

ADVANCING INTERDISCIPLINARY KNOWLEDGE ON CULTURAL LABOUR, CREATIVITY, AND PLATFORM GOVERNANCE IN THE DIGITAL AGE.

STATEMENT OF RESEARCH PROJECT

In the digital age, music-making has been fundamentally reconfigured by platforms such as Spotify, YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok. These infrastructures provide artists with unprecedented visibility and reach, yet they simultaneously impose new regimes of algorithmic control, economic precarity, and dependence on engagement metrics. Global scholarship has shown that platforms are not neutral intermediaries but commercial ecosystems built on data extraction and profit imperatives. Within creative industries, this has accelerated the erosion of stable institutional support and replaced it with metrics-driven, freelance models that deepen artistic vulnerability. Music is particularly affected, as deeply personal forms of cultural expression are increasingly commodified and governed by algorithmic visibility.

Singapore provides a revealing case study of these dynamics. As a technocratic city-state invested in cultural infrastructure and digital innovation, the government has sought to foster a “vibrant and innovative” arts landscape through initiatives such as the Smart Nation vision and the National Arts Council. Yet independent musicians remain constrained by limited institutional support, few spaces for experimentation, and the marginal viability of music within a high-cost economy. At the same time, global platform logics shape their artistic practices, circulation, and recognition through algorithmic governance, diasporic flows, and shifting aesthetic norms. For many, sustaining a career now requires an ongoing negotiation between creative intent and algorithmic optimisation, between cultural autonomy and the demands of platform performance.

This proposed research project asks: How do independent sound artists in Singapore navigate the tensions between creative autonomy and platform governance, and what does this reveal about the broader dynamics of cultural labour under platform capitalism? Situated at the intersection of practice and theory, lived experience and academic critique, the project seeks to understand how artists engage with digital platforms, negotiate precarity within Singapore’s cultural and economic infrastructures, and make meaning through artistic labour. While rooted in the local context of Singapore, the inquiry extends to larger questions of how platform capitalism structures cultural production globally, and how artists might collectively reimagine more sustainable and autonomous conditions of work in an age of digital precarity.

This proposed project will provide insights from an interdisciplinary perspective:

1. Design and Digital
2. Music and Creative/artistic Labour
3. Economics

SCOPE OF WORK FOR SELECTED PHD STUDENT

In addition to meeting the requirements of IGS and obtaining a doctorate degree, the PhD student will work closely with the TAC team and actively involved in different stages of the project, including conducting a comprehensive literature review on platform capitalism, cultural labour, creative precarity, and digital music economies, mapping theoretical intersections across design ethnography, behavioural economics, and creativity studies to refine the project's conceptual framework; undertaking fieldwork with independent sound artists in Singapore, employing design ethnographic methods such as interviews, observations, and participatory workshops to document how musicians navigate tensions between creative autonomy, platform optimisation, and economic precarity; designing and facilitating co-creation workshops with musicians, experimenting with collaborative approaches to explore sustainable practices and prototyping potential tools, methods, or platforms that may support artistic resilience; analysing data, using a multi-scalar framework to synthesise strategies, policy and platform structures; and co-publish with the TAC team.