

**Where Technology meets Art: Social and Technological Drivers
shaping the success of Indian Hip-Hop**

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Submitted by
Mukul Sanjeev Bagul
12046917

mbagul21@student.aau.dk | mukul.bagul@stud.sbg.ac.at |
mukulbagul75@gmail.com

Rebæk Søpark 5, 2650 Hvidovre, Denmark

Morten Falch
Sergio Sparviero

Department of Communication Studies

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For,

Music who showed me this day,

And those serving as guiding light in my way.

Parents who kept me strong,

And Love for being there when the days were long.

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Preface

The journey from being a listener of western hip-hop music in pre-smartphone era to being a part of Indian hip-hop scene in the streaming platform era is remarkably interesting to reflect upon. I am a music producer and a rapper and the more I was producing music, the more it made me realize the importance of digital media in this industry. On the other hand, working as a software developer for 2 years, I have been creating technological tools. The combination of these varied interests fueled the passion in me to explore the connection of technology and music.

From the beginning of my Master's education, I have been trying to fuse these 2 concepts together. Starting with a critical review of how digital platforms have changed the distribution of music in the industry (Bagul, 2021) to analyzing the impact of music streaming platforms and how do they attract new artists (Bagul et al., 2021), this journey has taught me a lot about technology and art alike not only through the way of research, but also by analyzing the thoughts of various artists. This led to a lot of thoughts relating to connection with the digital media and music industry, its impact on the artists and more importantly its role in spreading a culture which did not originate in India along with the social impact of acceptance of this culture in India.

I may find that this topic is rather complex, but the interests have intersected, and I feel that it will be interesting to explore these effects.

Executive Summary

Hip-Hop is a genre which originated in the Bronx, US and has been one of the top genres. In India, Hip-Hop is relatively very new in India but the growth which is seen over the last few years is tremendous. This growth in Indian Hip-Hop or 'Desi' Hip-Hop has been due to two factors which are the two themes in the research throughout- technical and social. The technical side of the research focuses on the role of social media and streaming platforms which are referred to as digital media throughout the research. The social side focuses on the cultural factors and how the audience has been able to accept this new culture so rapidly. The project asks the research question- *what are the socio-technical factors that have led to the widespread of Desi Hip-Hop?*

To explore this, eight interviews with hip-hop artists and hip-hop content creators were conducted to give insights into what the artists and the audience feels. The interviews were structured based on the two themes mentioned before. The expert's opinions on impact of digital media, use of digital media, negative effects were documented for the technical theme. Similarly, opinions on uniqueness of Desi Hip-Hop, cultural factors, relatability of the genre and community feeling in Desi Hip-Hop were chosen for the social theme.

The findings from the interviews and literature highlights state that Desi Hip-Hop has been mainly digital. Digital media has enabled various forms of content around Desi Hip-Hop which has fanned the flame of its growth. The number of content creators and artists is increasing, and this has uplifted the scene to another level. Artists need to focus more on the digital media to grow and forms like micro-content has made it easier for artists to instantly promote their songs, albums etc. The negative impacts of this is that the art is being lost along the way as artists are more focused on making content which is trending rather than music.

The audience has also accepted this genre as their social and cultural conditions give them a sense of self-identity as well as community, thus adding value in their lives. Desi Hip-Hop is unique because of the cultural diversity of India and has attracted attention, not only from India but also worldwide. The technical factors have helped artists and audience in accessibility and increasing reach, whereas the social factors have helped in acceptance which in turn has led to widespread of Desi Hip-Hop.

Future endeavors can be taken to explore all the aspects of Hip-Hop culture including B-boying, graffiti art, fashion and clothing.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

“Rap nahi karta mai,

Yehich hai mera nature”(MC STAN, 2021)

(“I don’t rap,

It’s my nature”)

When an Indian rapper talks so fondly about an art form, a culture which originated in the West, it makes one wonder how can a culture inspire and imbue passion in people living on the other side of the globe?

When you have an audience, it brings recognition and the possibility for inventiveness and ability among the artists (Jones, 2012). Rap music and Hip-Hop is relatively new in India, the reason it is growing is because it has found recognition in a wide audience. As hip-hop is the voice of the oppressed, people find it relatable. This has enabled artists to invent, mimic the western rap culture and find abilities within themselves to satisfy the audience. “Indian culture contrasts from area to district, food to cooking, and language to language, bringing forth a staggering exhibit of points of view as well as a situation exceptionally inclined to strife”(Hruday Yatindra et al., 2020, p. 8936). This intersectional and distinct types of Indian personalities make Indian rap or ‘Desi’ Hip Hop particularly novel. There are various factors that have played a major role in the recent widespread of Hip-hop culture in India.

This research will look at technical and social factors.

- How the technical factors have led to accessibility and
- similarly, how the social factors have led to the acceptance of this culture. Social factors include economical, societal, and cultural factors

The paper looks into detail how a blend of these factors has led to the rise and widespread of Hip-Hop culture in India.

1.2 Research Questions

What are the socio-technical factors that have led to the widespread of Indian Hip-Hop?

1. What is the role of digital media in Desi Hip-Hop?
2. How the socio-cultural factors of people in India have contributed to rise and spread of Desi Hip-Hop?

2. Literature Review

An extensive literature review is done to understand the technological and social factors related to Indian Hip Hop. The Digital Media term used in the research refers to Social Media like Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat and Streaming Platforms like Spotify, YouTube, Apple Music and all the streaming and content-based platforms. Every section in Literature Review looks at the social and technical aspect of the topic in the section.

The literature review starts with a theoretical background where the blend of technical and social theory lenses which will be helpful in analyzing the further methodology. Then the brief History of Hip-Hop and how it originated follows. The conditions of origin of the hip-hop culture are important to understand as those conditions are what motivate the artists and the audience find it relatable. This will be analyzed with the conditions of origin of Hip-Hop in India. Furthermore, a deep insight on how technical innovations and emerging media has helped hip-hop change through the course of time will be looked upon in great depth. Finally, the literature review will conclude with the evolution of Hip-Hop in India which is discussed in detail and here the social as well as technical factors play a vital role in understanding this evolution.

In the theoretical background section, the paper focuses on two theories- Actor Network Theory and Hesmondhalgh's Music as Empowerment Theory. To analyse the technical aspect and role of digital media, Actor Network theory will be used. This theory will be used only to analyse the network of actors which are audiences, artists, streaming platforms, and social media platforms.

The second theory of 'Why Music Matters' by Hesmondhalgh(2013) is used to understand why people listen to music. The spread of Hip-Hop culture in India is also due to the life-enriching factors of rap music. It is especially important to understand the factors that are making a wide range people listen to hip-hop music. The socio-economic conditions of people make them relate to what an artist is saying, and they aspire to be someone like him. The self-identity and collective-identity concepts of the theory are discussed in detail. The sense of belonging and relatability that rap music gives to the people and why is that important to be explored is explained in this section.

The literature review concludes with an analysis of Indian Hip-Hop in digital and social lenses. It describes the milestones that Indian Hip-Hop has went through. This section will be expanded more in the Analysis Section after the interviews as there is very scarce literature present on Indian Hip-Hop.

The literature review was done by searching for academic papers on Google Scholar to find concrete empirical evidence in the field of digital media and hip-hop. This review was done by carefully selecting papers which have been seen to be relevant for empirical studies. Then it was necessary to find books to enhance the theoretical background. As the research focuses on technical and social contexts, two theories were chosen to guide the research as mentioned above. Different authors' point of views in a specific theory has also been discussed to have a more critical view in the theory. As there is scarce literature present on Indian Hip-Hop, various sources were used to assimilate the data in that section. YouTube interviews of rappers talking about Hip-Hop, Digital Media and the overall Indian Hip-Hop scene were chosen. Along with that, various news articles, documentaries and magazine articles are used to collect this data. This section will be further be reinforced in Analysis.

2.1. Theoretical Background

This section explains how people listen to music. The reasons that people find music appealing is something that is related to social and technical aspects. The technical aspects as to how the music is reaching people or the accessibility of music. The social aspect of why people accept a culture or an artist or a genre is discussed. The combination of both technical and social factors will guide this research.

2.1.1. Actor Network Theory

Actor Network Theory is a powerful socio-technical approach to analyse how human and non-human elements are interwoven and their relations assemble (Fenwick & Edwards, 2010; Law & Hassard, 1999; Turner, 2009; Walsham, 1997). The theory provides with a lens to analyse the technical as well as social aspects in a network. The network consists of all the interrelated entities which are called actors. It is increasingly influential theory in appreciating the complexity of reality and active role of technology in it (Cresswell et al., 2010). A technology plays a pivotal role in any area of interest or digital space. This role is

something that cannot be ignored when considering any space where digital technologies are involved. The consciousness of humans is not everything that influences a certain network.

“Actor-network theory rejects solace of humanism, ‘man’s mastery of technology’. Instead of conscious being seen as the fulcrum of power the focus in ANT is on the organising powers of combinations” (Munro, 2009, p. 125). This theory does not assume that humans are masters of technology but assumes that non-human and human entities are both in power and relation. It focuses on how all the entities combine with each other and have influence while discarding that consciousness is at the fulcrum of power. ANT is a theory as well as methodology and is accounting for the very essence of societies and their nature (Latour, 1996). It tells a story about ‘*how*’ relations assemble and is a toolkit for understanding stories in those relations (Law, 2009). In any network, there are various actors which are dependent on each other, and they form a network through these dependencies. Organizations, according to ANT, are understood as networks of heterogeneous actors brought together into stable associations or alliances (Law, 1990). The actors can be human as well as non-human as long as they contribute to the network.

This theory is a toolkit which tells how these relations are formed and is important in understanding the story behind these relations. It is a theory as well as methodology to understand how the societies are formed while also explaining their nature and correlation of actors. The term non-human actors, in Actor-Network Theory is an umbrella term which covers wide but limited range of entities (Sayes, 2014). The non-human actors have influence over human actors consciously or sub-consciously. We cannot neglect this impact of technology and ANT is a suitable tool to analyse this impact. “A major empirical focus of the theory when applied in particular contexts is to try to trace and explain the processes whereby relatively stable networks of aligned interests are created and maintained” (Walsham, 1997, p. 469). The theory focuses on how networks are formed among actors when the aligned interests among them come together. These aligned interests not only create the network but also strengthen it as more and more actors try to jump in the network.

The use of this theory will be to analyse the technical aspect when it comes to hip-hop and digital media. Also, this theory will shed light on the social aspects and give an understanding of how the network of all these actors work. To understand how a culture is being spread through digital media, it is extremely important to understand the heterogeneous network of all the beforementioned actors that are involved. When it comes to digital media,

it is not the artist, or audience who is in total control. The digital media plays a leading role in spreading the music which artists make to their audience. It can be recommendation systems of Spotify which are promoting rap songs, or social media when an artist uses creative ways to promote their content and gain an audience. Here the power is in the hands of both humans and non-human actors. That is the reason ANT is being used as the influence that these non-human actors have cannot be ignored. It is exactly this influence that the research aims to explore and focus upon.

Actor Network theory in the context of this research is explained in detail in the following section.

2.1.1.1. Actors

In this research, the term digital media is comprised of all the social media platforms and streaming platforms that play a role in this industry. Digital media is a non-human actor. Artists and Audience are human actors, and the role of ANT will be important in understanding the relation between digital media artists and audiences. Here artists include rappers, music producers and hip hop content creators like reaction channels, breakdown channels, promoters, meme pages etc. on social media.

Music streaming platforms like YouTube, Spotify, Apple Music etc. which help the artists display their talent and provide with tools to analyse their streams and audience behaviour. On the other hand, they enable the audience to stream artist's songs, discover new artists and stay connected to their music. "On-demand music streaming services such as Spotify, Rdio, Soundcloud and Deezer, and personalized Internet radio services like Pandora and iTunes Radio, have exploded into the mainstream in recent years, after about a decade of gradual development" (Robert Prey, 2015, p. 2). YouTube, Spotify, and Apple Music (former iTunes) will be focused upon particularly, but not exclusively, in this research. This is because they are the top most used services in the world (Curry, 2022; King, 2021).

Social Media platforms like Instagram, Facebook, Twitter etc. help the artist to connect with the artists on a personal level. "The music industry is a bellwether for this revolution, where social media are increasingly used for sharing information about music albums and songs—and also for the sharing of the music itself"(Dewan & Ramaprasad, 2014, p. 101). Artists use social media to share information of their new projects or songs. Many a times these platforms are used to create a hype for these songs. They would post a snippet, announce that 'something is on the way', or use different creative ways to create a hype

among their followers. Since these platforms provide various artistic tools, it becomes easy for the marketing team of an artist to use them creatively to reach more people.

Social Media platforms can spread and broadcast information in a very effective and efficient way as immediateness, significant reach, lack of geographical and temporal boundaries are their characteristics (Eyrich et al., 2008; Jansen et al., 2009). These platforms can potentially help an artist reach audience worldwide almost immediately. So, they are a very powerful marketing tool. Communication with target groups is much more easy and inexpensive as compared to traditional media like advertising, direct marketing etc, and these promotions can include a variety of multimedia (Hausmann & Poellmann, 2013). This gives the marketing team and artists freedom to materialize their intangible goods and reach their niche audience much more effectively. “Instagram Reels got launched after the ban of famous app TikTok. After its launch Reels came a big way as influencer in the world of digital marketing” (Yuvarani & Saravanan, 2021, p. 50). TikTok was one of the apps in the list of Chinese apps banned by India. The short 15-30 second video format became instant success with TikTok and after its ban, Instagram took the opportunity and started Reels.

A lot of social media has feature of adding music to their stories, reels, or short videos. This is also a way for the audience to spread their favourite artist’s music. Reels are also a significant way in which people discover music. The explore feature of Instagram showcases some of the most interesting and engaging Reels made by public accounts. The Explore space on Instagram gives an artist or a marketing team for an artist or a label a chance to gain wider audience.

This theory is useful in understanding the role and co-existence of human and non-human actors. It is useful in relating technology and the role it plays in real world along with human actors. The aim is to understand the interwoven network of all the actors.

2.1.2. Music as Empowerment Approach

Music enriches people’s life. Many economic approaches say that the goal of music is economic prosperity (Hesmondhalgh, 2013). Even though economic prosperity is something important, music is not all about that. The life enhancing properties of music and culture are often underestimated. It is these properties that attract people towards music. Understanding why people listen to music is important. Hesmondhalgh further states that music listeners have two complimenting yet contrasting experiences-

- a. Music feels intensely and emotionally linked to private self.
- b. Music is often the basis of collective, public experiences

Music feels intensely and emotionally linked to private self- An example of this can be mother singing baby to sleep. This is more personal and something which creates value for oneself. Wide range of emotions and feelings are embodied in music, lyrics, and visuals, especially in popular songs (Hesmondhalgh, 2013). A person tries to find relatability in the lyrics and music. It creates a self-identity and defines who the person is or is not. “We are inclined to believe that our identity through time is, in its nature, all-or-nothing” (Parfit, 1971, p. 685). Self-Identity is something that makes an individual believe that the person’s life is his life and is incredibly significant for every human.

“Examination of personality facets as well as preferences for individual attributes in music provided nuanced information into the relationship between personality and preferences. People’s personal characteristics, namely, their personality traits, are a predictor of their musical preferences” (Greenberg et al., 2016, pp. 305–306).

Personality traits are being used as music recommenders in music streaming services such as Spotify, YouTube. This strengthens Hesmondhalgh’s claim of music creates self-identity by adding that- music creates self-identity among a listener when a particular music reflects his personality trait.

“Rap songs speaks the voice of cultural roots via its elements and are popular among youth who are well-informed by phenomenal interests” (Regmi, 2021, p. 18). When rappers speak about current issues, people who have an interest in them, find relatability in the voice which speaks for what they believe in. They find relatability to the rapper who comes from the same socio-economic background. This is the reason why rap music feels intensely linked with oneself.

Music is often the basis of collective, public experiences- This can be live performances, dancing with others or just listening to music together. Rich music sociability cannot be overlooked as music enhances collective experience among people who are listening to music in a shared space (Hesmondhalgh, 2013). The author further states that people discuss music heatedly among themselves and that is more tied up with social problems like inequality or suffering. This collective experience doesn’t necessarily have to be done in a room. “Media has become a game-changer if we turn back and look at the hip-hop history” (Regmi, 2021, p. 18). With the increasing media consumption, these heated discussions are being taken to social media platforms. YouTube, Instagram comments are

filled with these heated discussions of fans. Many hip-hop content creators and reviewers often stream live to discuss music with the fans.

Listening alone is subconsciously imagining the response shared with others (Hesmondhalgh, 2013). Even when people listen to songs alone, they are subconsciously sharing a space with others who listen to the same genres. There is comfort and a community feeling to know that there are other people listening to this genre or artist. As Parfitt (1971) mentions that identification is very important to every human. Combining this with Hesmondhalgh's (2013) claim that music is a medium of self-identity only strengthens his theory. This feeling of self-identity and belonging to a community, matters to everyone and is a major reason as to why people listen to music.

This theory will guide this research in understanding how people in India appreciated and accepted this genre. Also, the technical aspect will help in understanding the growth of hip-hop in India. Since, technology enabled easy access, more artists to come up and reaching a wide audience, the social aspects where people accepted this form of music forms a good theoretical lens to understand this phenomenon.

To understand the social aspects of people in India who listen to hip-hop it is important to understand how social conditions have led to the origin of Hip-Hop in the US. The following chapter will give an idea of social as well as technical aspects of Hip-Hop.

2.2. Digitization in Hip-Hop Industry

This section will start with a brief history of Hip Hop culture and how it originated. Then an insight on how digitization has changed the Hip-Hop industry. Furthermore, the paper will look closely into the Hip-Hop Industry from a technical and social point of view. The technical and social contexts are important as technology has enabled reaching a wider audience, easy access to artist's work whereas socio-economic conditions are very important in hip-hop as it helps in understanding why people listen to music. The effects of digitization are thus looked throughout the paper in technical context as distribution and social context as acceptance.

2.2.1. Hip-Hop Evolution- Social and Technical

In order to understand the digitization in Hip-Hop it is important to visit the roots of the culture. The term hip-hop culture is an extremely broad term and rap music is just a little part of the culture. The culture contains slangs, graffiti art, streetwear, fashion and much

more. Hip-Hop originated in the margins, financially and socially oppressed areas with heavy African-American populations in New York to combat frustrations of economic turmoil and racial discrimination and raise awareness in an unorthodox way (Hruday Yatindra et al., 2020).

The social factors that led to origins of hip-hop are something that are relevant throughout Hip hop culture originated during the mid-1970s in South Bronx, which was mainly black and Hispanic ghetto, as an integrated series of live community-based practices where early MCs(Rappers) and DJs, graffiti artists and break-dancers formed a scene which grew out of slum environments (Devos, 2007; Dimitriadis, 2009; Nguyen & Ferguson, 2019). This community was the one which was facing a lot of social and economic turmoil. They had to find a way to express themselves and connect to the people.

Joe Conzo who is titled as “The Man Who Took Hip-Hop's Baby Pictures”(Gonzalez, 2005) shared his opinions in a Netflix hip-hop documentary named “Hip-Hop Evolution” as to the origins of Hip-Hop in New York where it started.

“It was the boiling point to give birth to something out of nothing. And out of that turbulence and upheaval was the birth of Hip-Hop”(Joe Conzo in documentary of Wheeler, 2016).

Here Joe speaks about the lack of jobs, economic difficulties in the Bronx and this led to a boiling point of turmoil and a new culture was born. “It has roots in African American, Jamaican American, and Latino American communities and was borne out of resistance to dominant mainstream, predominantly White U.S. culture” (Nguyen & Ferguson, 2019, p. 99).

“Initially, rap was deemed a passing fad, a playful and ephemeral black cultural form that steamed off the musical energies of urban black teens” (Neal & Forman, 2004, p. 61).

The authors here are talking about hip-hop in general. They further state that as it was obvious rap was not going to go anywhere, this people’s dismissal changed to recognition. Now rap music has spread worldwide.

The social implications of the origins of hip-hop are what makes it popular among the audience who have the same backgrounds. Rappers claim to be ‘artists’ who spit out rhymes that mirror the reality they live in and persuade their audiences to not only witness the politics of the times but also strive for an improvement in the situation which gives hip-hop a

potential to empower and grant hope to disadvantaged youth (Asante, 2008; Chakravarty, 2017). The lyrics of the rappers have power which can influence the youth. The lyrics and the videos influence the audience in the most persuasive and convincing way. The same is seen in India. Kashmiri lad MC Kash was 20 years old when he started his career and the centre of his rap is human rights violations and contemporary issues of Kashmir and he depicts reality of Kashmir through his music (Chakravarty, 2017). He has awakened the youth of the nation. Also, a lot of young artists of Kashmir have started following on his footsteps.

This has shown that hip-hop thrives through social issues by giving voice to the oppressed, bringing people with the same background, issues together and thus forming a culture. Hip-Hop music is a very powerful tool and has the power to influence a lot of people. The culture and genre which was called a passing fad of the youth is there to stay and has a lot of power to influence.

“If Jay-Z comes out one day with his shirt hanging this way or LL Cool J comes out with one leg of his pants rolled up, the next day everyone is doing the same thing”(Chang, 2006, p. xii).

When the audience, who are going through the same troubles or conditions as these rappers went through see them, it gives them a hope and makes them relate more to the rapper. If the rapper is successful and as rap music goes, flexing your wealth to show where you have made it is a part of it, the audience who relates to the rapper aspires to be like the rapper. The aspirational aspect and the raw reality of the lyrics hits a chord instantly with the audience.

Fast forwarding to the technical evolution, most of the 20th century the industry revolved around recording.

“Driven by high-volume consumer sales of ‘sound carriers’ (LPs, cassettes, and CDs), the recording sector became a hub around which revolved publishing, live performance, studio production, artistic management, radio promotion, the marketing of star imagery and sales of merchandise” (Negus, 2019, p. 367).

This was a major change in hip-hop as it announced the shift from just live performing in clubs to making music available for listening to the public. This created a whole different industry. This industry involved economic investments in artists, licensing and copyrights, profits from physical sales, and royalties paid to artists. Since 1970’s record

sales had grown and kept on accelerating in mid 1980s since the CD invention and for all this period, music executives had all the control over the industry(Mulligan, 2015).

The music industry and record labels went hand in hand such that many people think that the recording industry and music industry are one and the same (Bielas, 2013). But it is not the case. Recording industry is a subset of music industry, where the recording, mixing, mastering, and producing of a rapper's tracks takes place. Music Industry "generally refers to the sale and purchase of recordings, the bundles of rights that go with them, and the livelihoods of people involved in that economy, ranging from musicians and fans to accountants, artists and repertoire (A&R) people, street teams, engineers, producers, lawyers, and record company executives, among others" (Sterne, 2014, p. 50). The hip-hop music industry involves everything from album art, recording, tours, concert planning and all the work involved other than actually making music. The artists would then sign up to these record labels and would be paid according to their record sales (Mortimer et al., 2012). Being signed to these labels was a huge thing for these artists. They gained instant recognition, had marketing teams running promotions and that meant a huge reach and wider audience.

The concerns and negative effects of these artists signing the record labels cannot be neglected. Many critics think that recording industry and labels have hyper-commercialized rap music, so they are concerned commercially on aesthetic and political values of rap music (Crossley, 2005). The social value of rap music is diminished as the lyrics are fabricated to make them sophisticated and it loses its raw value. Also, the labels are concerned about music that makes money, so they have certain standards and norms which make the music commercialized. This is one of the main reason commercial music is looked down upon by majority of the rappers.

Hip-Hop is all about bringing forward a social message through songs in a way that the music connects to people. Through various and innovative forms of cultural production—such as break dancing, graffiti, spoken word, and song—racialized youth have offered powerful analyses and critiques of their social conditions (Hill, 2009). These are all forms of hip-hop culture, and the youth has found a way to analyze and look at their own social conditions. They have found a voice and a medium to tell their tale. This tale feels real to the audience who have similar background or are going through the same thing physically, mentally or socially. As Hesmondhalgh's (2013) theory explains the reason people listen to music is because of its life-enriching and empowering qualities. The audience has the feeling

of self-identity and the comfort of belonging to a community of listeners. Since Hip-Hop is so closely connected to the real life and social conditions in terms of relatability, it is one of the top genres worldwide.

2.2.2. The Transition into Digital Music

“Music in the nineteenth century was largely a relational good”(Benkler, 2006, p. 73). Music was shared through hearing, repeating, improvising and was a thing that people did in presence of each other. Music publishing was done by trading musical sheets (Galuszka & Wyrzykowska, 2016) which in turn the middle class played for the guests or attended public performances whereas the rich hired musicians who played it live (Benkler, 2006). The invention of phonograph (Kenney, 1999) changed the music industry. Now people were able to record music which led to a commercial, concentrated industry which was about investments in advertising, forming preferences to get crowds and managing artists.

This led to the rise of record labels. The only music available to the public for a large period of time was through the records that were released by the record labels (Bielas, 2013; Bolaño, 2015; Lesser, 2018). This was mainly because the cost and complexity of producing music was extremely high and the artists had to rely on record labels to release their tracks. Artists would sign up for these record labels and have a contract and in turn would be paid according to their record sales (Mortimer et al., 2012), where these record labels would handle the recording, distribution, marketing, promotion and advertising for the artist and make sure that the records were available in stores (Bielas, 2013; Wagner et al., 2014). The invention of Compact Disk was the starting point of digital music. A CD as it was called, collected and sorted music from Vinyl records and thus was an enriching experience for the audience (Straw, 2009). The digital music era began, and everything changed with it.

The music we hear now is through streaming platforms. iTunes(Now known as Apple Music) was introduced by Apple in 2003(Eiriz & Leite, 2017) and the streaming era began. Many platforms like Amazon Music, Spotify, Gaana and Saavn followed. The industry has been disrupted due to the emergence of streaming platforms, social media that allow sharing of music, creating a persona and much more. Music streaming platforms aim to create personalised experiences and to push certain artists and music through algorithms and recommender systems and playlists. These platforms can help users get exposed to different music, including various genres and new artists (O’Dair & Fry, 2020). This will give enough exposure in an ideal business world. Having more artists in a genre means that the culture will spread, and audience will have a lot more variety to choose from.

Now let us look at how exactly this emergence of new media in music industry affected the hip-hop industry.

2.2.3. Hip-Hop and Digital Media

The Internet has rearranged the music industry in a vertical structure that now reaches the lowest commercial levels of the music business (De León & Gupta, 2017). This has led to emergence of digital media where social media and streaming services come together to help the artists reach their audience better. It has become easy for underground artists to have their music on these platforms and explore their niches better. New artists do not have a lot of resources when they are starting. Earlier it was difficult for new artists to put out their songs either in CD format or online. But ever since streaming services like Gaana, Spotify, Apple Music, YouTube came forward with their almost free or negligible costs, more artists started distributing music.

As the digital media became more popular, it changed the hip-hop industry in numerous ways and many more artists started coming forward. Rappers record ‘underground’ hip-hop music, and much of it is released by independent labels. Many record labels came along and started signing artists. The Big Three- Universal Music Group, Sony Music Entertainment and Warner Music have been dominating the music industry since 1930 (Day, 2010; Gebesmair, 2017; Hervey, 2002; Lesser, 2018). Universal Music Group owns major hip-hop labels like Def Jam, Interscope Records, Aftermath Entertainment Records which have an impressive line-up of major artists.

“Digital music distribution disrupted the recorded-music retail business, and Apple used the moment to redefine music retailing and distribution” (Adomavicius et al., 2015, p. 314).

Whenever a shift in technology appears, it causes an imbalance among the interests and strategies of the stakeholders creating major opportunities, risks and challenges to existing model of the market (Cowhey et al., 2009). This has not only brought a change in hip-hop music, but also to the promotions, audience, artists etc. The music industry now relies on shorter, more flexible, and low-profit margins (Dubosson-Torbay et al., 2004). As new and new platforms emerge, it leads to the rise in digital sales. Since the rise of digital channels for media distribution, the music industry has undergone a major transformation

characterized by plummeting revenues (Elberse, 2010). The transformation was majorly due to the introduction of streaming platforms.

In this streaming platform era, it is very important for artists and their business model to consider how their audience accesses and stumbles upon their music (O'Dair & Fry, 2020). For many underground artists, resources are scarce, and budgets are low. So, they cannot employ an expensive marketing team and the only option is sign for a label.

“Hip-hop artists in the US previously used mixtapes sold on urban street corners to gain exposure. With the establishment of digital media and file sharing, artists, new and established, have found that the Internet has given them access to a broader audience, and allowed them a new level of engagement” (Clark, 2014, p. 1117).

But with the emergence of new media, it has become relatively easy for artists to gain a fanbase and stay connected to them. The various platforms that are using music to promote content like music in Instagram reels, stories, music in Snapchat snaps or YouTube shorts. Instagram stories are a temporary form of content that does not go on the feed but stays on the user's profile for 24 hours wherein it can be edited to add text, music, location, filters, GIFs, location or mention someone by their username (Wert, 2021). It is a fantastic way to promote new music as social media can help an artist grow quickly. With fans mentioning artists in their stories, reels or comments, it creates engagement and Instagram pushes the content more. If India is to be considered, a small niche is good audience. So, lots of artists try to make content for the niche.

Spotify monitors user behaviour to recommend songs and this has become an unremarkable example of dominant business model for a lot of tech companies (Chodos, 2019). In their “discover weekly” playlist, Spotify encourages users to listen to new music and artists that may have been unknown to them (Coffey, 2016). Music streaming platforms also rely on their vast catalogue of music genres and various artists to attract users and remain prominent. The lesser-known artists fill up the catalogue which in turn looks attractive to audiences. On the other hand, these platforms need to have music of major record labels and it affects the platforms greatly if the labels pull out their music (Prey et al., 2022). Majority of the mainstream artists are signed to labels, and they bring in numbers in terms of revenue, streams to the streaming platforms. So, it is intriguing to see how all the artists are important for music streaming platforms for a variety of reasons.

The huge catalogue of artists provides audiences with a variety in music instead of just mainstream music which is commercial. Commercial music doesn't have any social or economic depth as labels tend to make the music more aesthetic and steer away from politics and thus is criticized for losing social value (Crossley, 2005). So, recommending new music gives new artists exposure and in turn encourages more artists to make their music public. On the other hand, audiences can explore the niche and find these artists who are doing something different in their niche.

One interesting study in Tanzania shows that a lot of hip-hop artists have effectively used the emerging new media to their benefit (Clark, 2014). Facebook signed a deal with Tigo, one of the largest mobile phone carriers in Tanzania, which allowed free access to Facebook without any carrier charge. This was crucial to people who couldn't afford a data pack which made Facebook automatically the only portal to social media. Artists set up pages where they could share their music and stay connected to their fanbase. This also allowed them to be a part of the global hip-hop collective. This case study very effectively underlines the importance of social media to hip-hop. Many artists have gravitated towards social media to counterbalance influence of mainstream media (Fuchs, 2014). We can see this not only in the Tanzanian case, but also how the hip-hop world is today. Majority of the rappers today use Instagram, Twitter to give major announcements and updates of their upcoming songs, album releases. It has become an easy way for them to conceptualize their idea and show it better.

“Rappers situate themselves strategically, in relation to mainstream social and political discourse” (Kerr, 2017, p. 20). The digital persona of the rapper is especially important as it portrays themselves to the audience.

2.2.4. Digital Platforms- Revolution?

“How musicians have found themselves redefined as ‘content providers’ rather than creative producers; an important historical change from recorded music as product to content” (Negus, 2019, p. 369). After the introduction of streaming platforms and social media, it is indeed true that musicians are now seen as someone who make content. This has been detrimental to music in a way that artists do not focus more on making something creative but rather focus on making something similar to what is trending, something that is relevant or forms of content that are popular.

Ever since streaming has begun, there is a considerable increase in the revenue that has started coming to the music industry since 2015 (Hesmondhalgh et al., 2021). The

authors have given a descriptive revenue generation for on demand streaming of music. The artist has to find a distributor which charges the artist a fixed fee or commission. The ‘celestial jukebox’ was a conceptual technology which meant that audiences would listen to their favourite music all the time (Marks, 2015). This celestial jukebox has now been repackaged and sold as music services delivered over the cloud such as Apple, Amazon, Spotify (Burkart, 2014). The popularity of an artist, label, creator is now calculated in terms of numbers- streams, views, likes, follows, subscribers. The number of views, subscribers, streams are not only a measure of popularity, but it has relationship with the income, more streams means more income (Baym et al., 2021). This is the new shorter, flexible and low-profit business model that was mentioned in section 2.1.3 (Dubosson-Torbay et al., 2004). A lot of business models have changed, and the recording labels have found a new way to assert their dominance in this new shift in technology.

Streaming Services have created unjust system of power which has led to the domination of major record companies (Hesmondhalgh, 2021). The author has made certain claims that the way these platforms offer very small ‘per-stream’ rate is unfair towards artists and is damaging artists in financial terms.

“Digitalisation is bringing about major changes in the way that recorded music is disseminated, but certain familiar features of the global recorded music industry – notably the dominance of oligopolies of vertically integrated corporations, based on systems of copyright ownership and exploitation – are likely to remain intact” (Hesmondhalgh, 2007, p. 3).

The digitization of music has brought a lot of changes in the way music is being distributed, but the feature the author talks about here is the dominance of record labels is something that remains the same. There are also label-owned services to distribute. Majority of music that is popular on these streaming platforms is the music that has been pushed by these major recording companies. This is how streaming platforms have sustained labels. The labels rake in huge audience for Spotify and in turn keep getting revenue. But there are other ways where Spotify has smartly integrated with social media to gain audience. Spotify users keep on growing as the promotions and information that are being carried through social media platforms among which Instagram stands at the top (Nugroho et al., 2022).

“Instagram Stories are used very differently to engage fans and share information that is not always music-related, and Stories are being used daily by artists” (Wert, 2021, p. 12).

Artists use posts and reels to announce events, albums, or singles ahead of time and then use stories to share the raw content and behind the scenes of their daily lives. “The portability and habitual use of the smartphone within everyday life enables Instagram to extend the role played by images in the stimulation, capture, and modulation of attention” (Carah & Shaul, 2016, p. 71). This is a major platform where artists are using various strategies to make audio-visual content and share their work in order to get more engagement and in turn wider reach.

2.3 Desi Hip-Hop Evolution

In this section, a closer look on Indian Hip Hop or Desi Hip Hop will be given and the effects of digital media on it along with the reasons for the spread of this culture in India will be analysed. Hip Hop has spread across India in just five years and is now one of the most popular genres among the country's youth (FrontRow, 2022). A brief history of how Indian Hip-Hop or Desi Hip-Hop has evolved will be discussed in detail.

“The teashop outside Khalsa college in Matunga, Mumbai would be mostly infested by a bunch of young guys narrating their lives in rhythmic verse, as crowds slowly gather around” (Sood, 2016, p. 1).

Earlier the mainstream and commercialized version of hip-hop would be the only songs that were allowed by to play and perform in clubs. But as the underground scene rose and people began to realize hip-hop is more than the mainstream Bollywood rap songs, these artists started performing shows. One of the prominent rapper Naezy says that ‘*asli*’ or authentic hip-hop is on the rise and it means a lot for the scene (Xalxo, 2019). According to big rappers like Divine (who received circulation in BBC Asia Network), Internet has played a major role as anyone with a smartphone and 3G connection is able to access the music and the underground hip-hop movement has been built ground up (Sood, 2016). These rappers are part of the Mumbai hip-hop scene where the groundwork of hip-hop in India was led.

“Sumit Roy from Kolkata wrote and recorded “Go protest” in the early hours of the morning, in response to the pushback against student protestors from the government, in which he declaimed: ‘*Poora desh cheeke/ chowkidar chor hai*’ (The whole country is shouting/ Those who are the guards, are the ones looting)” (Ramadurai, 2022).

Protest poetry culture has picked up a lot because of various issues in different part of India. The author further states that protest poetry is not new and has been used since

Independence movement in early 20th century, but no musical genre has caught attention of the public the way rap has.

“There is a whole bunch of conscious emcees who have been talking about topics like this (referring to topics of social injustice) ... We try to bring forth our conscious side so it connects to conscious side of audience” (Naezy et al., 2021). Dee MC one of the prominent female rappers said this in an interview with CNN-News18. CNN NEWS18 (formerly known as CNN IBN) is a partnership between TV18, one of India's leading television broadcast networks and CNN International (News18, 2019). Rappers are conscious about their surroundings, and it reflects in their lyrics. The audiences which are more aware about the things happening in their surroundings relate to it. This has led to major widespread of hip-hop.

2.4. Desi Hip-Hop and Digital Media

This section describes how Desi-Hip has evolved because of digital media. Digital media includes all social media like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter as well streaming platforms like Spotify, Apple Music, Gaana, YouTube and Twitch.

2.4.1. Digital Desi Hip-Hop

When we talk about hip-hop, Indian hip-hop is not what comes to mind naturally. But when a trend takes over a country of more than 1 billion people, it makes much more than a splash. It gets accepted and transforms into a culture.

This is naturally portrayed by the youth on social media like Instagram, Facebook etc. Given Instagram's popularity among the audience correlated with hip-hop culture and the hashtag search function, Instagram is the platform where youth perform and construct their identities in response to the messages found in rap songs (Mosley et al., 2017). More features like Reels, Adding Music to stories and posts make it much more relatable for the audience to create a persona based on what they listen and can relate to.

This is a major role which social media has played with audience who adapted this culture. Other people who see these posts, also get inspired, find it cool and the cycle continues. Some songs are used in reels just because they are bangers, and the beat is good or the lyrics are relatable. The music isn't limited to just international rappers. The slang, the local language lyrics, the hashtags are used a lot. The hashtag *#bantaikipublic* has more than

67000 posts till now on Instagram. It is a mix of 2 languages- Marathi and Hindi used by the rapper Emiway Bantai. It means Bantai's fans.

The slang contained in rap song lyrics are spread easily by the massive consumption of social media (Putri & Fauzia, 2017). *Bantai* is a Mumbai slang for brother or friend (bro), and it is widely adapted by audience and rappers alike all over India. Slangs from local rappers in Pune, Mumbai, Delhi are reaching the corners of India- slums and residences alike. This has resulted in new and upcoming rappers from all parts of the country. When artists rap in their own regional language, use their regional slangs, people from that region find some feeling of brethren and connect more to the artist. At the same time, it also acts as a medium to spread one's culture in the world. It gives the artists a feeling of representing their hometown, their neighborhood.

The diversity in India can be found in language, food, culture etc. when you travel from a city to another city which brings various points in discussion (Hruday Yatindra et al., 2020). This sheer diversity found in every small part of India make Desi Hip Hop different and is a major reason for its success.

“Indian rap is especially novel because of how intersectional and distinctive the Indian character is. Indian culture contrasts from region to area, nourishment to cooking, and language to language, delivering a stunning display of perspectives just as circumstances outstandingly opposed to struggle” (Ingle, 2020, p. 23) .

2.4.2. Diss Culture

“*Rappers Paisa kama paa rahe hai?*”(Raaj Jones, 2018)

“Are rappers really earning any money?”

Probably the most controversial yet pivotal statement in the history of Desi Hip-Hop. Raftaar, one of mainstream and famous rappers of India said the above statement in his interview with Raaj Jones. He followed the statement by taking a name of a fellow rapper- Emiway Bantai. Emiway Bantai is the biggest rapper in India if we go by subscriber count. He has 18.5 million subscribers on YouTube right now.

Raftaar later in the interview said that Emiway is not earning any money right now and this statement caused Emiway to take offence. “He (Raftaar) even got locked in a vicious [and audience-earning] beef and created ‘*Sheikh Chillli*’ for rapper Emiway Bantai” (Tagat, 2022). The beef was a major boost to Indian Hip-Hop as Emiway dissed Raftaar and MC

Stan in “Samaz Mei Aaya Kya” song and all the rappers went back and forth at each other. This was the first beef in Desi Hip-Hop of such a large scale and all the rappers gained a massive audience as people started to listen to rap.

Similar beefs followed with Kr\$na-Muhfaad, Divine-Emiway, Kr\$na-Emiway and they all have been very essential in changing the scene.

2.4.3. Going Mainstream

Yo Yo Honey Singh along with his crew ‘Mafia Mundeer’ rapped mostly about partying and only created party songs to make a niche in Bollywood (Cardozo, 2021) . Slowly other rappers like Raftaar who was also a part of ‘Mafia Mundeer’ started rapping for Bollywood songs and making commercial music. The author makes accurately describes the scenario back then as more and more rappers got featured in Bollywood, rap music was seen as a commodity and was just associated with party music. The author conducted an interview with Dhawal Parab a.k.a D’Evil who was featured in the movie “Gully Boy.” The rapper told the author that the things were going to change for the hip-hop scene even without Gully Boy, although Gully boy did help it accelerate and things have changed a lot after that. “I argue that ‘*Gully Boy*’ is glaringly caught in a dual movement in its relation with mainstream ideology: it incorporates the emplaced and embodied expression of identity that is at the core of hip-hop culture”(Kulkarni, 2020, p. 88). As rap music was just perceived as portrayed as party music, this movie was the first to have hip-hop in focus.

Zoya Akhtar’s film Gully Boy was based on real-life stories of Mumbai-based Hip-Hop artists- Naezy and Divine. This is the first time where hip-hop is the topic of the movie. Earlier rap music was a part of party songs in Bollywood which led to the belief that rap music is just about showing wealth, girls and alcohol. This was the wrong interpretation of hip-hop which was being bombarded to the Indian audience. The movie has been influential in increasing the number of rappers in India and thus enriching the Desi Hip-Hop scene with variety.

3. Methodology

This section describes the methods used to do the research. It describes in detail the strategies used to collect data, find literature sources and theories and methods to find empirical evidence.

3.1. Research Question Formulation

The interest in this research stemmed from the author's interest in social media and hip-hop industry. This research uses qualitative methods to dive deep into the role of social media in today's hip-hop industry. "The activities of collecting and analysing data, developing and modifying theory, elaborating or refocusing the research questions, and identifying and dealing with validity threats are usually going on more or less simultaneously, each influencing all of the others" (Maxwell, 2008, p. 215). The research started with an idea to explore the relation of digital media and Indian Hip-Hop. With the literature review and theoretical background, it became more and more apparent to include the social as well as technical sides in the research.

3.2. Qualitative Interviews

Qualitative interviews impart knowledge the expert has regarding the research field, they record the expert's perspectives which is subjective and analyse them which is an effective data collection method (Flick et al., 2004). Here the experts are various stakeholders in Indian Hip-Hop. The interviewees include Hip-Hop content creators on YouTube, admin of Hip-Hop meme pages on Instagram as well various rappers and music producers.

The interviews in this research are semi-structured. "Semi-structured interviews are conducted on the basis of a loose structure consisting of open ended questions that define the area to be explored, at least initially, and from which the interviewer or interviewee may diverge in order to pursue an idea in more detail" (Britten, 1995, p. 251) . The questions and the areas are defined in the interview guide to give an idea to the interviewer and provide a skeleton during the interview. The areas namely- technical and social which are defined in the theories (see 3.3.1) will be explored.

In general, these interviews cover the expert's thoughts on how digital media has played a role in spreading rap music all over the country. Also, the interviews cover the social

aspect as these experts are ideal hip-hop audiences as well which also helps in gaining an insight into how audiences of Hip-Hop are relating to the music and finding it life-enriching.

Thematic Analysis mentioned by Boyatzis (1998), which interprets and describes the primary data in an organized and rich format. The advantages of this thematic analysis are-

1. It is applicable for deep-rooted analysis, as thematic interpretation and this can go deeper into the data.
2. It allows interpretation of data to reach a broader perspective of social context and takes it to an unprecedented level.

The research will follow all the steps of generating codes, making themes and producing the final observations that will lead to the conclusion of the research.

3.2.1. Interview Themes

The research is a blend of technological and social drivers and thus it is clear the themes will be the same. The themes are driven by the technical and social theories used. It is easier then to analyse the findings according to the theory.

Themes	Theory	Motive
Technical	Actor Network Theory	Understand the network of actors- digital media, artists and audience
Social	Why Music Matters	Understand the life-enriching properties of Indian Hip-Hop and why it is popular

Table 1. Deciding themes for the interview

3.2.2 Conducting the Interviews

The interviews will be conducted based on these themes. The questions based on themes are formed in the next section. The information on choosing the experts and their information is provided in detail.

3.2.2.1 Forming Interview Questions

The interview questions were formed based on these themes. As the interviews are semi-structured the basic structure was defined by these questions.

Following are the introductory questions to understand the expert better and what they do.

Sr. No.	Question
1.	When did you start creating for Hip-Hop? (question differs for rappers, artists, content creators, journalist etc)
2.	Why did you choose to do this? What motivates you? Who were your inspiration and why?

Table 2. Introductory Questions

The Actor Network Theory is significant in understanding the roles of digital media in spreading hip-hop culture. The actors here are digital media which comprises of social media platforms and streaming platforms, artists- rappers and producers, content creators and audiences. These are the actors on which there will be primary focus. There are some questions are different for artists and content creators. Following are the questions that will focus on the network of these actors-

Sr. No.	Question
1.	For content creators- What are the different platforms you use to promote/share your content? For artists- When did you decide to put up your music on streaming platforms? Why did you choose these platforms?
2.	Which digital platforms do you mainly use for announcements? Which do you think are more effective in terms of engagement? Why?
3.	When we consider the hip-hop scene in India today, how important are these digital platforms?
4.	Do you think the hip-hop evolution in India is mainly digital? Ever since the internet became cheap and accessible, how effective has it been in fanning the flame to spread this culture?
5.	We see a trend of short videos like Instagram reels, YouTube shorts these days. Do you think they have been instrumental for artists to promote their music in different ways?
6.	What are the different ways in which artists/you use these platforms to promote music?
7.	What according to you is the difference between the digital hip-hop that is now compared to when these digital channels were not being so widely used?
8.	What are the negative effects that artists or creators have to face because of digital media?
9.	How has digitization helped in generating revenues directly or indirectly?
10.	Digital media has made it easy for new people/artists/content creators to put out their work easily. How important according to you this is for the culture?

Table 3. Interview Questions based on Actor-Network Theory

Then we transcend into the next theme which was understanding the social aspects based on the Music as empowerment approach-

Sr. No.	Question
1.	Do the social conditions of people make them relate to rap music more? What is the main reason you listen to hip-hop?
2.	For artists- What is your motive behind making music? What message do you try to put forward when you create music? For content creators- How do you come up with content for new videos and how do you decide what is relevant?
3.	In what ways is Indian Hip-Hop unique compared to hip-hop in the rest of the world? How does diversity in India play an important role?
4.	Music is also a collective experience. Creators- In what ways does the audience have the feeling of community? It can be favourite artists, current issues etc. Artists- How do you connect with your audience? Do you think giving them a feeling of community is essential for your growth as an artist?
5.	What are your opinions on slang? What role have regional slangs played in spreading this culture all over the country?
6.	How is hip-hop a matter of empowerment and flourishing? Overall, what role is it playing in making lives better?

Table 4. Questions to understand the social aspects of hip-hop audience

The interview concludes with the following questions.

Sr. No.	Question
1.	What do you think is the future of Indian Hip-Hop?
2.	How important do you think is understanding this digital media for an upcoming artist? Is focusing on music alone enough in this digital world?

Table 5. Concluding Questions

The interview questions are to form a blend between the technological and social aspects of Indian Hip-Hop. The theories driving both of these aspects are detrimental in collecting the data from the experts. Also, they will prove significant in analyzing the primary evidence collected.

3.2.2.2 Selecting the Interviewees

It is important to choose the interviewees carefully for collecting the primary data. The research chose people connected with Indian Hip-Hop in different ways. A wide range of experts are considered to collect data based on the Interview Themes. Four Artists including music producers and rappers were chosen to gain a mix of upcoming and popular artists. Three content creators who are active on various digital media to create reels, shorts, YouTube videos, memes and other various kinds of content related to Indian Hip-Hop. Since all the artists and content creators are from India, online tools such as Skype and Google Meet were used to interview them. Below is the list of all the interviewees-

Itihaas Studio (Vedang, Shreyas, Shanu and Tilted Rayz)- Itihaas Studios is best described as a group of artists from Pune, redefining and reinventing the sound of the city and its lively culture with their roots in Hip Hop, the friendliest handshake between our country's traditional sound and the western genre. Producer and Vocalist, *Vedang* is a solidified artist in Pune, alongside with *Verse-atiles*, one of the most promising rap-duo consisting of *Tilted Rayz* and *Shanu*, adding up to the roster is, *Shreyas*, a household name when it comes to Indian rap music and the Battle Rap culture. The Itihaas Team is known for their authenticity and honest vulnerability in any-and-all songs they create. Connecting to their listeners at a very individual level, working up a crowd is no big deal for this team.

This group of 4 artists from Pune are chosen as they are a mix of upcoming rappers like *Verse-atiles* duo 'Tilted Rayz' and 'Shanu' who have 2.4k monthly listeners on Spotify as of now and they are growing rapidly. On the other hand, 'Vedang' who is a beat producer is a well-known and respected artist in Desi Hip-Hop with over 18k monthly listeners on Spotify and rapper 'Shreyas' with 13k monthly listeners makes this group a perfect blend of new and upcoming artists as well as artists who are well-known. "Among the notable names in the scene is Vedang Deshpande, who positions among the top hip-hop producers in India, making his own indelible mark in the picture with Indian sounds and Bollywood flips, caught the eye of industry heavyweights such as the late 'Sidhu Moosewala', 'Seedhe Maut' and others" (Fulkar, 2022, para. 1). All these artists will be interviewed individually.

Rohan Cariappa- Rohan Cariappa is also dubbed as CEO of Indian Hip-Hop. He started his YouTube channel with lyrical breakdowns of rap songs. Since there are many references, double entendre etc. in rap lyrics his main content is explaining it to audience. Also, his other content includes organizing hip-hop online events like '1 minute rap challenge' which was a

good platform for many underground artists to come together, interviewing hip-hop artists, explaining the concepts of rap music and hip-hop culture etc. which has proved to be pivotal in spreading the culture all over the country. He has 193k subscribers on YouTube and is a prominent content creator in Desi Hip-Hop.

One of his famous series called ‘Normies React’ was a perfect way to show how audience who doesn’t listen to Hip-Hop react to rap music. His Instagram content revolves around making funny reels mainly about hip-hop and rappers. He has around 60k followers on Instagram.

Kash Hip-Hop- One of the fastest rising hip-hop meme/content pages in India. Since the admin is from Kashmir, he has requested to stay anonymous. He represents the Kashmiri Hip-Hop scene. He has around 2.8k followers on Instagram and his content involves creating memes and giving news about current happenings in Indian Hip-Hop. His YouTube channel focuses on promoting underground and underrated rappers/producer’s songs, mainly artists from Kashmir. He has been instrumental in promoting

Hit Human- Hit Human whose real name is Rohit Nair started as a YouTube reaction channel. He is based in Mumbai which is a major hub for hip-hop. He reacts and reviews rap songs. Currently his content has diversified, and he is more focused in YouTube and Twitch live streaming. He also interviews artists and is playing a pivotal role in spreading the hip-hop culture through comedy reactions. He has around 40 thousand subscribers on YouTube and has another channel for Podcasts and Interviews about Hip-Hop. On his Twitch, he is growing rapidly as he covers episodes of the reality show Bigg Boss (Indian version of Big Brother) as MC Stan is part of that show in Season 2022. He has gained 4 thousand followers on Twitch in a span of 60 days.

Jyoti Sardar- A prominent music reaction & review channel in India, Jyoti (along with her friend Shruti) reviews different genres of music, with hip-hop being a focal point. Jyoti also interviews musicians and artists on her podcast “Real Talk with Jyoti Sardar”, available on YouTube and Spotify. Her YouTube channel has more than 102 thousand subscribers, and her following on Instagram is more than 10.8 thousand. She has been one of the fastest growing reaction channels on YouTube, as she brings a unique music appreciation perspective to her reviews, given her many years of experience as a music curator, tastemaker, presenter, and programmer in the radio industry.

All these interviewees were chosen based on their digital presence and various range of the content they produce about Desi Hip-Hop. Their digital presence is prominent, and they can shed a lot of insights into the digital side of how the culture has spread. Whereas they qualify as hip-hop audiences as well, so their opinions on how hip-hop is being accepted socially will be very important in this research.

3.2.3 Analyzing the Interviews

The research will follow the steps mentioned by Boyatzis (1998) to analyze the primary data gathered through the interviews. They include getting familiarized with the data, generating initial codes, searching themes in the codes, and getting the final result. Familiarity with the data is achieved by going through the data collected from content creators and artists and search for meanings of the words, patterns of all the experts in answering certain questions and defining sub-themes from the main two themes of the research.

It is important to recognize and understand patterns from the expert interviews to form code groups and themes as creating codes into information which can be accessed in a way that makes sense and has a meaning(Boyatzis, 1998). Finally, simplification of this data to make complex research data meaningful and clear for the readers and give them a clear idea about the reliability of the research needs to be done.

Since the research follows two themes- technical and social coding for those themes will be done separately. Initially codes will be created from the data collected. The thematic analysis requires the research to form codes from the data and form a collate of the codes into themes. Since the research is following two themes, namely technical and social, the codes will be then collated in wider sub-themes. The description of sub-themes is given below.

In this research, the technical and social drivers will have different sub-themes. Following are the sub-themes that will give a better overview of the interviews. First a look at technical sub-themes.

No.	Sub-themes	Questions
1.	Types of Content around Hip-Hop and Platforms	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What are the different platforms you use to share/promote your content? 2. How do you come with new content?

		3. What are the different ways you use to promote your content?
2.	Digital media impact	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How important are these digital platforms in Indian Hip-Hop? 2. Is Indian Hip-Hop evolution mainly digital? How have these platforms helped in fanning the flame across the country? 3. How have they augmented your reach? 4. How has digitization helped generate revenues directly or indirectly?
3.	Micro-content	1. Do you think micro-content has been instrumental for artists to promote their music in different ways?
4.	Negative Effects	1. What are the negative effects of digitization in Indian Hip-Hop?

Table 6. Technical drivers sub-themes

The social aspects will be analyzed separately at first. The sub-themes in the social context are-

No.	Sub-Themes	Questions
1.	Self-Identity in Indian Hip-Hop	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Do the social conditions of people make them relate to rap music more? Why do you listen to hip-hop? 2. Do you think digital media uses personality traits to recommend music? How effective that is? 3. What is your motive behind making music?
2.	Diversity in India	1. In what ways is Indian Hip-Hop unique compared to hip-hop in the rest of the world?

		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. How does diversity play an important role? 3. What role have slangs played in spreading hip-hop culture?
3.	Hip-Hop as a collective experience	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. In what ways does the audience have a sense of community? 2. How do you connect with your audience? Do you think giving them a feeling of community is important for the growth of an artist?
4.	Future of Indian Hip-Hop	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What do you think is the future of Indian Hip-Hop? 2. Do you think artists should focus on digital media

Table 7. Social drivers sub-themes

After the initial coding and forming these themes, all will be combined to form the final analysis. Thematic analysis will help in going from initial codes to a narrative which the readers will understand. The technical and social sub-themes will be discussed separately. Later both of these themes will be merged to show how they blend with one another in the analysis section.

3.3. Secondary Empirical Evidence

The data collected from the interviews will be aligned with the secondary empirical evidence. As mentioned before, there is very scarce literature available on Indian Hip-Hop. The secondary empirical includes the literature review done so far. Along with the academic papers, articles and books, various other sources were used to gain more information about happenings of Indian Hip-Hop. These include YouTube videos where big rappers are being interviewed, news articles, magazine articles as well as various authentic websites. References were also taken from documentaries about Hip-Hop in general as well as Indian Hip-Hop documentaries.

4. Findings

Section 4.1 shows the interview codes for the technical drivers. All the codes are found in the data from primary evidence. The coding was done based on different categories.

4.1. Interview Coding

The coding of technical and social aspects will be done separately. There were several categories during the initial coding. Many categories were similar to each other but had different application. While coding, all the labels generated were done on the fly and the codes were generated accordingly.

4.1.1. Technical questions coding overview

After analyzing the interviews the codes developed in the technical theme were- **Content Produced, Platforms Used, Micro-content importance, Digital Media Impact, Negative Effects**. Direct quotes from the interviews will be added under all these codes. These are the main codes after careful analysis of the interviews. Each of the code represents the variety of views and patterns found in the empirical research.

- **Content Produced-** *“Divine’s track ‘3:59’ crossed 100 million without being a diss.”*(Rohan Cariappa, personal communication, November 16, 2022). Indian Hip-Hop is going mainstream and digital media have made it possible to reach those numbers. New types of content are coming up around hip-hop. Listing out various types of content is important. The creators who were interviewed have various types of content and their thoughts on it have been categorized in this code.
- **Platforms Used-** Artists are using wide variety of platforms to put up their music. Along with that they use social media to keep in touch with their fans, promote their music. These platforms provide various tools to promote their work in the most creative ways. Similarly, creators are constantly finding niches and platforms to put up new content. They also use social media platforms to promote hip-hop. Various platforms and how they are being used is mentioned during the interviews.
- **Micro-content Importance-** *“Instagram because they have the reels, so before any other app. I put 1-minute songs on reels .”*(Tilted-Rayz, personal communication,

November 17, 2022). Every expert found micro-content tools significant in gaining reach. This new form of content is indeed very instrumental in uplifting the Desi Hip-Hop scene.

- **Digital Media Impact-** This code will help gather all the data regarding how streaming platforms and social media have played an important role in spreading a genre which didn't originate in India and making it their own.
- **Negative Impact of Digital Media-** It is important to assess the negative impacts of the digital media along with all the positive. This will provide a more critical view on these platforms and thus helps in covering all the points of digital media.

Following is overview of experts' sentiments about the digital media and its role to promote hip-hop.

Expert	Content Produced	Platforms Used	Micro-content importance	Digital Media Impact	Negative Impact of Digital Media
Rohan Cariappa	Bars Breakdown. Funny Reels related to hip-hop	YouTube for content. Instagram for marketing	Pulling millions of numbers Platforms support creators	Views are the measuring factor Understanding digital media is 60% of artist's work.	Mindset of artists to put up content instead of music.
Hit Human	Hip-Hop songs reactions Hip-Hop Livestreams	Instagram and Twitter to promote content. YouTube and Twitch	Artist's focus is on making songs viral on reels. YouTube has asked us	NFTs of 'Nayaab' Playlisting songs important	Difficult to make content and generate revenue in short form content.

	Promoting content on shorts	for making content.	to make shorts.	Titles are important	Have to be careful about what you say
Kash Hip-Hop	Memes Promote underrated rappers	Instagram and Twitter Spotify playlist Reddit	Hyping up audience More reach	Promote music to take culture ahead Paid promotions through pages	Minimized physical interaction between artist and audience
Tilted-Rayz	Rap	Streaming Platforms Instagram for promotions	Window Shopping	Streaming platforms make you popular. Easy to put out a song	People believe in overnight success.
Vedang	Producing Music and Singing	Streaming Platforms Instagram for promotions	Reels make song viral MTV Hustle 2 worked on reels	Reach MC Stan in Bigg Boss Easy for upcoming artist	Pulling people to gigs is difficult.
Shreyas	Rapper	Streaming Platforms Facebook, WhatsApp but	Visual content has better impact Important for business	Get in touch directly to audience More reach for songs	Making songs for reels Artists losing identity

		Instagram is main			Judgement based on numbers
Shanu	Rapper	Streaming Platforms Instagram for promotions	More reach, views and followers	Spotify helps in growing Internet generation More artists	Good artists not able to come forward Wrong portraying of hip-hop

Table 8. Technical theme coding overview

4.1.2. Social questions coding overview

The codes formed after analyzing the social theme are **Relatability Factor, Diversity in India, Role of Regional Slangs, Hip-Hop as collective experience, Digital Identity, and Future of Indian Hip-Hop.** After the careful coding of the interviews these were the main categories of interest.

Relatability of Hip-Hop- *“It is very raw. It’s not sugar-coated”* (Vedang Deshpande, personal communication, November 23, 2022). Hip-Hop is a genre which is very raw and most of the audience can relate to it because of its rawness. The experts had different views about the relatability factor of hip-hop. Also, their reasons as to why they listen to it was something that needs to be considered as all the experts are audiences of rap music. This code resonates with the factor of self-identity through music of the ‘Music as empowerment approach’.

Diversity in India- *“There is a cultural influence of our background where we come from.”* (Tilted-Rayz, personal communication, November 17, 2022). India is a very diverse country and a mix of different cultures. All the interviewees believed that the diversity in India is playing a huge role in making Indian Hip-Hop stand out.

- **Hip-Hop as a collective experience-** Every artist and creator need their audience to have that community feeling and being part of something. The experts' sentiments regarding this were very positive. This code was chosen as 'music as collective experience' is a part of Hesmondhalgh's music as empowerment approach.
- **Role of Regional Slangs-** Even though slangs are a part of diversity of India, mentioning them separately is necessary as they have played a huge role in spreading the hip-hop culture. The responses from the artists and creators regarding this were mostly positive.
- **Digital Identity-** After looking at how hip-hop is a relatability medium of youth, the experts sentiments regarding the recommendations of the platforms based on audience's personality traits, artists digital persona and their use of social media is categorized under this code.
- **Future of Indian Hip-Hop-** Various mixed feelings regarding the future of Indian Hip-Hop can be seen in the artists and creators interviews. Similar yet contrasting opinions were assimilated under this code.

An overview of the expert's sentiments in the social theme is given below to give the readers a generalized idea of the proceedings of the interview.

Expert	Relatability of Hip-Hop	Diversity in India	Role of Regional Slangs	Hip-Hop as a collective experience	Digital Identity	Future of Indian Hip-Hop
Rohan Cariappa	Truth	Folk music in songs	Sense of belonging	People fight for rappers	Tracking content consumed	Needs to be more unique

	Rappers feel it	Rich folk culture	Connect instantly			Lots of ground to cover
Hit-Human	Genre which middle class people relate Real and raw	Many languages Songs are unique	Imitating slangs Inbuilt variety to add texture	Feeling of cult Effective for growth	Thumbnails, Titles, Tags are important Digital persona	Very bright Everyone wants to invest
Kash Hip-Hop	Dream of living rich life Issues in Kashmir Motivation	Languages of rap	Slum slangs are relatable	Region gives community feeling Issues bring people together	Recommendations based on location Artist Radio	On the rise. Major events promoting Hip-Hop artists
Tilted-Rayz	Socio-economic conditions	Cultural influence Different Backgrounds is uplifting the scene	Direct soul-to-soul connection Form of expression	Feeling of relatability	Suggestions based on content	International attention Good quality to come
Vedang	Not sugarcoated	Multiple faces of hip-hop	Very funny and catchy	Personality of rapper	Digital persona important	Not that positive

	Medium to express				Marketing is important	
Shreyas	Focus on words Raw, rebellious	Traditional instruments Indian influence in music	Geographical identity Abused in a way Spreading culture	The music I make is intimate Most important thing	Pay attention to digital media	It is maturing Have its own identity
Shanu	Message is very clear	Languages	Slangs are overused	Important to connect Gives exposure	Spotify Playlists based on region Understanding business	Spread like wildfire Top genre

Table 9. Social theme coding overview

4.2. Forming sub-themes from coding

The sub-themes mentioned in section 3.2.3 were formed based on the above codes. Similar codes were merged to form a sub-theme. The relevance and importance of these sub-themes is discussed in detail in the upcoming sections.

4.2.1. Technical sub-themes

The sub-themes in Table 6 display the opinion of artists and hip-hop content creators about the digital media- streaming platforms and social media. The initial codes generated in this theme led to the formation of these sub-themes which will pave the way for this research. The Actor-Network Theory will primarily guide the technical theme. The themes are created to focus on various actors in this research. Digital media being the non-human actor whereas rappers and artists are human actors. Their network and the intricate relation between them are the reason that Indian Hip-hop is a successful genre.

4.2.1.1. Types of Content and Platforms- Every content creator uses different platforms for different purposes. To understand how widespread Hip-Hop is in India,

we will discuss the various types of content that has been revolving around it. Also, artists have been using various platforms and ways to promote their music. This will be analyzed and discussed in this sub-theme.

4.2.1.2. Digital Media Impact- This sub-theme defines the positive effects of digital media. How digital media has helped in growing this culture and how it can be used effectively by artist according to the primary data collected will be discussed in detail in this sub-theme.

4.2.1.3. Micro-Content- The new form of content that has taken digital media by storm is something that plays a very major role in hip-hop according to the experts. This sub-theme contains all the quotes from experts who explain the role of micro-content formats like Instagram reels, YouTube shorts etc. Since two of the experts are famous YouTubers in the field of Hip-Hop, some insider insights into YouTube regarding shorts is also included in this sub-theme.

4.2.1.4. Negative Impact- The interview consisted of critical questions as well. The experts had distinct views on the negative impact the digital media has. This sub-theme will bring in a critical angle to the digital media and how they are negatively affecting genre of Hip-hop in India.

4.2.2. Social Sub-themes

The sub-themes in Table 7 display the opinions of content creators and artists about Hip-hop in social context. The initial codes generated in the social theme have been combined and assimilated to form these sub-themes. Along with this, various factors guided by Hesmondhalgh's(2013) Music as Empowerment Approach have been considered while forming these themes. These factors include music as a medium of self-identity and music as a collective experience. Along with this the whole social theme will describe the life-enriching factors and how music is a medium of empowerment for the audience, creators and artists.

This will further strengthen the Actor-Network Theory and will shed some more light on the interrelation and network among the aforementioned actors in the digital space of this research. The social sub-themes are discussed in detail below-

4.2.2.1. Self-Identity of Indian Hip-Hop- The experts chosen are themselves listeners of Hip-hop. This theme will go through the various social reasons expressed by the interviewees on individual level about how Hip-hop is a medium of self-identity for the audience. This sub-theme will also discuss the various ways an artist maintains the digital persona or digital presence further stressing how effective that is to an artist's growth.

4.2.2.2. Diversity in India- Experts were of the opinion that Diversity in India is something that makes Indian Hip-Hop extremely unique. The interesting reasons as to how this is achieved is discussed in detail in this sub-theme. The different languages, culture and musical instruments have been '*instrumental*' in adding a flavor and uniqueness to Indian Hip-Hop. Many experts believed that this uniqueness is attracting attention towards Indian Hip-Hop. Diversity in India makes the Indian Hip-hop unique, whereas the slangs are the reason why it has spread within India. Slangs are used by the youth to create their identity (Reyes, 2005). Slangs which have spread through various forms of Indian Hip-Hop have been adopted by the youth all over. Hence, they play a major role in the success of this genre in India. The expert opinions on slangs are assimilated in this sub-theme.

4.2.2.3. Hip-Hop as a collective experience- Generating community feeling in the audience is the most important thing an artist can have. The different ways in which artists and hip-hop content creators create that community feeling falls under this sub-theme. This supports the factor of 'Music as a collective experience' of the Music as empowerment approach.

4.2.2.4. Future of Indian Hip-Hop- The primary data contains various opinions about future of Indian Hip-hop as a whole. The experts are a part of the Indian Hip-Hop scene and are well-informed about the happenings in Hip-hop. Their opinions about how they perceive Indian Hip-Hop in future is compiled under this sub-theme.

This is an overview of the sub-themes in social and technological context based on the primary data collected. These themes will be strengthened by the literature and secondary empirical evidence in the next section. The inferences from in-depth analysis of data will be narrated in the Analysis section.

5. Analysis

The different sub-themes have influenced this analysis and narrative. A detailed look at how both the technical and social factors have played role in spreading of this culture. The blend between social and technical conditions is seen and the sub-themes are overlapping to form the narrative.

This section starts with the diversity in India as understanding the cultural aspects first will guide the research throughout. Different factors make up the diversity which is used in rap. The role of making Indian Hip-hop unique is being played by the diversity. The diversity works because the audience finds it relatable.

5.1. Diversity plays a role

The different factors that make up the diversity in Indian rap songs according to the experts are listed below.

5.1.1. Languages and slangs

“MC Stan is in Bigg Boss bro. Literally crazy” (Vedang Deshpande, personal communication, November 23, 2022). MC Stan is one of the most hyped artists in Desi Hip-Hop at the moment. It is the first time a rapper has been on the national television on one of the biggest reality shows in India which is an Indian reality television game show franchise based on the Dutch reality show Big Brother (“Bigg Boss,” 2022). YouTube content creator Rohit Nair, also known as Hit Human who does reactions, live streams, and content around hip-hop while talking about this thing says that “This is just the start. The future of Indian Hip-Hop is going to be even more bright”(Hit-Human, personal communication, December 1, 2022). MC Stan’s language is the reason that there are so many of his viral reels on Instagram live, lyrics have millions of views. The youth find slangs very cool and can instantly connect to them and use them. “My friends in Kashmir are using Pune slangs because they listen to MC Stan” (Kash Hip-Hop, personal communication, November 19, 2022). Marathi slangs are very unique. MC Stan is that reckless person inside you who you want to become, but the society doesn’t allow you to be (Rohan Cariappa, 2020). Raftaar, who is one of the biggest and ‘OG’ rappers in the Desi Hip-Hop scene said this in an interview with Rohan Cariappa.

People connect to MC Stan because of his personality. His slangs are just funny and the way he says it make them more unique and people from other parts of the country start exploring the slangs and the artist (Hit-Human, personal communication, December 1, 2022;

Kash Hip-Hop, personal communication, November 19, 2022; Vedang Deshpande, personal communication, November 23, 2022). “I listen to hip-hop because it resonates with me more than anything” (Shreyas Sagvekar, personal communication, December 3, 2022).

People relate to hip-hop more as it resonates with them, they feel connected to the artist. Indian Hip-Hop is unique because of India’s diversity. The hip-hop music in India contains various languages. Since India is a diverse country, the slangs and languages in India differ from region to region. The experts expressed that Indian hip-hop is unique because of its diversity in cultural influences, languages, cultures and traditional instruments. Even if US has different sounds among the country, they have the same language. India has 122 major languages and 1599 other languages (“Languages of India,” 2022). The hip-hop scene has progressed because of this. Rappers from different regions collaborate to have that diverse culture and texture. This is what makes Indian Hip-Hop unique from hip-hop in other countries.

MC Square integrated his folk music in his songs, combine that with his language and that makes his songs very unique. (Hit-Human, personal communication, December 1, 2022; Rohan Cariappa, personal communication, November 16, 2022). We see Pune rappers like MC Stan having a verse in Hindi and Marathi slangs with Delhi rappers ‘Seedhe Maut’, Raftaar and Ikka. It is a unique texture achieved which is possible due to the different languages and slangs. Even Hindi language is filled with slangs from different regions. “Rappers in US collab with rappers in UK to change the slang and texture but we have it inbuilt” (Hit-Human, personal communication, December 1, 2022). International focus is on Indian Hip-Hop because of the wide variety of languages and texture produced.

“In India there are fu**king number of language. The lingo changes every 10-20 km in Pune. People speak different types of Marathi even within Pune” (Vedang Deshpande, personal communication, November 23, 2022). There are raps in Marathi, Gujarati, Tamil, Telugu, Dhakani etc. and that has given out so many faces to the hip-hop. Hip-Hop has spread slangs and slangs have spread hip-hop. (Jyoti Sardar, personal communication, December 16, 2022). The success of any genre is measured by the variety it has, and therefore these languages make Indian Hip-Hop very diverse and varied.

On the flip side, some experts believed that slangs are being overused. “Right now, it is also abused in a way that people are basing their identity on slangs”(Shreyas Sagvekar, personal communication, December 3, 2022). Some slangs are on the trend and rappers are basing their identity on those slangs. They are being abused to gain views and also because they are on the trend and slangs are catchy. Artists try out and imitate slangs as audience find

them cool. If a rapper comes from a place where slangs are used a lot, then it is fine, but if you try to force them then it will not fit (Hit-Human, personal communication, December 1, 2022; Shantanu Dubey, personal communication, December 3, 2022; Shreyas Sagvekar, personal communication, December 3, 2022). This is a drawback and something that is seen everywhere in the Indian Hip-hop scene right now.

Another drawback is that languages are restricting rappers as the audience becomes limited to the people who know that language. Since Hip-Hop is about lyrics, it can restrict an artist. “I feel that rapping in regional languages creates these small ponds for artists” (Jyoti Sardar, personal communication, December 16, 2022). To keep this balance between local lingo and Hindi, rappers add certain words and slangs which give audience an instant connect.

5.1.2. Culture

Another factor that adds flavour to Indian hip-Hop is the diverse culture. “There is a cultural influence in our background. It is uplifting the scene on a whole different level” (Tilted-Rayz, personal communication, November 17, 2022). Hip-hop has spread from the US into the world. “For many hip-hop artists, then, the first move toward localization is a rejection of aspects of rap from the United States and a turn toward overtly local themes” (Pennycook, 2007, p. 106). Helping the regional culture spread is something that is being done by Indian Hip-Hop. Here as well the diversity plays a major role. The culture changes as you go from one city to another. This wonderful mix of culture brings out numerous styles and experiences of hip-hop unique to the rapper’s own culture. The audience gains an insight into that culture.

“Culturally India is vast and extensive”(Vedang Deshpande, personal communication, November 23, 2022). Another important thing is that different cultures have different types of musical instruments. This makes the rap songs sound unique. “If you come to Maharashtra, there are different percussions. Here there is ‘Tutaari, Pipaani’. So, the variety of things is incredible and unique” (Shreyas Sagvekar, personal communication, December 3, 2022). Here, Shreyas mentions the pipe musical instruments in the state of Maharashtra which are the signature instruments of the state. He also mentions the drums called ‘Dhol-Taasha’ which are also very unique to Maharashtra. These percussions and instruments add another level of musicality in his songs. Vedang is popular because he blends the samples of old Marathi songs with hip-hop beats. He has made a name for himself because of this.

These diverse languages, slangs, sounds, and culture are able to contribute to the success of Indian Hip-Hop only because it hits with the people and the audience finds it relatable.

5.2. Indian Hip-Hop as medium of Self-Identity

This section expresses the opinions and views of the experts regarding the social sub-theme which is Relatability of Indian Hip-Hop. First a look at how Indian hip-hop is relatable and creates a feeling of self-identity following the social theory of music as empowerment, followed by how digital platforms are using these personality traits to recommend content. The experts' opinions are analysed using the social theory lens to form this narrative.

5.2.1. Relatability of Indian Hip-Hop

“Hip-Hop provides genuine warmth and truth”(Rohan Cariappa, personal communication, November 16, 2022). Since the experts themselves are listeners of hip-hop, they had various opinions about how Hip-Hop feels relatable. The overall sentiment of the experts was that in hip-hop, the lyrics are not sugar-coated. This is the genre where you will find swear words in songs. The lyrics are easy to understand and that is where the audiences feel it relatable.

“I have seen a lot of my friends who are still living in slums, and they relate to it”(Shantanu Dubey, personal communication, December 3, 2022). In a song, rappers talk about their life in slums and how they have journeyed, the people living in slums find their identity and voice in those lyrics. They aspire to be someone like them. Majority of the population in India can be considered as middle class. “The new middle class in India (that is, those spending between \$2 and \$10 per capita per day) doubled in size between 2004–05 and 2011–12, amounting to nearly half of India’s population” (Krishnan & Hatekar, 2017, p. 40). Hip-Hop is a genre where the artists write their own lyrics and perform it themselves. They feel the lyrics which is something that hits the audience. It is a genre to which middle class people can relate to as every middle class person dreams to live a rich life (Hit-Human, personal communication, December 1, 2022; Kash Hip-Hop, personal communication, November 19, 2022). All of the experts were of this opinion about the directness of this genre. When the interviewer asked them about their reason to listen to hip-hop, their answers varied according to what their role was in the Desi Hip-Hop scene.

The content creators listen to hip-hop as their content is based on it. “I only listen to Indian Hip-Hop. If I am sad, I will listen to MC Insane, if I am vulnerable, I will listen to

Bella to pump myself” (Hit-Human, personal communication, December 1, 2022). Rohan likes lyricism and upbeat songs. Kash Hip-Hop is a very good example of the relatability of Indian Hip-Hop. His name comes from Kashmir, the region he belongs to. Growing up he saw many curfews, riots and encounters in Kashmir as Kashmir is a state of military unrest. “When Ahmer or other Kashmiri rappers talk about this, I can relate and feel the pain” (Kash Hip-Hop, personal communication, November 19, 2022). The expert’s reason of listening to hip-hop was relatability to his surrounding and issues that happen in his Valley. The reason he started promoting Kashmiri artists was because he wanted to bring the issues of Kashmir out through his channels by promoting underground Kashmiri artists. This feeling of community and self-identity is exactly what Hesmondhalgh’s(2013) music as empowerment approach explains.

The artists interviewed were into hip-hop, and their motivation mainly was because they create this form of art, they listen to Indian Hip-hop. Shreyas being a writer loves hip-hop as the main focus of hip-hop is on the words. He being a rapper appreciates the art of writing lyrics. “The first time I wrote something and I spazzed out on the mic, people weren’t looking at me as someone who has physical problems, but as a person who killed it on stage” (Tilted-Rayz, personal communication, November 17, 2022). There are various ways in which Indian Hip-hop has proved to be uplifting and enriching people’s lives. Shreyas likes the rebellious nature of hip-hop. The one thing that all artists felt was that it was a medium of expression and gave a therapeutic feeling to them.

5.2.2. Digital Platforms and recommendations

Music as a medium of self-identity is something that also benefits the streaming platforms and social media platforms. As music is a medium of self-identity for the audience, the platforms also use these personality traits to showcase artists, recommend content and stay relevant. “Everything we do is a datapoint for apps. Mostly recommendation works on what you listen as well” (Vedang Deshpande, personal communication, November 23, 2022). The location of the listeners, time spent on a specific piece of music or reels, playlisting based on artist profiles, and helping the audience discover new artists based on tastes is done by these digital platforms. The experts had various opinions about these recommendation systems. But they all agreed that these platforms are definitely using a person’s characteristics to push their content.

Spotify has their featured playlists which are recommended to the user. Playlists like Dillihood, Bambai Bantai, Rap 91 etc. are location based Hip-Hop playlists from Delhi, Mumbai, and India respectively. They are instrumental in discovering new artists and recommending music to audience. Audiences from a certain location relate more to the rappers in their location. These playlists are created for that purpose. Along with it if a person likes a certain artist, Spotify has playlists like “Artist Radio” which majorly features the artist’s songs, but also includes artists that are similar. “If I go to Ahmer’s discography, there is a Spotify made playlist called Ahmer Radio and it will have songs from artists that come from the same place or people who are listening to Ahmer have also listened to” (Kash Hip-Hop, personal communication, November 19, 2022). This is very useful for artists, audiences, and platforms alike. Social media platforms like Instagram recommend reels based on the user activity. “They are tracking your time spent on videos and they will show you related content. How much you scroll and where do you stop all of this is considered by the algorithm” (Rohan Cariappa, personal communication, November 16, 2022). In this way, Instagram recommends reels, and these are being used by the artists in a very effective way to promote their songs.

5.2.3. Music as self-identity (Music as empowerment approach)

“In terms of empowerment, the more we figure out ourselves as individuals and hip-hop helps in that and it will be beneficial to us” (Shreyas Sagvekar, personal communication, December 3, 2022). The theory explains how music is a medium of self-identity of an individual. The empowering and life enriching qualities of music come from its relatability as it helps listeners find themselves individually.

Kashmir is a state of many issues. When an artist speaks about those issues, addresses the unity within the people of Kashmir, the audience imagine themselves as the protagonist of the story the artist is narrating. “I got motivation through it as many of the lines hit me” (Kash Hip-Hop, personal communication, November 19, 2022). The current issues of a state, socio-economic conditions in India always had a lion’s share in the widespread of Hip-Hop in India. It is the life-enriching qualities that simple and raw lyrics of hip-hop performed by the artist are given to the listeners.

Section 5.2.2. has described how relatability in hip-hop gives the feeling of self-identity in India. Section 5.2.3. portrayed how this is used by the digital platforms to promote artists and push content to the audience. It is important to understand that digital media focus on the relatability and the personality traits. But how are these platforms being used by the

artists and audiences in India? How has Desi Hip-Hop evolved due to the technical factors? The following section answers these questions.

5.3. Impact of Digital Media on Desi Hip-Hop

“Internet is available in very remote places throughout India” (Tilted-Rayz, personal communication, November 17, 2022). Ever since Internet became cheap in India, every household has a smartphone. “Reliance Jio is providing the customers with the cheapest ever services or even free of cost services which has influenced the customers to a greater extent ” (Jasrotia et al., 2016, p. 443). “Before Jio, if your song was gonna reach 50 people, now it will reach 5000 people if you play your cards right”(Shreyas Sagvekar, personal communication, December 3, 2022). This clearly shows the importance the internet revolution has brought in Indian Hip-Hop. It acted as a catalyst in the widespread of Indian hip-hop in many ways. All the experts agreed that Indian Hip-hop has spread widely ever since the internet has become cheaper and is indeed a digital revolution. The following chapters show the positive impacts of digital media on Desi Hip-Hop.

5.3.1. Use of Streaming Platforms by Indian rappers

“*Chandni Bar* made 30k streams. After that I became serious about streaming. Spotify has more chances of growing” (Shantanu Dubey, personal communication, December 3, 2022). Streaming platforms are the reason for any artist’s growth. The more songs you have, the more views you get decides the shows you are going to get. People check an artist and then they explore the discography of the artist. Having songs on streaming platforms is very important for an artist.

Since the Indian generation now is 90% digital, there are more and more hip-hop artists popping up. Jyoti very accurately describes this new wave of artists as ‘DIY Artists’. The streaming platforms have made it easier for anyone to put up their songs with less costs, access and this has spread the Indian Hip-hop scene. Artists are able to do everything independently and the growth of independent artists is very important to the scene. More and more artists mean that there is variety, diversity in songs. “It has become so f***king easy to put out a song and get to ears of people” (Tilted-Rayz, personal communication, November 17, 2022). As we have discussed earlier, diversity of India makes it much more interesting and new artists pull in audience. As new and new artists come up, the Desi Hip-Hop keeps on

spreading. This is the most positive impact of digital media that has led to the success of Desi Hip-Hop.

Streaming platforms have gained importance in the recent years. The celestial jukebox as defined by Marks(2015) is a concept that allows you to play any song from any artist on your devices from anywhere. The expert's believed that Spotify and YouTube music are very popular. Spotify is more popular as YouTube free version does not allow playing songs in the background. "Spotify is better as you can listen to the audio" (Shantanu Dubey, personal communication, December 3, 2022). The catalogue of Spotify makes it easier for audience and the artist. In India, Kalamkar is one of the biggest labels in Hip-hop. Majority of artists follow the trend of Kalamkar of dropping songs. The best timings, titles, thumbnails, and hashtags are all important when putting out a song. This was the opinion of all the experts. Artists use the same tags, timings and similar thumbnails as these labels. YouTube channels should not be messy with clutter of non-relatable videos" (Hit-Human, personal communication, December 1, 2022).

Also, playlisting is very important in Indian Hip-Hop according to the experts. Spotify playlists have played a major role in spreading this music in the country. Hip-Hop being an independent genre has pulled in a lot of numbers. Songs like Machayenge by Emiway Bantai which has over 200 million views, 3:59 AM by Divine which has over 180 million views on YouTube show that this genre has been very successful.

5.3.2. Use of Social Media platforms

"Internet allowed you to directly get in touch with your audience" (Shreyas Sagvekar, personal communication, December 3, 2022). Social media is used by artists to promote their music. When asked about the platforms used, Instagram clearly stood out as the main platform used for promotions. Content creators and artists use Instagram alike. "Instagram's reach is the most, I think. I have most audience on Instagram" (Vedang Deshpande, personal communication, November 23, 2022). Instagram is used in a wide variety of ways. Instagram has been instrumental in making songs viral and pulling in numbers.

Their reels feature is something that makes the platform very useful for promotions. The micro-content and reels will be discussed in the next section. "There are artists who have single-handedly pulled in millions of numbers just by asking creators to make reels on them" (Rohan Cariappa, personal communication, November 16, 2022). Various visual aids are provided by these social media platforms to promote the music. Also, the stories, short-form content and posts have the feature of adding music. Some hacks are being used by artists to

promote their songs. An example of that will be naming your songs as *Rain* or *Tea*. When a person posts a story about rain, the person naturally searches the music to be posted on his stories using these topics, and then the song pops up. This is a way of promoting music. Different ways have been made possible by these platforms to have promotions. “King used to add *NEW HINDI LOVE SONGS 2021* in his titles. This was making his charts pop” (Hit-Human, personal communication, December 1, 2022). This has reached at a point where digital marketing has become very important for any upcoming rapper.

“Focussing on your music is 40% of your music and understanding social media, PR, engagement building is more important. Skills purely very rarely makes an artist grow up” (Rohan Cariappa, personal communication, November 16, 2022). Artists in India and all over the world are using these platforms widely. “Paid Promotions. Stories, Reels, Posts are charged different. Also, Spotify playlisting” (Kash Hip-Hop, personal communication, November 19, 2022). Vedang who runs *‘Itihaas Studio’* says that all the enquiries come through Instagram. “You are measured by your views and how much shows you are getting which is again dependent on your views” (Rohan Cariappa, personal communication, November 16, 2022). This makes the digital media more important for the Desi Hip-hop scene. Artists are always trying to influence people based on the social factors and they use these digital media to make sure the music reaches the people’s ears.

When it comes to content creators, all of them are using Instagram to promote their content and helping to take the scene forward. From all the interviews it can be assuredly confirmed that Instagram is the most powerful and most used ways of communication between artists or creators and fans, promoting music in different ways and gaining reach in this age.

5.4. Micro-content

“The space that TikTok created, everyone is eager to fill. So, these platforms support creators very much” (Rohan Cariappa, personal communication, November 16, 2022). TikTok was banned in India over national security concerns of India with China (“India Bans PUBG, Baidu and More than 100 Apps Linked to China,” 2020). Ever since TikTok was banned in India, other platforms raced to fill the gap by introducing micro-content or short form videos. The creators and artists believed that this new form of content, especially Instagram reels have been very significant in promoting Desi Hip-Hop. Major artists are making songs, partnering with content creators so that they can make reels and promote it.

“King again is example of melodious hooks. Karma is also experimenting with catchy hooks so that his reels go viral” (Hit-Human, personal communication, December 1, 2022). It is not only partnering, but intentionally making such songs which have the potential of becoming viral on reels.

Divine’s ‘3:59 AM’ crossed 180 Million views on YouTube. Rohan Cariappa believes that the following lines were the reason for such big numbers-

*“Edit karke mera image tune meme bana diya,
Mehnat karke tere bhai ne pura dream bana diya”* (DIVINE, 2020).

It translates to-

“You edited my image and made a meme,
“I hustled and made it where you dream to be.”

When Tik-Tokers (every short form content creator was generalised by this name in India) who were bullied related to this and started making reels on this. This was a win-win situation for both- the reel creators and Divine as the cycle of getting views continued on both these platforms. Many Desi Hip-Hop artists are remixing old songs into hip-hop beats, making melodious songs so as to go viral on reels. “MTV Hustle 2.0 worked because of Instagram as well because the reels went viral” (Vedang Deshpande, personal communication, November 23, 2022). MTV Hustle is the only and thus the largest Hip-Hop reality show in India. They had their entire campaign through reels, where many of the participant’s performances went viral through reels. It has become easy to do paid promotions, asking creators to make reels and putting the song out there.

But why are these reels and micro-content spreading this culture across a country? “People love window shopping. If I see a dress or piece of ornament let’s say, I will enter the shop and see the whole f***king variety they have. But you have to display something. I see Indian market this way” (Tilted-Rayz, personal communication, November 17, 2022). This is the most accurate analogy of how reels or shorts work. They are merely a tool of building interest, like window shopping. Visual content always had a better impact than texts. The tools that allow you to convey everything visually has definitely helped the Indian Hip-Hop scene.

“The attention span now is what, around 5-10 seconds. If your reel doesn’t have anything interesting in the first 5 seconds, people are gonna scroll” (Shreyas Sagvekar,

personal communication, December 3, 2022). The challenge is to make content within the timeframe which is dynamic and captures people's attention. Various strategies are used by rappers. They either post a snippet or an artwork to create hype for the song. "One of the rapper 'Kalam Ink' posted a short of his unreleased song playing in his car, that reel got more than one Million views" (Kash Hip-Hop, personal communication, November 19, 2022). The song further got more views than that.

"YouTube asked us to make shorts over long-form content in a YouTube convention" (Hit-Human, personal communication, December 1, 2022; Rohan Cariappa, personal communication, November 16, 2022). These platforms are promoting this type of content, and this is helping Indian Hip-hop reach numbers like never imagined before.

5.4.1. Desi Hip-Hop going mainstream

The Bollywood industry sort of rules the music industry (Shreyas Sagvekar, personal communication, December 3, 2022). Hip-Hop in Bollywood was just party songs. In Gully Boy it was the first time that hip-hop was the main focus. "I like how they have used the soundtracks in Gully Boy"(Jyoti Sardar, personal communication, December 16, 2022). It is a movie which acted as a catalyst in fanning the flame of Indian Hip-Hop culture to spread over the sub-continent.

MTV Hustle is a reality show for rappers where rappers from all over the country compete. It is the only reality show of its type in India which is purely for Hip-Hop. As discussed in section 5.4 the show's promotions were based on Instagram reels. Multiple reels of the competitors in the show went viral and that has helped the show reach popularity. Shehnaaz Gill who is a singer and actor recently did a song called '*Ghani Syaani*' with MC Square who is the winner of MTV Hustle 2.0. As mainstream artists, actors and reality shows started indulging in Indian Hip-Hop, content creators have started making all forms of content- videos, posts, reels etc around it.

Divine's recent album '*Gunehgaar*' featured many international artists like Armani White, JadaKiss, Russ and many more. "Apple had a launch event and they played song of Badshah on it" (Kash Hip-Hop, personal communication, November 19, 2022). Also, Divine's track is featured in a video game called Need for Speed. "If Ranveer Singh is playing '*Baazigar*' (*Divine's song*) on Red Carpet, people will listen to it" (Hit-Human, personal communication, December 1, 2022).

This is generating a lot of revenues for the rappers and content creators who are involved. Rappers can be seen flexing their wealth. MC Stan's viral lines about his 80000 INR shoes, Divine's sold-out show in a stadium and many more artists have shown that there is big money in Indian Hip-Hop.

A Hip-Hop channel on YouTube called RAPBOT makes content like news, facts, review etc on Indian Hip-Hop. In his video titled 'HOW DHH ARTISTS MAKE BIG MONEY' he has explained the various sources of income. The following section will cover the facts put up in the video.

5.4.1.1. Rapbot's video on How Desi Hip-Hop Artists make money

'Spotify Wrapped' is a good way of showcasing their numbers for any artist. MC Stan had 113 million streams in year 2022. According to Spotify calculation MC Stan made over \$188k in the year 2022 only through Spotify. Kr\$na has made around \$144k in 2022. This is possible because of the huge numbers that they have on Spotify. Of course, these revenues are later split if the artist is signed by a label or management.

Live Performances, shows also have a lion's share in the revenue stream of Desi Hip-Hop artist. Now even underground rappers get good brand deals, along with content creators who create content on Hip-Hop. Kr\$na did a song for Realme (which is a famous smartphone company in India), Emiway did a track for Flipkart which is arguably India's biggest shopping app. Along with that, Instagram paid promotions also play an important role. Gucci did a collaboration with Divine, Christian Dior with Kr\$na and many more.

YouTube and Spotify play a very important role in generating revenues for the artists (RAPBOT, 2022).

5.4.2. Forms of content around Hip-Hop

Firstly, various types of content of Indian Hip-Hop are made by the experts interviewed. Rohan Cariappa's main content is lyrical breakdown videos of Desi Hip-hop songs on YouTube. He started around 2018. "I like to breakdown bars as I find it like a puzzle" (Rohan Cariappa, personal communication, November 16, 2022). Hit-Human is a reaction channel. "There were only 2 reaction channels in India when I started" (Hit-Human, personal communication, December 1, 2022). So, he has been reacting to hip-hop songs since 2018. He has recently started livestreaming reactions on Indian Hip-hop. According to him livestreams have surprisingly good audience. During the recent beef between Emiway Bantai

and Kr\$na, he gained a lot of viewers as he reacted live to the song when it was released. He has now shifted his content to live stream reactions and occasionally posts long form videos giving information or stating his opinions/observations about any rapper. He also does live streaming on Twitch where he reacts to songs, watches episodes of Bigg Boss since MC Stan went to the reality show.

Kash Hip-Hop uses Instagram as his main content platform. He posts Indian Hip-Hop memes, lyrical videos and promotes underground hip-hop artists. His focus is on uplifting the Kashmiri Hip-Hop scene. “Emiway Bantai shared and commented on my first post on Instagram. Memes are shared by many people” (Kash Hip-Hop, personal communication, November 19, 2022). Jyoti Sardar does reaction and review of songs. Also, most of the content creators do paid promotions on Instagram and YouTube. There are various Spotify playlists made by the creators.

Apart from this other content that has been seen on YouTube includes Indian Hip-Hop news and updates, Desi Hi-Hop facts, Desi Hip-Hop controversy theories and various other forms. Indian Hip-Hop is not a niche anymore and many creators are jumping in the bandwagon trying to come up with new concepts and ideas for content around it.

5.5. Community feeling in Desi Hip-Hop

“I give this feeling of being a cult, it has an effect on growth” (Hit-Human, personal communication, December 1, 2022). Many creators and artists create this community feeling among their audiences. All artists believed that it is very essential for their growth. Mainstream artists follow their own fan pages and interact with them regularly. They know that giving a collective experience for the audience is important to build a community. “Emiway and Kr\$na won’t know these people personally but they still fight with each other on social media” (Rohan Cariappa, personal communication, November 16, 2022). When the beef between Emiway and Kr\$na happened, you could see their respective audiences fighting over ‘Who is the best’ on almost every media platform. The listeners relate themselves to the artist and when they see that there are other listeners who feel the same, they feel like they are part of a community. “Why are artists motivating this? So that they have a core audience which can bring in lots of audience which will support them, fight for them” (Hit-Human, personal communication, December 1, 2022).

This is the second factor in Hesmondhalgh’s Music as Empowerment Approach. Music is a collective experience. Reaction channels are popular as the audience wants to see

someone vibing and listening to a song of their favourite artist. When listeners feel like they are a part of community, it creates sense of belonging which is in turn a life-enriching value of music. This way the listeners can then spread their favourite artist's music. Following are the opinions of some of the experts on how collective experience is important for the artists.

“When that person or audience hears it, there is a voice of us in someone is what they see. Every time you cannot self-motivate yourself. That is definitely uplifting thing” (Tilted-Rayz, personal communication, November 17, 2022).

This helps the audience grow along with the artist. A listener can imagine himself being connected to other listeners of the same artist or being a part of that community.

“I sort of made an audience which is very dedicated to Shreyas which is the most important thing an artist can have” (Shreyas Sagvekar, personal communication, December 3, 2022).

Having a dedicated audience is the most important thing an artist can have for the growth. according to the expert. The audience as a community pushes the artists through comments, recommendations, and various forms of interactions on the streaming and social media platforms. “You should connect to them, and they will love you and recommend you to others. This will give exposure” (Shantanu Dubey, personal communication, December 3, 2022).

5.5.1. Music as Empowerment Approach- Collective experience

People discuss music heatedly among themselves and that is more tied up with social problems like inequality or suffering (Hesmondhalgh, 2013). “When I started promoting Kashmiri Hip-Hop, many people came forward to encourage me as they wanted Kashmiri issues to come forward” (Kash Hip-Hop, personal communication, November 19, 2022). When rappers from Kashmir brought out their issues, it gave meaning to the song. People started finding belonging in the community of listeners. This was why they appreciated and encouraged Kash Hip-Hop to promote more such music.

It is the same for creators. Hit Human calls his fans ‘*The Bathroom Gang*’ or BTG in short. “When I say go to any big creator and raid them by spamming BTG in the chat, this makes the audience feel that they have achieved something” (Hit-Human, personal communication, December 1, 2022). This is very effective technique as it helps your fanbase grow and creates loyalty in fans. Emiway Bantai calls his fanbase ‘*Bantai ki Public*’, Kr\$na

calls his fanbase 'Awaam', Seedhe Maut calls their fanbase 'Seedhe Maut Nation' and much more.

It is this community feeling and being a part of the broader Desi Hip-Hop community, which has led to the growth of the overall scene. People recommend songs and discuss it widely in comments, live stream chats and social media posts. This is how the technical and social factors blend in.

5.6. Negative effects of Digital Media on Indian Hip-Hop

The negative effects of digital media will be discussed here to give a critical overview.

5.6.1. Content- not art

It is important to have a critical point of view on the role digital media has played with regards to Indian Hip-Hop. "Every artist has this in the mind that '*Will this work on reels?*'" (Rohan Cariappa, personal communication, November 16, 2022). Artists are now focussing on making content rather than music. Experts believed that the art is being lost somewhere in this process. "Artists lose their identity. You make changes according to which platform it's gonna be" (Shreyas Sagvekar, personal communication, December 3, 2022). The artists and content creators had similar thoughts on how artists are making music just for the sake of platforms. Artists see what is trending on Instagram reels, YouTube shorts and make a track which is similar. "There are more rappers coming up with the same style which is not good" (Shantanu Dubey, personal communication, December 3, 2022). Shanu feels that more and more rappers are coming up who are using the same style, and this should stop.

True art should be something the artist feels and does unrestricted. But when social media reach is considered, it is important to follow the trends. Indian Hip-Hop has similar trends which are overused by everyone. One such trend is remixing popular Bollywood songs into Hip-Hop music. Refix Music started that trend and now you see a lot of artists doing it. Even mainstream artists like Divine, Raftaar have been doing it. The way social media is pushing micro-content has forced artists to follow similar trends to go viral. "You already have that thought in your mind before you sit down and pen your feelings. You know you have to pen it down in 60 or 90 seconds" (Shreyas Sagvekar, personal communication, December 3, 2022).

An artist is measured by their number of views, streams, subscribers, and followers. Many artists are underrated. Audiences have numbers as their first filter before discovering

any artist. Having many artists and choices give the audience a decision paralysis effect. Numbers are an obvious way of measuring an artist, but not the most effective one.

5.6.2. See you at my show

Digital media has made everything online. Although, there a lot of positive effects of this, the negative effect of this is that it has minimized physical interaction between artists and their audiences. This affects the growth of an artist according to the experts. “Pulling people to gigs. You have crowd online, but you don’t know how many people will show up at the gigs” (Vedang Deshpande, personal communication, November 23, 2022). It is difficult to get the online crowd to show up at a concert or show. “You are measured by your views and how much shows you are getting which is again dependent on your views” (Rohan Cariappa, personal communication, November 16, 2022).

According to the experts, street ciphers have decreased in numbers since everything is online. Rappers used to meet-up and rap in a cipher. It is a good way to connect to fellow rappers and potential audiences.

These were the various negative effects which have to be taken into consideration according to the experts.

5.7. Future of Indian Hip-Hop

The future of Indian Hip-Hop is very bright (Hit-Human, personal communication, December 1, 2022; Jyoti Sardar, personal communication, December 16, 2022; Kash Hip-Hop, personal communication, November 19, 2022; Tilted-Rayz, personal communication, November 17, 2022). Many of the experts believe that the future of Indian Hip-Hop is very promising. It is a very fast-growing genre in India. “Indian Hip-Hop is like crypto now, everyone wants to invest” (Hit-Human, personal communication, December 1, 2022). Multiple YouTube creators are now jumping in to cover rappers, hip-hop music and various content creators make use of hip-hop beats and rap songs in their videos. There is a fine blend of quality and quantity in Indian Hip-Hop which has attracted international labels. “Many people outside our country are looking out for artists. DefJam came to India, Mass Appeal came to India” (Tilted-Rayz, personal communication, November 17, 2022).

While some experts had a more critical and concerned view regarding the future of Indian Hip-Hop. “Hip-Hop in India is maturing. In 10 years it will be there where it will have its own identity” (Shreyas Sagvekar, personal communication, December 3, 2022). Hip-Hop

in India even though is reaching mainstream, some artists believe it is maturing. The reason for these artists to believe that is knowledge about the culture. There are a lot of new rappers coming about, but very less of them have proper knowledge of the culture and are copying what they see. This according to some rappers is not the right course moving forward. “But the new rappers don’t know much about hip-hop, then the future of hip-hop is not that bright” (Shantanu Dubey, personal communication, December 3, 2022). Shanu further states that even the audience needs to be well-educated about the culture. Then it will spread and will be difficult to beat as the top genre in India.

“There is a lot of missing” (Rohan Cariappa, personal communication, November 16, 2022). In Rohan’s opinion, there is a lot of ground to cover in terms of fiction, reality shows, award shows, documentaries etc. Artists also need to bring in variety. “After Gully Boy there was a wave of Hip-Hop. I am seeing it fading out. I am not that positive about it” (Vedang Deshpande, personal communication, November 23, 2022). The varied answers clearly show that many artists and creators’ opinions are divided about the future. Majority of them believe that future is bright, but it needs to be on the right track. The reason why some believe that there needs more to be done is because they feel that Hip-Hop is not being represented correctly. The general inference from the varied and mixed opinions can be drawn by saying that in terms of numbers, revenues, and identity Indian Hip-Hop has a very bright future, but it has to go on the right track without losing the meaning of Hip-Hop.

6. Outcomes

This section describes the outcomes of all the primary and secondary empirical evidence collected during the research. The opinions of experts after the analysis and the literature are all combined to form the outcomes.

Following figure shows the intricate network of different actors. Also, the social theory of music as empowerment has been added to give an overview of the outcomes from the analysis.

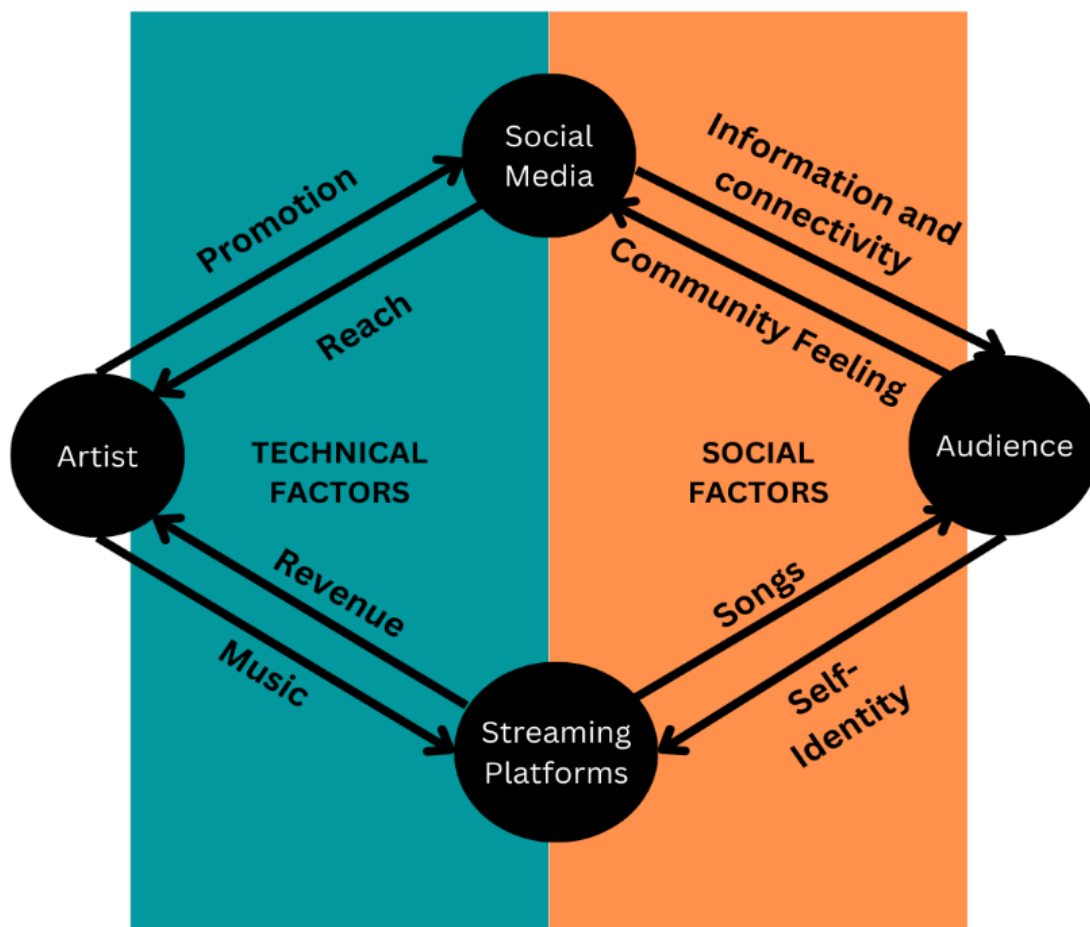


Figure 1. Technical and Social Factors Overview

The actors as mentioned before are Artists, Audience, Streaming Platforms and Social Media Platforms. It is a very intricate network which is all dependent on each other. This network along with the social factors of the people in India has led to the widespread of Indian Hip-Hop.

6.1. Artists and Streaming Platforms

The artists use streaming platforms like YouTube, Spotify, Apple Music, Amazon Prime and many more to put up their songs, music videos and their albums. In return the artist receives some form of revenue from these platforms. The artists also use these platforms as a catalogue where the audience can access their music. Due to these platforms, it has become very easy for new artists to put up their songs. This has resulted in emergence of new and new artists which has contributed to spreading the culture. The diversity of India makes Desi Hip-hop very unique and generates varied music. As more and more artists come forward, the streaming platforms have more catalogue and variety as Desi Hip-Hop is rich in quantity and quality.

The streaming platforms provide revenue per stream, views, subscribers etc. Various forms of content on YouTube have been instrumental in promoting hip-hop. Many content creators are coming up with new ideas and themes around Hip-Hop. This has solidified Hip-Hop in India. According to many experts, everybody wants to jump into Hip-Hop. This in turn helps the content creators and artists generate revenue. Although, a lot of artists feel that initially the revenue provided by these platforms is very negligible. But there are various ways to generate revenue and streaming platforms help in generating that in the revenue. The shows the artists get is based on the number of streams and views the artists have on these platforms.

Streaming platforms help in generating reach and reaching more audience for the artists and content creators. Playlisting on Spotify, Apple Music and such streaming platforms helps in augmenting the artist's reach. YouTube is the main platform used by content creators to post their videos about rap songs, reactions and reviews, lyrical breakdowns, hip-hop updates, hip-hop news, livestreams and Desi Hip-Hop knowledge in general.

6.2. Streaming Platforms and Audience

The basic functionality of streaming platforms is to provide audience with a catalogue of songs for the audience to listen. The various forms of content around Hip-Hop made by the artists or creators reach the audience through these platforms.

Hip-Hop is a raw genre and feels very real. The rap songs are performed and written by the artist himself. This makes the audience feel these songs and people find it relatable.

When an artist speaks about his journey, listeners have a feeling of self-identity as they hear a voice of someone who has been through a similar journey. A sense of self is very important for the audience. That makes them follow/subscribe to the artist and thus increasing the artist's numbers. The life enriching and empowering factors of Hip-Hop music are very high as it the most real genre. A lot of people in India are from middle class and Hip-Hop is one such genre to which they can relate completely. When an artist uses slangs or languages of an area in this diverse country, it gets stuck with the audience immediately.

The recommendation system of streaming platforms like Spotify/YouTube helps in spreading similar types of content or music the listener likes. This way new artists are discovered by the audience which has further strengthened the scene. The social context of Hip-Hop in India is very crucial as to why the audience have this sense of belonging thus making Desi Hip-Hop a medium of self-identity for many people. This is reflected in the views as artists like Divine/Emiway are getting more than 100 million views. Relatability of Indian Hip-Hop is the most important factor for the Desi audience and the artists alike. This relatability adds value and enriches life by helping the audience figure out more about themselves as individuals.

The case of Kash Hip-Hop who runs a meme page and promotes hip-hop is very interesting. He comes from Kashmir and wants to bring out the issues in Kashmir. As a listener, he could relate more to the Kashmiri rappers as they were talking about issues he was seeing on a daily basis and that motivated him to promote the Kashmir Hip-hop scene.

6.3. Artists and Social Media

Artists are using social media mainly for promoting their songs. Content creators use social media for promoting their content. There are numerous ways in which Desi rappers are using these platforms for promotions. The most used platform based on secondary evidence and interviews is Instagram. Instagram has been very influential after TikTok was banned in India. The micro-content gap that TikTok created has been filled by Instagram racing ahead with its new form of content- reels. YouTube followed with its 'Shorts'. Later all social media platforms started focusing on micro-content.

Promoting a song has been easier for an artist due to this micro-content. Having a visual form of poster, video on reels can make the song appealing. As Tilted-Rayz said it is like window shopping. The audience gets a glimpse of the song which, then they can listen on

streaming platforms. Many artists are focusing nowadays on creating content on social media that can give them reach. Although some believe it is harming the art as artists are more focussed on making content which is trending rather than something what they feel and is innovative. Social Media platforms have been very instrumental in amplifying artist's reach. The attention span of audience is 5-10 seconds and artists have to catch attention within that timeframe. Artists have pulled up millions of numbers by collaborating with creators and influencers asking them to make reels on their songs. Understanding marketing, PR and engagement building is very important for the artists.

Artists also use social media as a way of connecting with their listeners. They show their day to day lives. Instagram is the main platforms where artists and content creators announce their recent music, video, or an album. Instagram has the most reach and is an effective tool for making announcements. A lot of artists create hype for their upcoming projects. This builds up excitement and guarantees good response from audience. Some major examples in the scene are Divine, Emiway Bantai, Karma who have collaborated with creators to make reels on their songs. Divine's Baazigar is a song which has gone extremely viral on the reels. So micro-content on the social media has helped artists gain reach which would have been impossible otherwise.

6.4. Audience and Social Media

The audience are using social media as a way of connecting to the artists and getting updates on their upcoming tracks and albums. The audience gets a platform to directly connect and talk to the artists. All the current information that an artist shares, the audience creates a hype.

When many listeners follow a certain artist, they create a community. There are various fan pages of artists formed by fans. Social Media has made it easy for audiences who like similar type of music or an artist to come together. This generates a sense of community for the audience. As observed in the recent beef between Kr\$na and Emiway Bantai, fans of these respective artists were supporting, sharing, and fighting on every media channel whenever a diss track was dropped by an artist. Artists and content creators give name to their fans- Emiway's fans are called '*Bantai ki Public*' which means 'people of Bantai' whereas Kr\$na's fans are called '*Awaam*' which means 'general public'. Audience feels like they are part of something and defend the artist. Artists maintain this by regularly interacting with the audience, following fan pages to create and maintain a core audience.

According to the artists that were interviewed, interacting and maintaining this core audience is extremely important for the growth of an artist. Content creators also give their audiences names. HitHuman calls his audiences as 'BTG' which is short for Bathroom Gang. They try to imbibe the feeling of cult among their listeners. This way the rappers in India are creating their own fan cults who love the artist and recommend the artist to others. This increases exposure of the artist.

7. Conclusion

The research looked at the technical and social factors which has led to the rise and widespread of Desi Hip-Hop. Extensive literature review was done on Hip-Hop in general at first. Since the literature on Desi Hip-Hop is very scarce, papers related to Hip-Hop in other countries were compared. Some similarities and uniqueness among them were found. There were many things left unanswered about how the digital media has led to the rise and how social conditions of people in India has led to the spread of Hip-hop culture in India.

To explore and answer these questions, 8 expert interviews with both Hip-Hop artists and digital media creators whose content revolves around Hip-hop were taken. The primary evidence from the interview was gathered in two themes- technical and social. Then the evidence was blended in analysis section to focus on the socio-technical aspects.

The technological drivers have enabled accessibility for the artists and audiences alike. It has become easier to showcase your work as an artist globally within minutes. Reliance Jio made the internet cheap and accessible in India and thus every household in India now has a smartphone and internet access. The Desi Hip-Hop evolution in India is mainly digital according to the experts. Actor Network theory which was used by this research focuses on how the organizing powers combine to form a network. Hip-Hop in India started gaining momentum as streaming platforms and social media were being used by artists to reach audience. Various existing content creators started focussing on creating Hip-hop content. There were a lot of new creators on YouTube popping up that were making content based on Hip-hop. This helped in increasing the audience even more. The network of actors starts growing and feeding each other.

It has become easier as artists can put out their work globally in very less time. Various creative ways are being used by artists to promote their music on social media. The micro-content feature which is available on every social media platform has enabled artists to showcase their talent and invite new listeners to explore their discography. This intricate network of artists, creators, audiences, social media, and audience has been very instrumental in promoting and spreading the culture in the country. The technological factors have led to a rise in numbers of hip-hop artists in India and thus leading to further spreading the culture.

When we look at the social and cultural factors of Desi Hip-Hop, it is unique because of the sheer diversity that is seen in different parts of India. India is a diverse country and the

languages and slangs that have been used in Desi Hip-hop makes it very unique. Collaborations between rappers from different regions give them that unique texture. This is the reason why Indian rap music has quality in it. Traditional instrument sounds are being used in Desi Hip-Hop beats which adds up to the uniqueness of Desi Hip-Hop.

Hip-Hop as a genre is very raw and unfiltered. It is a genre where the common people can relate to. Since majority of people in India are middle class, they found this genre to give them a sense of self-identity. Digital media has given a platform for the Indian audience who like a similar type of music or artist to come together and form communities. Giving a community feeling to the listeners and creating a core audience is very important for the growth of an artist. This sense of self-identity and community feeling among the listeners has led to acceptance of Desi Hip-Hop. The diversity in India and the relatability of Hip-Hop are the social drivers responsible for the spreading the Desi Hip-Hop culture.

These are the socio-technical factors that have led to rise and widespread of a culture in India which did not originate in the country. These factors have led Desi Hip-Hop to go mainstream. The future of Indian Hip-Hop is very bright, but some experts believe artists are focussing on making content rather than making something they feel which has led to losing of art. This can affect the future of Indian Hip-Hop. Knowledge of Hip-Hop should be imparted among the artists and audiences alike.

8. Future Scope and Limitations

This research project has its limitations. The research just focuses primarily on rap music. Hip-Hop culture is much more than rap music. It includes graffiti, fashion and clothing, dancing and much more. There are various factors that have played role in spreading these attributes of hip-hop culture which demand attention. In future work these can be explored further to collect evidence as to how Hip-Hop culture as a whole has spread across the country. Various factors like new Hip-Hop exclusive clothing brands popping up, increase in graffiti artists, B-boy dancers can be looked into further to understand how this has fanned the flame of Hip-Hop in India.

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10. Appendix

10.1. Interview Summaries

Following are the summaries for the interviews which were conducted only in Hindi. These are the translated summaries of answer given to each question by the experts.

10.1.1. Hit-Human Interview Summary

1. When did you start creating for hip-hop?

2018. I reacted to an Emiway song because I used to listen to Dax, and he had a collab with Emiway. So that is how I started making Hip-Hop reactions.

2. Who were your inspiration? What motivated you?

I used to replicate Bhuvan Bam's vine videos in my mother tongue. KSI, Sidemen Jelly. So, I had a plan of becoming a YouTuber since I was a kid. I used to watch reaction channels of US. There were only 2 reaction channels in India when I started and the reaction I did got stuck.

3. What are the platforms you use to share and promote your content?

Instagram and Twitter. Now I am making content on Twitch and YouTube.

4. How important are digital media in Indian Hip-Hop?

Very Important. King is the best example of social media persona. He has used the word King very smartly and has been promoting himself like the King. Also Raftaar has changed his image recently. Earlier he used to dance, be playful but now if you observe him, he is stiff and he is portraying himself as the Boss of the label Kalamkaar. It is important to have a clean Instagram handle which mirrors your persona. YouTube channels should not be messy with clutter of non-relatable videos.

5. Do you think that digital media has fanned the flame of spreading this culture?

Yes bro. Nayaab album has NFT now. If you buy the NFT you get tickets for some shows. This is a strategy to sell NFTs and give free shows so that people go to more shows.

6. How are Reels and YouTube Shorts important?

Micro-content is very important. Now I feel like people are trying to make songs which can go viral on reels. King again is example of melodious hooks. Karma is also experimenting with catchy hooks so that his reels go viral. Divine's Baazigar is inspired from Refix Music who started sampling old Hindi Songs into beats. Ever since Refix got viral doing this many people are following the trend. And since it is a big name like Divine, people are enjoying the album. If it was an album of someone who is not famous, people would just like that one song in it. The album became hit just because of Divine's image.

7. What is the difference between the digital hip-hop and how it was before?

I was in a YouTube convention, where the YouTube asked us to make shorts over long-form content. There is podcast channel called DostCast started making a lot of shorts which has more than million views and that's why he's channel is 300k, 400k, 500k something. But his original podcasts from which those shorts were taken has only around 18k-24k views. How can we react in short form? We can get ad revenues from long form videos, but since the audience now has short attention span, it will all be converted to shorts. You will get famous, but I don't know.

8. Do you think there is less audience on your livestreams because of this?

Surprisingly Live streams has more audience, I don't know how. I react to songs on my livestreams, and I get views. If I post a pre-made video, I know the limit of how many views I get. But my livestreams reach much more, around 500k views, especially the livestreams which covered the beef/diss tracks. So, I feel why should I take efforts on editing, and putting a pre-made video? So, I just react to any song live. I am thinking of making highlights of the live and promoting it through shorts.

9. What are the negative effects?

As you grow, you have to shut your mouth. You cannot roast or tell the exact truth. Humans love appreciation. Artists take a lot of efforts in making songs and if a

random person who is popular says something bad about the song, it hurts them. Once you have reach, these problems occur. I cannot be what I was in 2020. I couldn't find ways to make jokes and be entertaining, so I ask my audience how they find the song instead of me commenting. So, this is the thing, as you get popular what you say matters a lot. Latest example is the thing that happened between Kr\$na and Rohan Cariappa. When Rohan was promoting lyricism and appreciating Kr\$na, it was all good. Rohan made one short criticizing Kr\$na and that made Kr\$na salty.

10. How are digital platforms helping you generate revenue?

It is difficult for Hip-Hop reactors as they get copyright claims. I was supposed to get the YouTube 'Join' Membership button when I had 30k subscribers, but I didn't as I had too many claims on my channel. I tried to contact YouTube team, but nothing happened. So, I started Twitch. The plan on YouTube was to do member-only streams and generate revenue. But Twitch is working out nicely. Revenue sources are paid promotions, ad revenue, brand deals, super chats.

11. Since many artists are coming forward, how important you think is for the culture?

Of course, very important. Playlisting your songs, getting featured in Spotify's hip-hop playlists is something that helps new artists. For example, AFKAP's song Aaina made it into a playlist. He has only 2 songs, but he is very famous. Also, Emiway's songs have been featured in Diss Tracks and Party Playlists,

12. How have these platforms augmented reach?

I was above 10k very early. But since I started doing livestreams, I have been able to reach a very wide audience. Livestream has a feature called subscriber only chat. So I get on people's nerves and make them subscribe to just send me a message. During this beef season I played it smart with titles to make them unbiased and thus both Kr\$na and Emiway fanbases would watch it. Along with this album live reactions which is something that less people are doing. Since I involve more people and is crowd oriented.

13. Do you think social conditions make people relate to rap? Why do you listen to it?

Yes bro. Tell me a genre which middle class people can relate. In Hip-Hop doesn't matter who you are, you will always relate. Hip-Hop is more real and raw. You will not find swear words in Bollywood songs. That is why people are connected to it instantly. I only listen to Indian Hip-Hop. If I am sad, I will listen to MC Insane, if I am vulnerable, I will listen to Bella to pump myself. Desi Hip-Hop is crazy now.

14. How do you come up with content? How do you decide what is relevant?

My channel will be more consistent now. I have fixed days for livestreams, and I am going to experiment by doing something like Saturday Night Live. I must show a bit of filmmaking. I observe and come up with ideas. For example, let's talk about how Rohan Cariappa said, "If you can call out Emiway for his lack of lyricism, then you also need to be versatile." But people appreciate Paradox for his versatile. Just because Emiway gets hate his versatility is not recognized that much. So, such observations inspire the content. As I am not just reaction channel anymore, I also make these videos who have a process. Another example is Ab 17. My friend introduced me to him by saying that he is Delhi's MC Stan.

15. What do you find unique in Indian Hip-Hop?

There are so many languages, so many slangs. In a track where there is Seedhe Maut, you get to hear MC Stan's verse. This is what you get in India. Rappers in US collab with rappers in UK to change the slang and texture but we have it inbuilt. Raftaar, Ikka from Delhi are in the track where you are hearing Pune slangs from MC Stan. MC Square, Paradox songs are unique because of their language.

16. How are these slangs spreading the culture?

You will have to market your personality based on that way. If you are from "South Bombay" where you speak decent language but when you try to portray yourself as someone who uses slangs a lot, it will not fit. So be what you are. A trick to make relatable songs is to write what you feel deep inside you. People will relate. The problem is artist tries to find out and imitate their slangs as they find it cool.

17. Hip-Hop is a medium of self-identity. Do you think Spotify and YouTube is using personality traits?

Yes. Of course, if it is promoted in that way. If you think MC Stan is someone who deliberately has been this raw or maybe it is how he is. But the way he is being promoted is something that I feel. So, these are 2 sides and people find motivation from it however they want. Yes, these platforms are using these to recommend songs.

18. How do you give your audience who is called Bathroom gang or BTG the feeling of community?

When I say go to any big creator and raid them by spamming BTG in the chat, this makes the audience feel that they have achieved something. Big YouTubers like Gideon reacted to our spam raid on his channel. So, to give this feeling of cult, it has an effect on growth. These are new things that give you relevance ever since social media has come up. Fan page Kr\$na army has grown so big that even Kr\$na follows the page and likes his tweets on Twitter. Why are artists motivating this? So that they have a core audience which can bring in lots of audience which will support them, fight for them.

19. What role has hip-hop played in making lives better?

For example, Divine stayed true to his art. He grew. When people see this journey, they feel attracted. When Divine says “I have everything but why am I alone” you feel it. Because Hip-Hop is real. Bollywood songs don’t give you this. Somebody is composing them, somebody else is singing them. But in rap everything is done by a single person.

20. Future of Indian Hip-Hop?

Very bright. There are many creators making content in hip-hop who were doing something else. Indian Hip-Hop is like crypto now, everyone wants to invest. If Ranveer Singh is playing “Baazigar” on Red Carpet, people will listen to it. MC Stan is in Bigg Boss.

21. How important is understanding digital media?

You need to know your thumbnail, tags, titles etc. King used to add NEW HINDI LOVE SONGS 2021 in his titles. This was making his charts pop. He made music

videos of every song and then called it an album. MC Stan and King are perfect examples of persona. Even when they were small artists, they were big in their heads. And they have been like that ever since. Observe when labels drop videos, what tags they use. Kalamkaar drops every Friday at 11 am. Majority artists do it. Emiway uploads at night as his audience has hype mostly at 9. You need to constantly observe and keep adding spice.

10.1.2. Kash Hip-Hop Summary

1. When did you start creating for hip-hop?

In 2020 during lockdown, I got my first smartphone and I realized that there are very less meme and hip-hop content pages on Instagram. Also, there were a lot of rappers in Kashmir but there was no “scene”. So, I decided to create a page and started by creating memes. As the page started to grow, I started promoting rappers.

2. What motivated you to do this?

MC Kash is one of the OG rappers in Kashmir. He left hip-hop after some time, but he was the reason that many rappers came forward from Kashmir. Kashmir Hip-Hop is conflict music. Majority people in India listen to party hip-hop music and I wanted to promote Kashmir Hip-Hop or conflict music. So, from start I had the motive of promoting hip-hop and taking the culture ahead through digital media.

3. What platforms are you using to promote and share your content?

I started with Instagram and then Twitter. I am also sharing stuff on Reddit. I found a subreddit called “Indian Hip-Hop Head” with around 55k active audience where I shared Kashmiri hip-hop songs. Also, I created playlist on Spotify, where I added songs. This way the artists are getting better reach.

4. How important you think digital media is for Indian Hip-Hop?

Hip-Hop started around 2010s which was Honey Singh era and also the Bluetooth era. As now you see as the internet is so widespread, like you go in any small village or any house you will find at least one smartphone with internet access. Everybody is

using social media apps. Nowadays artists are putting out their music first on Spotify and then they release the music video.

Rappers do paid promotions through hip-hop pages, reaction channels to increase the reach.

5. How has digital platforms augmented your reach?

Emiway Bantai shared and commented on my first post on Instagram. Memes are shared by many people. Many content creators also share my content. I post new songs on Reddit and my YouTube channel. Reels and short videos are trending nowadays. That is why digital marketing is important. I made a YouTube short on a song “Agency” by Talha Anjum. Even though I have less than 900 subscribers on YouTube, the short got 100k views.

6. Ever since TikTok has been banned, all platforms are starting micro-contents. How important is that for artists?

Usually, rappers put a snippet on Instagram reel and on YouTube shorts, audience gets hyped for the song and when the song releases, boom, you make sure it will have a good reach. For example, one of the rapper “Kalam Ink” posted a short of his unreleased song playing in his car, that reel got more than 1 Million views. When he uploaded the original song with music video, it got more views than that. So reels/short videos are really important.

7. List the types of content you create.

I make reels with lyrical videos, put songs on story, share it on Reddit. My main channel is on Instagram. I promote artists who make really good music who are underrated. I promote their songs on my YouTube, my audience checks the artists and their discography. After I started promoting songs, other hip-hop pages also started putting out mixtapes to promote underground artists. Hip-Hop meme, content pages are playing an important role through digital platforms to spread the culture. We share the audience with artists.

8. What are negative effects of streaming platforms?

These days many of the artists are getting in touch with the audience only through social media. They do Instagram live, put up stories. But this has minimized physical

interaction and they do not meet their fans physically. Even if they do shows, the promotion and everything takes place online. Ciphers are also rare now. Mostly rappers do ciphers online and there are fewer physical events now.

9. How do you generate revenue?

Paid Promotions. Stories, Reels, Posts are charged different. Also, Spotify playlisting. There is a page called HH12 who has 20K followers. His playlist has 1k-2k likes.

There are many ways for hip-hop pages to generate revenue. The charges depend on the reach and followers. I have 2.8k followers and I charge maximum of 500 Rs. 100 Rs for story, playlisting and 150 for posts/reels. For post, reel and story I charge 500 Rs. This all depends on reach.

10. Nowadays, it is easy for artists to put out music in a cheap way. How important is it for the culture?

I will give you an example of Divine and his latest album- Gunehgar. He announced his show before the album, did proper paid promotions. There are also many rappers who do exclusive CDs. There is a rapper called Karun- he released his album called “Kabool Hai”. He first released it on CD exclusive and then on the album. I feel digital platforms have contributed the most to Indian Hip-Hop. There are more

11. Is Hip-Hop evolution in India mainly digital?

Yes. Indian Hip-Hop is reaching many parts of the world. Emiway, Divine, Raftaar have digitally collab with many international artists. Emiway-Russ, Divine-Armani White, Divine-Russ etc.

12. Do you think social conditions of people make them relate more to rap?

Yes bro, of course. I come from a middle-class family. Every middle-class kid has a dream of living the rich life. When a rapper displays his lifestyle, everybody wants to be like that. In my example, I used to see curfews, riots, encounters in Kashmir everyday as I come from the Valley where it is very common. When Ahmer or other Kashmiri rappers talk about this, I can relate and feel the pain. People outside Kashmir will listen to it and think that maybe it is fake or exaggerated. But as a someone who has been through it, know this. Ahmer Music is signed under Azaadi

Records. His album Azli depicts the story of whole Kashmir. There are many rappers out there in Kashmir who are way better than mainstream artists. But there was no internet in Kashmir and these rappers would go outside just to upload the songs and then wouldn't even get to see how their song performed. In the last 2 years, internet hasn't stopped once. Everyone has internet now and I feel Kashmir Hip-Hop scene would have been way better.

13. How do you create content?

If I listen to any song, and I feel that I can make a meme of any song, I do it. If I relate to any song or find it really good, I share it without paid promotions. Also, there are many artists who are my friends, so I keep sharing them. I focus on making my content raw. I make sure that I don't offend the artists with my memes.

14. How is Indian Hip-Hop unique?

There are lot of languages in India, and everybody is rapping in their own language. We do not see this in Western Hip-Hop as mainly it is in English. There is Urdu, Hindi, Tamil, Gujarati etc. which is a good mix and makes it unique. You can see that there are rappers who have come from the streets and now are making collabs with someone like Russ. Nowadays everybody knows that Indian Hip-Hop is on the rise and people are not talking about Western Hip-Hop. Apple had a launch event and they played song of Badshah on it. They could have used Western rappers, but everybody knows that Indian hip-hop is right now the biggest scene in the world. Also, Divine's song is featured in Need for Speed.

15. Do you think that platforms recommend based on personality traits?

Yes. They know where you are from, and they will always recommend. For example, if I go to Ahmer's discography, there is a Spotify made playlist called Ahmer Radio and it will have songs from artists that come from the same place or people who are listening to Ahmer have also listened to. Also, Instagram, if I am using Instagram music and putting up songs of a certain rapper, the next time I go there I will get recommendations of artists using the same language, from same region.

16. Is it effective in increasing the reach?

Yes. I have discovered many tracks through this. I discovered many rappers who lived in my town through Spotify playlist of some other rapper. This was surprising for me that I didn't know them before.

17. Music is a collective experience. How do you give your audience a community feeling?

It is a fact that most of the people like to listen to party songs, vibey songs. A lot of rappers in Kashmir have started using old and traditional instruments and rapping in native Kashmiri language. This is a way how a community is formed. When I started promoting Kashmiri Hip-Hop, many people came forward to encourage me as they wanted Kashmiri issues to come forward. I formed a group with those people, and we now take decisions on which song to promote. I have many such small communities within my audience. I made international collabs possible- Ahmer and Hashim Nawaz, Fadi and SXR. These are two Indo-Pak collabs which is a very rare thing. These songs came from Pakistani rapper channels and the audience got shared.

18. What are your opinions on slangs? What role do they play in spreading the culture?

It is a good question. Example- Divine, Emiway, Stony Psycho and mainly MC Stan use a lot of slum slangs. This makes people from slums relate to it. MC Stan's majority audience loves him because of his language. I couldn't understand the language that well when I first listened to it. So, I started exploring him and I even use these slangs with my friends. Also, Emiway said that I use slangs as I represent my hood in one of his reply diss tracks to Kr\$na. Another rapper from Pune is Sambata and one of his raps got viral on reels- Pinnak. It is difficult for me to say it, but my friends who don't know the language can still rap it as it is. As they liked the slangs, they explored the artist more. So yes, slangs are playing a huge role in spreading the culture.

19. What is the role of Hip-Hop in making lives better?

Everybody has a moment where I should have a break and quit. I had such a moment and I listened to lo-fi and poetic raps. I got motivation through it as many of the lines hit me. Hip-Hop plays a very important role in empowering people. Like a guy with breakup will listen to Talha Anjum.

20. What is the future of Indian Hip-Hop

It is very bright. The day is not far when Indian Hip-Hop will be number 1. Indian rappers are providing quality and quantity. Nobody would have thought that a guy (Divine) will go Platinum and do world tours.

21. Should artists focus only on music? How important is focusing on digital media?

If an artist does full time music, for him music is important. Also, there should be personal as well as social life. If an artist has really good skills but has no money to properly distribute his songs. He should focus more on content, one day he will become famous. Like Sambata, he didn't do any promotions, but his one song blew up.

10.1.3. Shanu Interview Summary

1. When did you start creating music and rapping?

I started writing in 2012. I recorded my first song in 2015. Professionally I recorded in 2017.

2. Why did you choose to do this?

It was never about fame or money. It started as a hobby. I used to listen to Linkin Park and found that Mike Shinoda was singing differently. I understood then that hip-hop and rap is different. I liked hip-hop as it felt like the person was talking to you. I mostly write sad songs while thinking that the person who is depressed can get motivation and inspiration about life. Rather than flexing about ourselves.

3. When did you decide to put music on streaming platforms?

I have been rapping for almost a decade. Other than YouTube I hadn't put my songs anywhere. In 2020 me and Tilted-Rayz as Verse-Atiles did a track with a guy in USA called UIJ. He said he wanted to put it on Spotify and all these platforms but not YouTube. The first song we put was in 2020 on Spotify and now I have a good discography. Spotify is better as you can listen to the audio. I prefer Spotify over YouTube to listen to songs. At least in India, YouTube was the only thing at that time. Everybody's first preference is YouTube.

4. How important are these digital platforms for Indian Hip-Hop?

As an artist, having a social media presence is really important. As long you don't present it to your audience in an effective way, there is no use of making a song. It is different if you are just making it for yourself. But if you want people to listen to your songs, presenting yourself properly on Spotify or Instagram is very important. If you do that, then your audience will grow. Staying active on Instagram is also very important.

5. Which platforms you use for promotions?

I mainly use Instagram. In 2015, I used to use Facebook. Reels give you more reach now, so I am using it.

6. How has Instagram or streaming platforms affected your reach?

Ever since I have been doing shows, I have seen my Instagram get better with reels and photos. Spotify, I took seriously after Chandni Bar. I used to feel bad that I didn't get many streams on Spotify. It affects you as an artist. Chandni Bar made 30k streams. After that I became serious about streaming. Spotify has more chances of growing than YouTube is what I feel. The more songs you put, the more active you are on social media, the reach increases.

7. Will you say the Indian Hip-hop scene is mainly digital?

80% is digital. It is an Internet generation. 80-90% is digital.

8. What do you think is the importance of micro-content?

I was not happy with Instagram when they started reels. I was like this is just like TikTok and that made me disappointed at first. I slowly started realizing that this is important as I put up a reel for the first time and I started getting views on my channel, my followers started increasing. So, I realized it is a strategy to grow. Every big artist or label is doing it right now. It is the best thing for promotions as they have the most reach. Now if you open Instagram, you don't go to home page, you go to Reels directly. I think reels are boom sh** and is easy to get followers, reach and views.

9. What are the different ways in which you promote your music?

First, I put up a post that this is the artwork of this song. Then a teaser and a snippet. So, like 1 post and 2 reels. Try to make a story.

10. What is the difference between digital hip-hop and traditional hip-hop in India?

We used to do ciphers on the streets before covid. After that it was just online. If you did a collab before COVID, you would go personally to record with another artist. Now it is online. A guy from Pune will collab with a guy from Delhi online. Now there are not even 5% ciphers as they were before. That is a bad thing due to digital hip-hop.

11. What are the negative effects of digital media?

The way hip-hop is being promoted through these platforms is somewhat 60% being portrayed wrong. Good rappers and producers are not being able to come forward. The active audience on these platforms is mostly between 16-21 years of age. There are many songs where people are not really that good and this is being hyped up. So, there are more rappers coming up with the same style which is not good. So new rappers are not able to really understand hip-hop as there is no connectivity between rappers now.

12. How do you generate revenues?

I haven't earned much through streams. But as I started putting out my songs on Spotify or YouTube venues have invited me to perform. I was known since I used to do shows before these platforms came to light. So that also helps.

13. Were you popular before putting out songs?

No. I am not even that popular now. People know me better than 2 years ago. If I wouldn't have put songs nobody would have known me that well.

14. How important is it that there are new artists and content coming for the Indian scene?

The more artists there are it is better. But they should give time to their art. Instead of talking senseless stuff, it is better to focus on art. Obviously it is good for culture. Culture will spread widely. Right now, Indian hip-hop is spreading a lot.

15. Do you think people relate more to Hip-Hop because of social conditions?

Kind of. It's not like every rapper is poor or very rich. I also come from bad conditions, but my parents have supported me a lot so I cannot say that. Of course, if a rapper has lived it and says it is very relatable. I have seen a lot of my friends who are still living in slums, and they relate to it. Hip-Hop is a genre where people can relate. I don't think there is a genre which you can relate that much to hip-hop. In Hip-Hop you get everything- from love songs to songs that address depression. It is easy to understand and that is why it hits. The message is very clear in hip-Hop. I listen to hip-hop mainly as I am doing it.

16. What is your message when you write songs?

It is basically what I feel I write. If I am sad, I write sad songs. The message is for someone who is going through it to understand. I sometimes makes bangers as well so that I can make people dance on the shows. But I like making intense and lofi songs.

17. Why do you think Indian Hip-Hop is unique?

The unique thing is languages. The languages India has, no other country does. Hindi, Marathi, Tamil, Dhakani, Telugu, Bihari. I have listened to songs in those as well. That is the advantage. It varies from state to state. In Maharashtra hip-hop is different, in north is different.

18. Do you think these digital platforms use these personality traits to recommend?

Yes, I think so. There are playlists like Dillihood, India-91 which are made by Spotify. So, I think they must be recommending it. It is a big platform.

19. How do you connect to your audience? How do you give them a community feeling and how important is it?

Mainly I connect through Instagram. They come to gigs as well, so I meet there. I reply to them. I try to be their friends. It is very important. The closer listeners are to you, it gives them importance. You should connect to them, and they will love you and recommend you to others. This will give exposure.

20. What is your opinion on slangs? How has this helped in spreading this culture?

I don't use many slangs. I feel that slangs are overused now. If you are a good rapper and using it naturally then its fine.

21. What is the future of Indian Hip-Hop?

The way it is now, and this momentum continues then it is gonna spread like a wildfire. But the new rappers don't know much about hip-hop, then the future of hip-hop is not that bright. Even audience should know what hip-hop is. Then the quality of hip-hop will improve. Hip-Hop is a genre which will stay on top. In US it has been the top genre since a long time. If it is done properly then it is difficult for any other genre to compete.

22. How important is understanding digital media for an upcoming artist?

To promote your music understanding this is very important. I regret that that I didn't know it that much earlier. I would've been more well-known now. Focus on your music but take out time to research and understand business if you want to make a profession out of music. Now there is no other way.