

CULTURAL INDUSTRIES IN THE DIGITAL AGE: CREATIVE OR TECHNOLOGICAL?

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1. Introduction

The cultural industries have been struck simultaneously by multiple changes in their environment associated with the emergence of a new wave of technology. These changes, far beyond Internet alone, have contributed to drastically altering the nature of works created, their forms of distribution, and their economies, as well as customers' usages, practices, and attitudes. These transformations go way beyond the initial Internet shockwave – MP3 files, Napster, and the first networking web-sites – stemming from the direct competition from dematerialized media. The changes currently underway are shaping a more general framework of exploitation and dematerialization of works. Even something as simple as the sale of a recorded medium (a book, film, or music) is now morphing into a paid service providing broader access to certain content, associated information, catalogues, and tools (reading, searching, saving, etc.), as well as social networks. The supply and commercialization of services have replaced the sale of cultural products (Stahel, 1986), to the point where artists such as AC/DC have come to refuse all downloading of their songs on the grounds that the individual sale of a single track undermines the comprehensive nature of the artistic project of a CD, designed to be listened to as a whole. Likewise, the possibilities of dematerialization are laying new foundations for the localization of activities, challenging the historical conditions of the territorial exploitation of works and rights: we are witnessing the globalization of markets and productions, as well as unprecedented types of communication between physical and virtual markets. Overall, the development of online markets has gone hand in hand with new forms of intermediation, wherein the ranking optimization and visibility of a work are at times more valuable than the work itself.

445

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