Throughout the investigation, ethical considerations were given careful thought. At the begin-



ning of each interview, verbal consent was acquired. The researcher decided to adopt pseudonyms for consistency and secrecy, even though several participants felt at ease using their own names.

Thematic analysis was used to examine the data in accordance with the broad principles put forward by Braun and Clarke (2006). Instead of being a rigid protocol, the six-step process—becoming comfortable with the data, creating initial codes, looking for themes, evaluating themes, defining and identifying themes, and creating the report—acted as a flexible road map. Due to the limited size of the dataset, the coding was done without using qualitative data software. The project aims to advance a more comprehensive knowledge of how digital platforms such as YouTube operate in less industrialized cultural contexts by concentrating on artists in Mizoram.

4. Findings and Discussion

The data collected from eight independent musicians in Mizoram reveals a range of perspectives and experiences related to YouTube and other digital platforms. Four major themes were identified through thematic analysis: (1) *YouTube as an entry point*, (2) *promotion and visibility strategies*, (3) *monetization and infrastructure gaps*, and (4) *cultural identity and language politics*.

Theme	Common Practices	Challenges
YouTube as Entry Point	Phone recordings, basic uploads	Lack of initial training or equipment
Promotion	Instagram Reels, IG Live, word-of-mouth	Algorithm confusion, inconsistent results
Monetization	TuneCore, DistroKid, direct sales	Poor payouts, technical barriers, lack of royalty knowledge
Identity	English/Mizo hybrid lyrics	Trade-off between reach and cultural expression

4.1 YouTube as an Entry Point

For almost every participant in our study, YouTube was a crucial beginning point. It served as a platform that allowed for the distribution of content and provided emerging artists with a sense of validation. According to the participants, YouTube served as both a platform and a springboard, enabling them to release music without awaiting clearance from conventional media outlets like cable television, record labels, or radio. In Mizoram, where artists hardly ever have access to professional infrastructure or financial support, the platform's openness, affordability, and reach were particularly crucial.

“When I first uploaded my song, I just used a picture and an audio file. No video, no marketing. Still, it got more views than I ever expected. That’s when I realized YouTube might be more powerful than I thought” (Participant 4).

This encounter demonstrates YouTube’s standing as a “cultural technology,” according to Burgess and Green, which permits new kinds of distribution, visibility, and creation outside of established gatekeeping systems (Burgess and Green 5). YouTube is seen as an ecosystem that can assist every step of a music release in Mizoram, where musicians frequently serve as their own producers, managers, and promoters.

A number of individuals related how YouTube was the platform that exposed them to a wider audience than just their friends and family. Their confidence and sense of self as artists were greatly influenced by these early uploads, which were frequently made with little tools and no formal instruction.

“My first few songs were recorded on my phone. I didn’t know anything about mixing or mastering. But people commented, they shared it, and that gave me the courage to continue” (Participant 1).

“I didn’t even have a YouTube channel of my own. I asked a friend to upload it for me. It was just for fun. But then people started noticing it, and that gave me the push I needed” (Participant 7).

These explanations are consistent with what Van Dijck, Poell, and De Waal refer to as “*platform affordances*”—the distinctive cultural and technical characteristics that draw in users with little money (Van Dijck et al. 31). By providing fundamental tools for self-publication, YouTube bridges an institutional gap in places like Mizoram where official distribution channels are either non-existent or very poor.

Crucially, participants’ feelings of empowerment were frequently linked to their capacity to connect with untested and new audiences. One of the most thrilling parts of working on YouTube, according to artists, is this.

“The first time someone from outside Mizoram messaged me about my song, I couldn’t believe it. It felt unreal. Like, I’m just some guy with a laptop, and now people from Shillong and even abroad are listening to me” (Participant 6).

Because access to mainstream Indian music markets is frequently limited by geographic, linguistic, and cultural distance, this kind of visibility is especially crucial for musicians operating in regional or “peripheral” media landscapes (Lobato 102; Athique 201). In this sense, despite the lack of institutional support, YouTube serves as a platform for Mizo artists to participate in larger cultural discussions.

Not many musicians, meanwhile, saw their foray onto YouTube as a calculated career move. For many, it started off casually as a way to exchange songs with friends or as an experiment. This natural introduction supports the notion that “*accidental careers*”, in which visibility might come before professionalization, are frequently supported by digital platforms (Cunningham and Craig 19).

“I never planned to be a singer. I just loved music. YouTube was a way to keep my songs somewhere. But after a while, I saw that people actually liked what I made” (Participant 3).

However, some participants acknowledged YouTube’s limits despite its accessibility. Many claimed to have eventually come to the realization that uploading a song alone was insufficient to support a career in music. Early attempts frequently failed to generate revenue or sustain audience growth due to a lack of knowledge about YouTube’s algorithm, metadata, or monetization methods.

“In the beginning, I thought just posting a song was enough. But now I understand that it’s only the first step. If you don’t promote it or tag it properly, nobody will see it” (Participant 2).

This highlights a more fundamental issue: although YouTube provides free access, it also puts the onus of technical and strategic expertise on the artist. According to Nieborg and Poell, platform-based cultural production forces creators to become businesspeople in addition to artists, progressively shifting accountability from institutions to individuals (Nieborg and Poell 277).

In conclusion, YouTube provides accessibility, visibility, and legitimacy, making it a vital entrance point for Mizo musicians. Its transparency, meanwhile, has advantages and disadvantages. Anyone may get started, but it can also result in confusion, burnout, or unfulfilled expectations if they lack the necessary computer literacy or support. As a result, YouTube’s place in the Mizo music scene is indicative of larger conflicts in platform-based creative industries around the world between potential and precarity.

4.2 Promotion and Visibility Strategies

Attracting and keeping an audience is the next obstacle for musicians who start posting music to YouTube. Every participant in this study stressed the value of promotion, particularly on social media

sites like Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp. Instagram Reels and Stories were mentioned as the best techniques for drawing in viewers and encouraging interaction.

“I start posting teaser clips one or two weeks before the song comes out. I do it again on the day of release and sometimes after, to keep people watching” (Participant 2).

“Instagram Reels help a lot. Sometimes, people share the reel without even watching the full video on YouTube. But that still creates hype” (Participant 5).

These behaviours provide credence to Baym’s contention that musicians of today must engage in a variety of “*intimate labour*” tasks in order to stay visible, including creating music and maintaining an approachable and personable online identity (Baym 42). The utilization of short-form movies, behind-the-scenes footage, and personal tales by the artists demonstrates a growing comprehension of the cross-platform flow of content.

For many participants, Instagram served as a platform for developing relationships with listeners as well as a tool for advertising. Artists frequently use polls, comments, and direct messages to interact with their followers. One person thought about it:

“People respond better if they feel like they’re part of your journey. I show them the recording process, even my struggles. That makes them more interested in the final song” (Participant 1).

This is in line with Cunningham and Craig’s observations, which contend that producers in the “*social media entertainment*” market are expected to build access and authenticity into their brand (Cunningham and Craig 49). Instagram and YouTube Live give musicians the chance to mimic a personal connection with sizable audiences in Mizoram, where in-person interactions with artists have historically been more difficult.

Working together was also mentioned as a key tactic for increasing visibility. This included cross-promotions with influencers, shared postings with videographers, and even features with other bands.

“I collaborate with my videographer friend. He posts the music video on his channel and I post the behind-the-scenes. That way, both of us benefit” (Participant 4).

“Sometimes, I go Live with another artist who has more followers than me. Even if they just talk or wave, it brings attention to my page” (Participant 3).

Nonetheless, a few participants voiced their worries over visibility’s unpredictable nature. Even with the best of intentions, promotional initiatives frequently failed to achieve the desired number of views or engagement on YouTube. This annoyance highlights a prevalent problem with *platformized* creative work: visibility is increasingly controlled by opaque, dynamic algorithms. Platforms prioritize material according to engagement metrics rather than artistic merit or even the creator’s intentions, as Van Dijck, Poell, and De Waal contend (Van Dijck et al. 38). Confusion or even burnout may result from this discrepancy between effort and results.

“I tried paying for Instagram ads once. It didn’t feel right. It felt fake. And it didn’t help much anyway” (Participant 8).

The majority of artists favoured natural methods, however some tried sponsored advertising. Many said they were uneasy about self-promotion that seemed very “commercial,” as they feared it would make them seem desperate or less credible. This is consistent with research by Duffy and Hund, who point out that self-branding in creative industries frequently entails social and emotional costs, particularly when creators are thought to be making an excessive effort (Duffy and Hund 4).

It’s interesting to note that some participants also employed

more conventional offline strategies, such as community word-of-mouth or private WhatsApp status updates. Even while these techniques might appear antiquated, they are still useful in Mizoram, especially when it comes to connecting with elderly audiences or those in places where internet literacy is low.

“I still post on WhatsApp. Even if it’s not very effective, some people only use that. Especially older fans or those not on Instagram” (Participant 7).

In conclusion, a combination of platform-native tactics (Reels, Lives, DMs) and more regional, unofficial techniques (WhatsApp, mutual sharing) shapes Mizo artists’ exposure and promotion. Even though artists are getting better at generating and controlling online attention, many still face challenges like algorithmic volatility, a hazy translation between views and engagement, and the psychological toll of continuous self-promotion.

4.3 Monetization and Infrastructure Gaps

Even though Mizo artists may reach a larger audience through YouTube and other digital channels, the majority of participants said it was extremely difficult to turn their artistic endeavours into stable income. These difficulties result from a number of interconnected causes, including a lack of technical and financial assistance, a lack of understanding of monetization strategies, and more general structural flaws in the local music industry.

The majority of the musicians in this research were aware that YouTube and streaming services like Spotify and Apple work might make money off of their work. Few people, though, truly understood how those systems operated.

“I know that YouTube pays you if you get views. But I’m not really sure how much, or when, or what kind of content gets paid” (Participant 1).

“On Spotify, we got 1 dollar for 10,000 streams. It’s very low, and most of the money doesn’t come back to us” (Participant 8).

This is consistent with research by Marshall, who notes that digital monetization is perceived by many independent musicians as “invisible labour”—a process in which revenue is either too little, delayed, or unpredictable to support a career (Marshall 96). When attempting to withdraw their money from music distributors such as TuneCore or Amuse, a number of survey participants complained about technological difficulties. Inadequate local infrastructure exacerbates these issues even further. Record labels, artist management companies, and performance rights groups that assist musicians in comprehending or utilizing digital platforms are not yet completely operational in Mizoram. Although there are a few collectives, such as Mizo Zaimi Inzawmkhawm (MZI) and Music Domain Mizoram (MDM), their capacity and effect are still quite small.

“We send our songs to TV or cable channels, but they don’t pay us. That’s how it has always been. You just give it for free and hope someone watches it” (Participant 4).

This reflects a system in which creative efforts are either completely unpaid or undervalued in the name of visibility, where exposure is frequently exchanged for labour—a dynamic Hesmondhalgh and Baker refer to as “free work” (Hesmondhalgh and Baker 104). Even in the digital age, Mizoram has an unofficial culture of free sharing, particularly among independent artists who believe they have few other options.

The Indian Performing Right Society (IPRS) and PRS for Music are two examples of national or worldwide rights management organizations that many participants were not aware of. Not even people who were aware of these organizations knew how to register their music or get payments from online or live performances.

“I heard about IPRS from someone, but I don’t know how to use it. Nobody tells us how these things work” (Participant 7).

This supports the results of McLeod, who contends that platform-centred thinking, legal complexity, and a lack of education frequently prevent independent musicians from accessing copyright and royalty regimes (McLeod 67). Many Mizo musicians just upload their tracks and rely on YouTube’s built-in monetization—if they are eligible—instead of arranging contracts or licensing agreements.

“YouTube is the only platform that pays us directly. That’s why I focus more on that, even if I don’t understand the full system” (Participant 2).

The question of dividing profits among partners is another worry. One participant described the challenge of controlling and equitably allocating the revenue after working on a collaborative release with a vocalist and a filmmaker. Without formal contracts or digital tools for automatic revenue sharing, artists rely on verbal agreements, which can cause tension or confusion. This again highlights the lack of institutional structures to support fair compensation and rights management.

Finally, artists often expressed disappointment in the overall return on investment for their creative work. Given the costs of production—including studio time, music videos, and promotional materials—many artists end up spending more than they earn.

“We put so much into the video. Camera, editing, makeup, costumes. But after all that, we just got a few thousand views and no income” (Participant 6).

“Sometimes I feel like I’m doing this more for passion than anything else. The money is just not enough” (Participant 1).

The long-term viability of a music career is seriously hampered by these financial constraints. According to Baym and Senft, the “plat-

form economy” is forcing artists to perform continuously for social capital with little financial compensation, favouring visibility above revenue (Baym and Senft 152).

All things considered, making money in the Mizo music industry is still a very unorganized and unpredictable process. Digital platforms provide access to audiences around the world, but they do not ensure financial gain. The majority of artists continue to work in an environment where digital literacy is poor, revenue is erratic, and labour is informal due to a lack of robust local institutions and technical expertise. Addressing these issues will require coordinated efforts in education, policy-making, and institutional support to ensure that artists are not merely visible, but also fairly compensated.

4.4 Cultural Identity and Language Politics

The conflict between cultural identity and the desire for prominence on international platforms such as YouTube was a common subject in the interviews. In Mizoram, artists frequently have to choose between preserving their language and cultural legacy and attempting to reach a larger, frequently non-Mizo audience. This conundrum influences both their lyrical writing and their view of success in the digital era.

Some participants emphasized the value of maintaining local culture and authenticity in their work by stating that they preferred to sing just in Mizo. Others, however, admitted to choosing English—or blending Mizo and English—based on the belief that it might attract more views, especially from audiences outside the region.

“Sometimes I write in English because I think it will get more attention. Even if the lyrics are not that deep, more people can understand it” (Participant 2).

“I try to balance it. I mix English with Mizo words, so people know where I’m from but still understand the message” (Par-

ticipant 3).

Similar to what Canclini calls “hybrid cultures”—expressions that represent both local rootedness and global aspirations—this type of linguistic hybridity is sometimes viewed as a tactic for cultural negotiation (Canclini 19). In a competitive platform ecology, Mizoram uses this hybridity as a survival tactic as much as a creative tool.

Artists that adhered to Mizo, however, said that their audience involvement and reach outside of the state were limited.

“When I post a song in Mizo, only people from here really watch it. But when I do a cover in English, people from outside also start following me” (Participant 4).

Vernacular artists find it more difficult to obtain the same degree of exposure due to “platform bias,” which Lobato refers to as the tendency for algorithms and cultural hierarchies to favour English-language content (Lobato 99).

However, language serves as a sign of authenticity and belonging in addition to being a means of communication. Mizo lyrics, according to a number of participants, gave their songs a more “real” or emotionally impactful sense, both for them and their target audience. This focus on cultural pride and emotional expression is a reflection of larger conversations about cultural resistance in ancillary media environments. Iwabuchi contends that local values and languages are frequently included into media forms that otherwise have a global structure in order for regional artists to assert their identity (Iwabuchi 73). By doing this, they oppose prevailing media trends that frequently diminish non-Western or non-mainstream content.

It’s interesting to notice that some participants pointed out that cultural identification encompasses more than just language; it also includes aesthetic and stylistic choices. For example, in order to express a sense of regional identity, music videos purposefully

used Mizo scenery, traditional attire, or allusions to local traditions.

“In one of my videos, we shot in a Mizo village and wore traditional clothes. That’s how we show who we are—even if people outside don’t fully get it” (Participant 7).

However, other artists believed that in order to stay current or “platform-friendly,” they had to sacrifice their identity. This is consistent with Duffy’s finding that artists frequently encounter a “authenticity bind”—they must be both marketable and relatable, both domestically and internationally (Duffy and Hund 5). These conflicting forces imply that Mizo artists’ identity work is dynamic rather than static, influenced by algorithmic rewards, audience feedback, and individual ideals. Without official direction or expert assistance, artists constantly adjust their tactics based on what is relevant and what is working.

In conclusion, linguistic politics and cultural identification play a major role in how independent musicians in Mizoram manage their YouTube careers. Their work demonstrates a constant balancing act between maintaining local cultural roots and adjusting to the needs of a worldwide online audience. Their linguistic, visual, and emotional decisions reveal a strong sense of belonging as well as a need for visibility.

5. Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to investigate how Mizoram’s independent artists use YouTube and other online resources in their creative and professional life. Eight musicians from a variety of genres and popularity levels participated in in-depth interviews for the study, which revealed that although YouTube has made it easier for artists in Mizoram to enter the market, it has also created new difficulties with regard to visibility, monetization, and cultural negotiation. One of the main conclusions is that for many Mizo musicians, YouTube is an essential first step into the music industry. It is a potent tool

for visibility and self-expression because of its open nature, which enables artists to publish their work without institutional assistance. But many musicians in the area today lack the digital literacy and commercial expertise that this same openness requires. As a result, many find it difficult to maintain long-term professions, even while some experience brief success or viral moments.

The survey also emphasizes how Mizoram artists use a combination of conventional and digital techniques to promote themselves. Although word-of-mouth, Instagram, and WhatsApp were all creatively used, the majority of participants were unsure about how algorithms operate or how to guarantee long-term visibility. These ambiguities frequently result in dissatisfaction, particularly when marketing initiatives fail to generate significant interaction or revenue. One of the biggest challenges is still monetization. The majority of participants lacked knowledge of worldwide platforms for tracking income, rights registration, and royalty collecting systems. Artists mainly rely on unofficial labour, verbal agreements, and personal networks because there is little infrastructure in the area. Even the most well-known artists struggle to create a steady living when they lack financial, technical, and legal backing. Lastly, the study demonstrates that Mizo musicians continue to place a high priority on cultural identity. Artists frequently find it difficult to balance using English to reach a wider audience with expressing themselves in their home tongue. Authenticity and marketability are constantly negotiated as a result of the need to meet platform expectations and audience preferences, even though some people combine the two or include cultural elements in music videos.

This study adds to the expanding corpus of research on creative labour and digital media in non-metropolitan areas. This paper advances our knowledge of how digital platforms function in a smaller, underrepresented region like Mizoram, since the majority

of the material currently in publication concentrates on globalized or urban situations. It demonstrates that whereas digital tools open up new options, they do not solve old issues; instead, they frequently reframe them in intricate and novel ways. Future research could concentrate on the opinions of local content distributors, platform administrators, and policymakers, or on audience behaviour in the Mizo YouTube space. For practitioners and cultural workers in Mizoram, the findings point to an urgent need for digital training programs, legal awareness workshops, and the establishment of support institutions that can help artists turn visibility into long-term success.

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LIST OF PRESENTATIONS IN CONFERENCES/SEMINARS/WORKSHOPS

- [1] Presented a paper on “Consumption & Conception: A Study on the Impact of Digital Media Technologies on Users Musical Experiences” in the One Day International E-conference on 15.12.21; organized by Nehru Arts and Science College, Coimbatore, TN.
- [2] Presented a paper titled “Challenges and Prospects of Regional Over-the-top (OTT) Platform: A Case Study on Darbu” at the Two-Day International Conference on Borderless Communication organized by Department of Mass Communication, Mizoram University on 17th and 18th November 2022.
- [3] Presented a paper titled “Digital Resonance: Exploring the Influence of YouTube on Audience Engagement” at the Two-Day International Conference organized by The School of Media and Communication, Shri Shankarlal Sundarbai Shashun Jain College for Women on 22nd and 23rd February 2024.
- [4] Presented a paper titled “Our Side of the Story: A Qualitative Study on Portrayal of Insurgency in Selected Mizo Films”, at the National Conference on Indigenous Knowledge, Culture and Media in North-East India, sponsored by ICSSR, on 16th and 17th May, 2024.
- [5] Presented a paper titled “Algorithmic Dreams: Mizo Musicians in the Age of YouTube and Digital Platforms”, at the Two-Day National Seminar on Analysing Contemporary Issues in North-East India: Problems and Opportunities, organised by IQAC, Govt. Aizawl College, on 9th and 10th July 2025.







CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that

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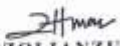
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at the Two-Day National Seminar on

**ANALYZING CONTEMPORARY ISSUES IN NORTH-EAST INDIA:
PROBLEMS AND OPPORTUNITIES**

held on 9th & 10th July, 2025, organised by Golden Jubilee Organising Committee
and IQAC, Government Aizawl College.


(Dr. ZOLIANZUALI)
Co-ordinator, IQAC


(LALBIAKZUALA)
Principal

PARTICULARS OF THE CANDIDATE

NAME OF THE CANDIDATE : JOEL LALTLANCHHUAHA

DEGREE : DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT : MASS COMMUNICATION

TITLE OF THESIS : THE ROLE OF DIGITAL
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ABSTRACT

THE ROLE OF DIGITAL MEDIA IN MUSIC INDUSTRY: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF THE MIZO YOUTUBESPHERE

**AN ABSTRACT SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF
PHILOSOPHY**

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**DEPARTMENT OF MASS COMMUNICATION
SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS, MANAGEMENT, AND
INFORMATION SCIENCE
SEPTEMBER, 2025**

**THE ROLE OF DIGITAL MEDIA IN MUSIC INDUSTRY:
AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF THE MIZO YOUTUBESPHERE**

BY

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Submitted

**In partial fulfillment of the requirement of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in mass communication of Mizoram University, Aizawl**

The Role of Digital Media in Music Industry:

An Exploratory Study of the Mizo YouTubesphere

I.Introduction

The production, distribution, and consumption of music have undergone significant transformations over time. To reach listeners in the past, musicians used radio, television, and tangible media like CDs or cassettes. However, the music industry has changed globally in the modern era due to digital platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube. Without relying on conventional media, these platforms enable musicians to post their music, connect with fans directly, and get recognition. According to Cayari (2011), even independent and young musicians can now establish their careers online because to the growth of websites like YouTube.

Smaller areas like Mizoram, a state in Northeast India with a vibrant music scene, have also been affected by this worldwide trend. YouTube has been a major music release outlet for many Mizo artists in recent years. They view YouTube as a platform and a portfolio that allows them to present their work to a larger audience. Digital media does, however, provide certain difficulties in addition to new potential. Many artists have trouble making money off of their work, navigating algorithms, and adapting to the shifting demands of their audience. Although they have their own restrictions, local platforms like Darbu and Thulkhung are starting to take the place of international ones and provide artists more control. Notwithstanding these changes, not much scholarly study has been done on how Mizo musicians interact with and traverse the digital music scene. The purpose of this study is to investigate how Mizorami musicians utilize and interpret websites such as YouTube, what opportunities and challenges they encounter, and how digital media is influencing the regional music landscape. The study contributes to the expanding corpus of research on digital media and cultural production in non-metropolitan environments by concentrating on the voices of musicians.

In light of this, the current study aims to comprehend how Mizoram's music scene is changing due to digital media, specifically YouTube. It looks at how artists use these platforms to become more visible, mold their artistic processes, and deal with the advantages and disadvantages of a quickly changing digital landscape. By doing this, the study acknowledges Mizoram's own linguistic, cultural, and institutional background while placing it amid broader global changes. The thesis offers a localized perspective that emphasizes the daily challenges and tactics of artists in a minority-language region, while also adding to the expanding corpus of study on platformization and cultural production by recording these experiences. As a result, the introduction lays the groundwork for the investigation that follows, which progresses from general worldwide trends to the unique circumstances of Mizoram and culminates in the establishment of the research questions that direct this investigation.

II. Background and Context

The emergence of digital media has altered the function of media organizations, audiences, and artists. Artists may create fan communities, release music on their own, and get direct response from comments, likes, and shares on social media sites like Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube. Digital platforms provide a platform for user-generated material, which makes media more participatory than traditional media like radio and television (Edmond, 2014; Chandler & Munday, 2011). Large audiences can now be reached by even small or independent musicians because to the democratization of music. From cassette recordings in the 1970s to totally digital releases now, Mizoram's music culture has evolved. Lalsangzuali Sailo released the first cassette in the Mizo music industry in 1978, and video production started in the middle of the 1980s. In order to organize musicians and distribute content, artist organizations such as Music Domain Mizoram (MDM) and the Mizo Zaimi Insuihkhawm Pawl (MZI) have been crucial (Zohlupuii, 2013). Local digital platforms that provide mechanisms for local governance and monetization, such as Darbu and Thulkhung, have also surfaced as alternatives to global platforms. These modifications are a reflection of a larger transformation in Mizoram's musical

production and consumption patterns. Nowadays, a lot of up-and-coming artists begin their careers on YouTube or Instagram, eschewing more traditional media. Instead of using official industry channels, they frequently rely on peer networks and self-promotion. However, there are still disparities in access to digital technologies, and some artists continue to encounter obstacles because they lack funding, technical know-how, or resources.

III. Statement of the Problem

Nowadays, YouTube is the primary channel used by many artists in Mizoram to market their work. More creative flexibility, simpler audience access, and the capacity to publish without relying on conventional media like radio or television are just a few of the new opportunities brought about by this change. These platforms do, however, also present certain difficulties that are not always simple to resolve. The fact that most artists struggle to make money on digital platforms is one of the primary issues. The revenue from YouTube advertisements and other digital tools is frequently insufficient to sustain a steady career, despite the fact that their music may receive views and likes. The absence of appropriate information and assistance is another problem. Many artists lack access to instruction on the proper use of internet platforms. They pick up knowledge from peers or through trial and error. To address some of these problems, local alternatives such as Darbu and Thulkhung have emerged, providing platforms that prioritize Mizo material and make an effort to monetize local artists. These sites, however, are still relatively tiny, compete with international behemoths like YouTube and Spotify, and are susceptible to issues like low user engagement and piracy.

When combined, these difficulties reveal a large gap in scholarship and practice. Although Mizo artists are avid users of YouTube and other platforms, little is known about how they manage the demands of the digital economy while balancing cultural identity, sustainability, and visibility. Smaller, minority-language environments like Mizoram are often overlooked in the literature on music and internet platforms because it tends to concentrate on metropolitan industries, massive marketplaces, or

international success stories. This lack of focus runs the risk of ignoring the inventiveness, challenges, and tactics of musicians who work on the periphery of the Indian and international music scenes. This thesis fills a significant research vacuum by recording their lived experiences and examining the advantages and disadvantages of digital platforms in this context.

IV. Research Objectives and Questions

Objectives –

[1] To explore how music-makers in Mizoram use and perceive YouTube as a platform for visibility, promotion, and career development within the local music industry.

[2] To understand how digital platforms—especially YouTube and Instagram— influence the creative, strategic, and income-related decisions of Mizo artists.

[3] To examine the affordances and limitations of local digital platforms (e.g., Darbu, Thulkhung) in relation to YouTube and other global services.

[4] To analyse how traditional media institutions and artist organizations continue to shape visibility, recognition, and access alongside the rise of YouTube.

Research Questions –

[1] How do Mizo music-makers use and perceive YouTube for visibility, promotion, and career development?

[2] How do platforms such as YouTube and Instagram influence the creative strategies, branding, and income of artists?

[3] What affordances and limitations do local platforms like Darbu and Thulkhung offer compared to YouTube?

[4] In what ways do traditional media institutions and artist organizations interact with or adapt to digital platforms in Mizoram?

V. Significance of the Study

This study is significant because it examines in detail how Mizoram's music production, consumption, and sharing practices are being altered by digital platforms, particularly YouTube. Mizo musicians can use sites like YouTube to market their music and connect with new fans, but there are drawbacks as well, such little revenue, pressure to create videos, and trouble deciphering algorithms. This study provides insight into how musicians in a small and distinct cultural context adjust to global digital systems by examining the real-world experiences of music-makers. This is important because the majority of studies on music and digital media concentrates on global companies or big cities rather than local areas like Mizoram.

VI. Scope of the Study

This study focuses on how Mizoram musicians' careers, tactics, and creative practices are shaped by digital media channels, particularly YouTube. The study mainly investigates how Mizo musicians utilize YouTube for artistic expression, exposure, and promotion, as well as how these platforms affect their choices about content production, revenue, and audience interaction. Although YouTube is the primary medium under investigation, the study also takes into account other platforms, such as Instagram, Facebook, Darbu, and Thulkhung, because artists

frequently utilize them in tandem. Twenty-one (21) musicians from a range of backgrounds and genres are among the study's participants, the most of whom are based in Aizawl. In the Mizo music scene, they are singer-songwriters, performers, and producers who are active on digital platforms and who represent both up-and-coming and established voices. Five institutional officials from media outlets and music-related organizations were interviewed for the study as well.

VII. Area of the Study

Mizoram, a state in Northeast India renowned for its dynamic and changing music culture, was the site of this investigation. The emphasis is on musicians from the capital city of Aizawl, which is home to the majority of digital music activity. Aizawl has developed into a gathering place for independent musicians who share their work, develop fan bases, and further their careers via websites like YouTube and Instagram. Although they are engaged in the Aizawl music scene, several participants are originating from different districts. Mizoram's distinct cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic characteristics offer a crucial backdrop for comprehending how international websites like YouTube are utilized locally.

VIII. Methodology

A qualitative research design was used in the study. A qualitative technique was the most suitable given the exploratory nature of the subject since it provided a thorough grasp of how Mizo artists use and perceive digital media platforms. The study places more emphasis on participants lived experiences, meanings, and methods than it does on numerical data. Semi-structured interviews were used as the main technique for gathering data because they gave participants the freedom to express themselves in their own words and allowed for the exploration of particular topics. Data collection was conducted between 2022 and 2024 in Aizawl, Mizoram, with some interviews carried out over the phone when face-to-face meetings were not possible due to scheduling or geographic constraints. A total of 21 artists and 5 institutional representatives were interviewed.

Snowball sampling was used to find participants. Through a personal link, the researcher was first able to get in touch with other artists when one of the participants—who happened to be a friend’s husband—agreed to be interviewed. As participants recommended the researcher to peers and coworkers, the sample grew from this initial size. Following each interview, the participant was asked to recommend a fellow artist, who is typically a friend or someone with whom they have a personal relationship. The study conducted interviews with five more individuals, representing Zonet, All India Radio (AIR) Aizawl, Vanglaini daily, Music Domain Mizoram (MDM), and the Mizo Zaimi Insuihkhawm Pawl (MZI), in order to further enhance the data and offer institutional viewpoints.

Being a native Mizo speaker, the researcher conducted all of the interviews in Mizo, which was the subjects’ and the researcher’s common first language. The researcher did the transcription and translation himself. The researcher transcribed straight into English while listening to the original audio recordings, rather than first creating transcripts in Mizo and then translating them into English. Since the theme coding and interpretation were carried out in English, this method was used for pragmatic reasons and to expedite the analysis process. To interpret the interview data, the study employed reflexive theme analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2019). This approach was chosen because it acknowledges the researcher’s active interpretive role while offering flexibility and rigor, enabling themes to be formed inductively from the data.

IX. Theoretical Framework

The idea of platform affordances (Gibson, 1979; Bucher & Helmond, 2018) and the more general theoretical framework of platform studies (van Dijck, Poell, & de Waal, 2018) serve as the foundation for this investigation. Platformization (van Dijck, Poell, & de Waal, 2018) is the term used in this study to describe the infiltration of platform logics into social and cultural spheres. YouTube offers Mizo artists a way to get over conventional gatekeepers, but it also creates new reliance on

measurements, algorithms, and revenue systems. Thus, platformization offers a prism through which to view how regional musicians deal with, adjust to, and are limited by international digital infrastructures. These frameworks make it easier to comprehend how Mizoram artists use new local apps like Darbu and Thulkhung as well as online platforms like YouTube and Instagram. Examining how these platforms affect artists' creative decisions, exposure, marketing initiatives, and career paths is the goal. The Idea of affordances (Bucher & "elmo'd, 2018), which emphasizes the opportunities and limitations inherent in digital platforms, is equally significant. YouTube offers bands worldwide visibility, direct audience interaction, and inexpensive distribution.

X. Summary of Major Findings

With a specific focus on YouTube as a major distribution and promotion tool, this study aimed to investigate how digital platforms are changing the music industry in Mizoram. Seven interrelated topics that directly address the research objectives were established through interviews with five institutional officials and twenty-one artists. These results provide a nuanced view of how Mizoram artists manage their careers in a digital landscape that is both empowering and limiting.

YouTube as the Primary Outlet for Music Distribution

Examining how Mizo musicians utilize and view YouTube for exposure, promotion, and career advancement was the primary goal of the study. Results indicate that YouTube has solidified its position as the go-to platform for music distribution. It was frequently referred to by participants as the "main stage," where songs must perform in order to be accepted as authentic. Regardless of whether it circulates on other platforms, a song that is not published to YouTube is essentially invisible to many. However, the industry's general lethargy is reflected in the way musicians use YouTube. Although they appreciate the visibility it offers, few use the site in a methodical manner. Many artists rely more on organic audience finding than on optimization or promotion, post infrequently, and put less effort into video production. There was a clear follower mentality at work: rather than trying out new

techniques, artists frequently imitated the formats, styles, or tactics they observed others doing. This trend highlights YouTube's accessibility as well as its limitations in Mizoram: while it democratizes distribution, it rarely results in long-term career advancement.

Instagram and Visual Culture in Artist Promotion

The second theme, which looks at how Instagram influences artist identity and promotion, is strongly related to both Objectives 1 and 2. According to the interviews, Instagram complements YouTube by acting as the primary promotional tool and YouTube as the distribution centre. Instagram, according to artists, is where personalities are developed, audiences are involved, and exposure is actively maintained. Short videos, stories, and reels are used to build anticipation and drive viewers to YouTube releases. Here, the gaps between generations were glaring. While older or gospel-focused artists kept more formal and simple presences, younger artists were more interested in following trends, experimenting with aesthetics, and building an online profile. However, Instagram use was frequently reactive rather than planned, particularly among younger musicians. The low level of digital literacy in the scene is further evidenced by the fact that few individuals paid close attention to the technical parts of algorithms or promotion. Instagram has proven essential for staying relevant in spite of these obstacles, providing a simple way to get started with what this thesis refers to as the Platform Ladder Model, which is an initial step that creates buzz but rarely yields immediate financial gain.

Creative Choices Shaped by Platform Culture

The third topic, which emphasizes how platform culture affects creative decision-making, has a strong connection to Objective 2. According to the interviews, Mizo artists have a keen understanding of what functions well in the digital world. In response to the expectation of quick audience attention, they shorten intros, write songs with memorable choruses, and organize films around visual appeal and conciseness. In instance, YouTube Shorts and Instagram Reels promote the creation of material that has immediate effect rather than depth. The degree to which platform logics permeate local inventiveness is demonstrated by this adaptive behaviour. But

it creates tension as well. Artists acknowledged that adhering to trends can jeopardize cultural uniqueness or authenticity. They must strike a balance between meeting algorithmic requirements and accommodating the Mizo audience's inclination for traditional aesthetics, gospel themes, or modesty. The end effect is a creative landscape influenced by what may be called twin gatekeeping: content is governed by cultural norms, while form is determined by algorithms.

Local Platforms and the Desire for Cultural Ownership

Examining the advantages and disadvantages of regional platforms like Darbu and Thulkhung was the third goal. The results show that these platforms have little real-world use but significant symbolic value. Although artists were proud of local applications and conceptually supported them, their uptake was uneven because of technological problems, low user numbers, and a lack of awareness. Because they viewed these platforms as culturally important places that could shield local music from piracy and neglect, older musicians were frequently more eager to promote them. On YouTube, where audiences were already focused, younger artists, on the other hand, continued to be largely disconnected. Crucially, the interviews indicate that local platforms are viewed as possible complements to global platforms rather than as rivals. This dynamic is explained by the Platform Ladder Model, which states that artists start with Instagram visibility, gain YouTube popularity, and then, if at all possible, steer fans toward Darbu or live performances in order to make money. The third rung of this concept is occupied by local platforms, which stand for cultural ownership and financial sustainability, but most artists still find it challenging to access them.

The Enduring Role of Traditional Institutions

The fourth research goal examined the ongoing impact of artist associations like MZI and MDM, as well as more conventional establishments like Zonet, Vanglaini, and All India Radio (Akashvani Aizawl). These institutions continue to have symbolic authority in spite of the dominance of digital platforms. Recognition is still given by being mentioned on radio, television, or in print, particularly by older audiences. When artists featured on these platforms, they talked about how their families or

communities were proud of them, indicating that institutional support conveys a different kind of cultural capital than online visibility. Concurrently, institutional politics became a major impediment. Many viewed the rivalries between MZI and MDM as harmful and polarizing in an environment where industrial power might be achieved by collective organization. Membership in these groups occasionally led to media prominence or access to gigs, but it also came with annoyances and a feeling of being embroiled in political controversies. This demonstrates the contradiction of Mizoram's institutions, which offer access and credibility yet run the danger of upsetting an ecology that is already delicate.

Navigating Income, Monetization, and Gig Work

For Mizo artists, generating revenue continues to be one of the biggest obstacles. Since the majority had not attained the necessary thresholds, few participants reported making significant sums of money through YouTube monetization. Instagram served as a visibility tool rather than a source of direct revenue. Live performances, weddings, church gatherings, and sporadic sponsorships were the primary revenue streams. This dependence on offline revenue is a reflection of both potential and constraint. On the one hand, gigs offer consistent community visibility and a feeling of continuity with conventional performing techniques. However, it also highlights how unstable digital music production is in Mizoram, where internet platforms generate attention but infrequently result in long-term financial viability. Thus, the sector is defined by what Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2011) refer to as precarious creative labor, where involvement is motivated by identity and passion even in the lack of steady financial compensation.

Resilience, Identity, and Community

Lastly, the study discovered that in spite of structural obstacles, artists demonstrate resiliency and a strong sense of cultural identity. Many people kept making music for spiritual expression, community duty, or personal fulfilment rather than for fame or financial gain. Friends, church groups, and other musicians are examples of informal support systems that are crucial for maintaining artistic endeavours. This is in line with what Baym (2018) refers to as the "intimate work of connection," in

which creating art involves both sustaining relationships and creating material. The tenacity of Mizo artists further emphasizes the distinctive nature of this sector, which is more concerned with cultural continuation than with financial success. However, this very resilience also runs the risk of concealing the structural problems of institutional fragmentation, precarity, and inadequate infrastructure. The scene might stay inactive in the absence of more robust support networks, functioning at the grassroots level but failing to develop into a viable enterprise.

Synthesis

When combined, these results show that the Mizo music industry is best viewed as a developing ecosystem in which musicians manage their careers by utilizing a mix of local, international, and conventional infrastructures, and digital platforms offer visibility but not stability. The Platform Ladder Model provides a conceptual framework for comprehending this process: artists start with short-lived Instagram fame, build their YouTube following, and aim for financial gain through gigs or local platforms. However, the majority continue to occupy the lower rungs, demonstrating the potential and limitations of platform-based professions in limited cultural contexts.

XI. Contribution to Knowledge

By investigating how musicians in Mizoram use YouTube, Instagram, and locally created platforms like Darbu and Thulkhung, this thesis adds several novel insights to the study of digital platforms, creative labour, and regional music economies. This study broadens the discussion by highlighting a tiny, linguistically different, and underrepresented cultural context, even though the majority of the work currently in publication has examined the effects of platformization in large or worldwide companies.

The main contribution is the creation of what this study refers to as the Platform Ladder Model, which illustrates how Mizoram artists move via various platforms in pursuit of fame, recognition, and financial gain. The approach, which is based on

interview data, outlines a step-by-step procedure whereby artists initially create buzz and attention on user-friendly but non-profitable platforms like Instagram, Facebook, or WhatsApp. They then make an effort to establish credibility on YouTube, where income is a far prospect and metrics like views, likes, and subscribers have social and symbolic significance. Lastly, the most driven musicians attempt to transform this exposure into real profits by attracting fans to live performances and concerts, where there is the most earning potential, or to regional streaming services like Darbu. While sustainability can be found in a single platform in global contexts, the Mizo scenario illustrates how careers rely on this ladder-like advancement across several media environments. The Platform Ladder Model therefore provides a conceptual tool that can be applied in other regional or non-metropolitan settings where artists rely on multiple, interconnected platforms rather than a single dominant one.

XII. Implications of the Study

The conclusions of this thesis have several significant ramifications for musicians, organizations, legislators, and scholars that study digital media and music. Broadly speaking, the study shows that digital platforms are not neutral instruments but rather cultural and economic contexts that influence how artists produce, share, and maintain their work. These settings have produced both opportunities and constraints in Mizoram. Although artists now have more visibility than ever because to platforms like YouTube and Instagram, the fundamental issues of financial instability and a lack of industry infrastructure remain unresolved. Rather, the data indicates that Mizo artists' digital success is based on what this study has called the Platform Ladder Model. The fragmented nature of digital careers in smaller cultural contexts is highlighted by this sequential pattern, where artists start by garnering attention on Instagram or other short-form applications, build legitimacy on YouTube, then hope to make money through local platforms or gigs. This model highlights the necessity for artists to comprehend that visibility on its own is insufficient and that, in order for careers to be sustained, migration across platforms must be both intentional and planned.

The results show both potential and challenge for local platform developers. Artists praised platforms like Darbu and Thulkhung for their symbolic and cultural significance, but their limited use and low adoption have kept them from becoming widely used. Crucially, the information indicates that these platforms are unlikely to directly compete with YouTube; rather, they work best as supplementary venues where financial backing and cultural ownership may be highlighted. Developers must therefore change their approach from competing with multinational behemoths to developing specific value propositions, such as more straightforward monetization for small audiences, carefully selected gospel or traditional music collections, or improved ties with regional cultural organizations. Artists' symbolic support indicates that there is a significant desire for culturally controlled platforms, but this desire won't come to fruition until these platforms are technically sound, effectively advertised, and regarded with confidence by audiences. As a result, local developers must spend money on communication tactics that increase legitimacy and visibility in addition to app design.

XIII. Challenges and Limitations

Geographical and scope-related limitations are a major one. The majority of the interviews took place in Mizoram's capital, Aizawl, which has better access to the internet than many rural areas. Even though some of the participants were initially from outside of Aizawl, the study mostly represents an urban viewpoint and does not fully represent the views of artists who live in rural areas or are less tech-savvy. There were difficulties with language and translation as well. The Mizo-language interviews were subsequently translated into English for analysis. Even if great care was taken to ensure meaning was retained, it's possible that subtleties of tone or cultural idioms were lost or changed during translation. This is an inevitable problem in multilingual research and emphasizes the importance of being sensitive when interpreting identity and expression-related concerns. Another restriction is the makeup of the sample. With five institutional representatives and twenty-one artists, the survey was broad but not exhaustive. Although a variety of popular, independent,

and gospel performers were represented among the participants, some viewpoints are still neglected.

XIV. Recommendations

- [1] *For Artists and Music Creators:* The study's conclusions imply that Mizo artists frequently adopt a follower mentality when using platforms, imitating trends or uploading sporadically without employing effective growth or visibility techniques. Moving audiences from one platform to another is essential for sustainability and visibility, as the Platform Ladder Model created in this study makes clear. Artists should see platforms like Darbu or live performances as the point of money conversion, YouTube as the stage for legitimacy and archiving, and Instagram and WhatsApp as the entry point for publicity. It is possible to close the gap between revenue and visibility by consciously working across these stages.
- [2] *For Local Platform Developers:* Despite being significant symbolic venues, Darbu and Thulkhung are still underutilized because of technological issues, poor marketing, and small user bases. Instead of competing with YouTube, developers can work to enhance it by providing specialized affordances that are unavailable on global platforms. This might involve smaller-scale monetization, carefully selected gospel or folk music compilations, or special YouTube channels for local genres that run the risk of being overlooked. Even though they were reluctant to rely on these platforms, the survey revealed that artists were emotionally supportive of them. Developers must capitalize on this symbolic goodwill by offering a dependable and intuitive user interface.
- [3] *For Cultural Institutions:* The results showed that cultural institutions faced both opportunities and difficulties. On the one side, groups like MDM and MZI are crucial in providing credibility, suggesting performers for events, and providing a sense of community. However, their internal conflicts and politics frequently drive artists apart and impede the development of the group as a whole. Such fragmentation might be harmful in a sector as

delicate as Mizoram's. Institutions must put cooperation above rivalry and develop cooperative projects that benefit the larger artist community. Particularly with elderly audiences, traditional media like Akashvani Aizawl, Zonet, and Vanglaini continue to have symbolic value. For artists, their acknowledgment frequently feels more "official" than social media visibility. But if these sources don't adapt to digital culture, they run the risk of becoming obsolete.

- [4] *For Educators and Policy-Makers:* In order to support the sector, educators and policymakers can be extremely important. Including music literacy and digital media in courses, especially at the higher secondary or college level, might be one approach. Younger musicians would be better prepared to view digital platforms as professional tools rather than casual pastimes if they took courses in video creation, copyright knowledge, social media management, and audience engagement. For emerging musicians or collectives, policymakers might also offer startup funds and minor subsidies, allowing them to invest in promotion, rent studio space, or buy equipment. By supporting technical development and offering subsidies for internet connectivity in rural areas, governmental or non-governmental organizations could assist local platforms.
- [5] *For Future Researchers:* The importance of researching digital platforms in small, underrepresented contexts has been demonstrated by this thesis. It did, however, also highlight a number of holes that can be filled by further study. Including the viewpoint of the audience is a crucial step. It would also be beneficial to do comparative studies throughout North-East India to determine whether Mizoram has distinct features or if the Platform Ladder Model is applicable to other minor music industries.

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