
INDIE INDIAN MUSIC -- MARKET TRENDS IN INDIE MUSIC PRODUCTION AND DISSEMINATION IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

Independent music is the music developed and produced by artists independent of commercial studios. This helps artists experiment and develop their own forms of music across genres as commercial studios usually produce standard music to generate revenue from the pre-established market. Higher rates of internet penetration, easier access to equipment and technology, exposure to western media and increase in disposable income has led to the accelerated growth of the Indie music industry in developed cities of India. Indie Music has become an integral tool of protest for the preservation of freedom of speech and equality in a country that has been suffering from religious polarization attacks on cultural diversity by the present ruling political party. However, only the most privileged sections of society have been at the forefront of Indie Music in India. Poor networking and the lack of adequate infrastructure has led to the creation of multiple barriers to entry for musicians on the basis of gender, caste, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexuality, economic background, and domicile. The onus to include musicians of diverse identities into the mainstream lies on promoters, established musicians, sponsors, entertainment companies and the audience. The development of independent music in north-eastern parts of the country despite its economic backwardness is an example of how effective networking and investment by promoters and sponsors can create opportunities for artists irrespective of their identity or economic background.

Keywords: Indie Music, Audience, Globalization, Artists, Music industry

INTRODUCTION

The last decade has seen India become a cradle for the development and production of independent music. There has been a sustained increase in the number of musicians experimenting with different genres of music independent of record labels or production companies (Paul, 2015). This bloom has been fueled by shifts in consumer demand. The music industry has witnessed a shift in the preference of its audience. Millennials have emerged as one of the largest consumer groups (Bundhun, 2019). Exposure to western pop culture due to

globalization has left a significant impact on the taste of preference patterns of consumers, especially millennials. The demonstration effect, which implies a change in the behavior of individuals upon observation of that behavior amongst other individuals has created demand for music influenced not just by western genres, but also by the aesthetic around music in the west. This aesthetic is characterized by events like outdoor music festivals and live performances, innovative artists who don't shy away from experimentation and a general sentiment of protest or detachment against established structures and hierarchies. This is simply reflected in the fact that this music is independent of commercial studios and other conventional structures that have controlled the discourse around music since Independence. The change in mindset has been the first reason for the growth of this alternative to the mainstream.

Increasing penetration of the internet is the second causal link in the growth of Indie Music in India recently (PTI, 2019). Firstly, it has been instrumental in causing the shift in demand in the music industry by connecting young Indian consumers to western music. Secondly, it has also increased connectivity amongst artists, promoters, sponsors and consumers. This is extremely important from an economic perspective, as the needs of different economic entities can only be satisfied only if those who can potentially satisfy these needs are aware of their existence. Artists have a strong social media presence through which they communicate with critics, sponsors, promoters and their audience. The growth of the streaming industry online has made music cheaper and more accessible. Streaming websites, primarily Youtube have been responsible for the growth in popularity of most Indie acts in India. Lastly, India's economic growth in the twenty-first century has increased levels of disposable income and private investment which has created new opportunities and frontiers for aspiring musicians.

Musicians have also had access to significantly better instruments and technology since India's economic liberalization in 1991. More recently, the cost of home recording instruments has plummeted. The presence of recording software such as Logic and Pro Tools has decreased the dependence of musicians on professional studios are extremely expensive and inaccessible to large sections of society. The growth of music festivals in India has provided artists with additional revenue streams not only because of the sale of tickets but also because of the presence of abundant corporate sponsorships. Notably, Liquor manufacturers frequently invest in music festivals, as they are banned from advertising their products independently. Indie Music has also grown because of increased personal interactions with the audience (Wallack, 2016). Venues like the Hard Rock Cafe and the Piano Man Jazz Club regularly feature performances by independent musicians and groups. Indie music's recent growth has made it an indispensable part of India's pop culture.

BACKGROUND

Independent music is defined as the music produced by artists independently, without the help of commercial music records or their subsidiaries. All activities, from recording to publishing of music is done by artists themselves. This form of creating music is unconventional, especially in India, where music in the mainstream is dominated by few market-leading studios like T series and their subsidiaries. Indie music does not fall into a single, well defined particular genre but aims to produce music that can be categorized into multiple diverse genres. As a result of this artists are not straight-jacketed into roles and genres, which is otherwise the norm in the Indian music industry. This gives artists more freedom to experiment with different genres of music and enhances levels of creativity and innovation. In India, this term was first used in 2005 to describe independent artists who started producing their own music because of commercial studios' policy of creating music that was standard, easily acceptable and well defined and reluctance to introduce new artists or genres which hampered artistic creativity (Kunsur, 2017). The growth of Indie music in India has been concentrated in urban developed cities like Bangalore, Mumbai, and Delhi. This is due to the comparatively higher rates of economic development in these cities, which creates more opportunities for artists. As hubs of business and economic activity, these cities provide easier access to sponsors who are willing to promote artists and consumers who are willing and able to spend their incomes on music. Clubs and restaurants actively feature live music in their setting. The most prestigious of these venues such as the Piano Man Jazz Club in Delhi and Hard Rock Cafes across urban hubs help musicians gain credibility and outreach. These cities frequently serve as venues for music festivals, which have been characterized as the biggest push to Indie music (Paul, 2015). They also are home to some of the most prestigious higher educational institutions in the country. Educational spaces like the Delhi University or St Xavier's college, Mumbai have been instrumental in providing spaces and opportunities to independent musicians, irrespective of them being a part of those institutions. Indie music is not just an integral part of the cultural festivals that colleges host, but it has also formed the core of the culture of creativity and resistance that such educational institutions espouse to create (Dogra, 2019). Television channels that feature both popular and upcoming Indie music acts like MTV and Channel V are also restricted to Mumbai. It is clear that Indie music is developing primarily in urban hubs in India, and the most significant reason for that is higher levels of economic development and the rise of a young demographic that serves as the primary market for Indie music.

The concentration of Indie music in some geographic regions of the country has enabled musicians to have high access to cheap or free production technologies. Equipment such as Digital Audio Workstations, studio monitors, microphones, etc. is easily available at affordable prices. Importing of specialized equipment has also become more convenient and simple. Faster internet speeds and the presence of production software online has enabled many artists to produce their own music. The quality of technology and equipment available is on par with the

west. However, the limited access to technology and markets based on the geographical location and the social and economic background of musicians has created a system of exclusion that has, in turn, restricted growth to these communities only.

DISCUSSION

The dynamics of the Indie music industry are very asymmetrical. Despite the growth of this sector, a large section of the population has been excluded from benefiting from such growth on multiple grounds (Wallack 2016). Independent musicians usually thrive in an environment that is conducive, enhances creativity and is accommodating or supportive of the culture of resistance and protest. The very limited cities that have witnessed the growth of independent musicians are the ones that have been able to create such an environment. Artists in the Indie music industry are independent but it is very difficult for them to grow when they are isolated from such environments and more importantly, each other. There are extremely few artist collectives in India except those in the most developed cities. Communication between such collectives is only limited to networking conducted to fill requirements for musicians in Bollywood (the Hindi film industry in India). The absence of any organized network for musicians playing in various parts of the country leads the creation of a distorted and disconnected independent music industry. Given the importance of networks in the music industry, in the absence of networking existing beyond city lines, there is a concentration of creative development and opportunity creation in only these developed parts of the country (Yeluri, 2013). Artists are forced to bear the costs and risks of moving to developed cities to take a shot at entering the market, which is only the first step towards commercial or critical success.

The Indie music industry is also exclusionary based on social and economic grounds. Despite the increased availability of instruments, their pricing remains a problem for a lot of musicians. Because of the absence of any infrastructure and networks, private ownership of instruments is the only option that Artists have, and that too is economically not feasible for many. Musicians also suffer from problems like late payment schedules and default on contracts that impacts their lives and careers. Discrimination from the basis of caste and regional identity is also extremely prevalent. There is an explicit preference shown for musicians coming from specific geographic regions in the country by promoters and sponsors. This is reflected in the type of Indie artists who attain commercial success. Most of them are Savarnas belonging to the upper echelons of society. Even artists from minority communities who form a part of the mainstream like 'Madboy and Mink' belong to the most privileged sections of that community. Sexual harassment in this industry acts as a barrier for women trying to set up independent acts (Agarwal, 2018). The presence of discrimination is antithetical to the principles of resistance against oppressive structures that Independent music 'scenes' across the world aspire to uphold.

Music has long been one of the most effective and universally accessible tools for political protest, social reformation, and self-expression. As a form of social activism, it stirs civic consciousness and often generates solidarity for those who are oppressed. The impact that music creates extends beyond temporary leisure or entertainment to create a sentiment of resistance to uphold values of free speech and individual liberty in the face of oppressive regimes across the world. The British Progressive Rock band Pink Floyd actively took a stance against the British Government's involvement in the Vietnam war. The American rap crew NWA led the movement against police brutality and structural racism in the USA through their music. With the rise of Indie music in India over the past decade, some musicians have taken on the initiative to propagate social change and political reform. Music has served as an outlet and contributor to the independence movement in Kashmir. It has become one of the most original and effective sources of understanding the struggle of the Kashmiri people who spend their entire lives in regions plagued with conflict (Nighosker, 2018). Hundreds of independent musicians also formed a key part of the 'Artists Unite!' protest against the 'assault on culture' by the present BJP led Hindu Nationalist Government. The music of acts like the 'Kabir Kala Manch' and 'Ska Vengers' is influenced by subaltern narratives. Continuous attacks on cultural diversity by right-wing Hindu Nationalist forces in the country have, in turn, fueled the rise of themes of freedom, creativity, and resistance in the art produced by independent musicians.

Bollywood and other film music in India have dominated the market for music ever since there was one.

However, genres that are popular amongst Indie musicians such as Indian pop, Indian regional folk and Western pop have been gaining popularity through the last two decades (Nielsen, 2018). According to the same research, an average Indian spends 20 hours in a week listening to music, mostly through free music streaming services and social media platforms like Youtube or Tik Tok (previously Musical.ly). Therefore, most of the music consumed in India is not paid for (Nielsen, 2018). Revenue from advertisements and subscriptions online is rarely enough for most musicians to sustain themselves. Torrents and other illegal forums are still used by many consumers as the primary medium of accessing music. Regulations have proven ineffective in upholding intellectual property rights of musicians. It is essential to encourage consumers to pay for the music that they listen to, as such revenue streams are imperative for keeping struggling musicians engaged in the industry.

CONCLUSION

According to reports, the music industry in India is expected to grow by an annual rate of 15.5% to a size of \$26.9 billion in the next five years from its current size of \$14.8 in 2018 (KPMG, 2018). This is primarily because of the increase in digital consumption and distribution ever

since the introduction of 4G networking in India. Though problems relating to the preservation of intellectual rights online continue to plague the music industry in India, streaming platforms have been instrumental in the growth of regional music and niche genres that usually form the core of independent music (Singh, 2018). This growth is propelled by the growth of international and domestic streaming services like Spotify and Jio Music that is responsible for the growing normalization of paid music streaming in India. Streaming revenue has grown by 34.0% because of an increase of 32.9% in paid subscription streaming. With 255 million users at the end of 2018, revenue from paid streaming accounted for 37% of the total recorded music revenue (Jha, 2019).

Indie music is bound to be at the forefront of the growth of the music industry in the coming years. However, it is important to ensure that this growth is accommodative of diversity. Indie musicians of all economic, social and ethnic backgrounds should have the means to develop and produce music without incurring the cost of relocating to cities that are alien to them. Music Festivals in the northeastern part of India such as Ziro, Hornbill, Goodstock, and NH7 have played a key role in pushing the careers of local Indie musicians of those areas. These festivals regularly feature local artists. This exposes them to promoters, sponsors, and musicians from all over the world. This along with the presence of a more progressive society is perhaps why the North Eastern states of India are the only ones that have an active Indie music 'scene' despite being less developed economically.

Music festival organizers and other promoters must similarly be cognizant and accommodating of intersecting identities of musicians along the lines of ethnicity, caste, gender, religion, and sexuality. For an industry to grow in its true essence, especially one that aspires to uphold the principles of equality and freedom of speech, it is important to democratize the space and provide more opportunities to the underprivileged and oppressed.

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