Who's in Charge?

The Role of the A&R Manager as Gatekeeper within the Dutch Music Industry

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Abstract

The music industry deals with gatekeeping on a daily basis. Music passes through several channels or gates, in order for music to reach the audience. Therefore, this master thesis will examine in depth the functions of these so-called gatekeepers and gatekeeping networks, in order to understand where power and control lie in relation to processes of cultural flow. This thesis specifically focuses on the role of the A&R manager within the concept of gatekeeping. It examines the traditional role of the A&R manager before the rise of the internet and the current role of the A&R manager within gatekeeping through interviews with music professionals. In this way an up-to-date overview of gatekeeping within the Dutch music industry is presented. This thesis shows the evolution of gatekeeping and explains the changed role of the A&R manager since the rise of the internet and online developments such as the rise of platforms like Spotify and YouTube.

Keywords: gatekeeping, A&R, record labels, theory, Dutch music industry.

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Introduction

When thinking about gatekeeping, one might not immediately think about the music industry, while gatekeepers are responsible for which music reaches our ears and which does not. Gatekeepers decide what we hear on the radio, which playlist we see first on Spotify, and which artists we can see perform live.[1] The term gatekeeping is often used within communication studies to describe 'the process of selecting, and then filtering, items of media that can be consumed within the time or space that an individual happens to have'.[2] Gatekeepers, like news editors in journalism, are responsible for which events end up in the newspaper and which do not. Therefore, their influence on the consumer is of high importance.[3]

It is commonly known that within the music industry, certain individuals or institutions have more influence than others to ensure that music reaches the audience.[4] However, little is known about the exact processes and people who play a role in this. Although the gatekeeping theory is primarily focused on the field of communication, the music industry deals with gatekeeping just as much, by selecting and filtering music from artist to consumer. The conventional theory of gatekeeping, however, is insufficient for the everchanging music industry, since it is outdated and does not take online developments into account. The success of online music services such as iTunes and Spotify have put more focus on the distribution of songs, and less in the production of physical albums. This technological development has transformed the music industry.'[5] A&R managers (Artist & Repertoire managers) have traditionally always filled in this 'gatekeeper' role[6], but with the rise of DIY-artists[7] and platforms like Spotify and YouTube, A&R managers may not be the ones anymore who are in charge of bringing new talents onto the market.[8] Record labels, music platforms and the artists

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[1] Pamela J. Shoemaker, Tim P. Vos and Stephen D. Reese. 'Journalists as Gatekeepers' in *The Handbook of Journalism Studies* (New York and London: Routledge, 2009), 74

[2] Davie, G. 'Gatekeeping Theory,' Masscommtheory.com, accessed 25 Nov. 2019, https://masscommtheory.com/theory-overviews/gatekeeping-theory/

[3] Axel Bruns, *Gatewatching and news curation: journalism, social media, and the public sphere* (New York: Peter Lang, 2018)

[4] Casey van Wensem. 'The Biggest Secrets to Getting Your Songs Heard by Music Industry Gatekeepers', blog.reverbnation.com, accessed on 14 June 2020, https://blog.reverbnation.com/2017/01/05/the-biggest-secret-to-getting-your-songs-heard-by-music-industry-gatekeepers/

[5] Pamela J. Shoemaker and Tim P. Vos, *Gatekeeping Theory* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 63

[6] According to: Frith (1996), Shoemaker (2009), Strasser (2010), Zwaan (2009)

[7] 'DIY, short for 'Do-it-yourself,' refers to contemporary artists who foreground self-reliance and the self-made, particularly in opposition to mass production and mass culture (and their accompanying alienation)' Artsy, 'Contemporary DIY', artsy.net, accessed on 28 July 2020, https://www.artsy.net/gene/contemporary-diy

[8] Media update. 'How streaming changed the music industry', mediaupdate.co, accessed on 12 June 2020, https://www.mediaupdate.co.za/media/147338/how-streaming-changed-the-music-industry

themselves now might create gatekeeping networks together, through which they exert power and control over the distribution of music onto the market.

This thesis examines the functions of these gatekeepers and gatekeeping networks, in order to understand where power and control lies in relation to processes of cultural flow.[9] Given the powerful role of gatekeeping within the music industry, it is surprising that the practice of gatekeeping has not been examined in more detail. A correct understanding of gatekeeping within the current Dutch music industry is missing, just as an elaboration on the role of the A&R manager nowadays. This research presents an update of gatekeeping within the music industry in 2020. It shows the evolution between what gatekeeping used to be and what it looks like now in the music industry. It specifically sheds more light on the role of the A&R manager within the concept of gatekeeping. *Is the traditional role of the A&R manager as gatekeeper still applicable to the present day?* is therefore the main research question.

To answer the main research question, it is important to understand the gatekeeping theory. This thesis, therefore, starts with a literature study on the gatekeeping theory in chapter 1, to define what the gatekeeping theory is and what gatekeepers are. Next, it is important to examine the gatekeeping theory within related disciplines, such as film and journalism. In chapter 2 these two disciplines are analyzed as an example to how the gatekeeping theory has been used in other cultural fields. Chapter 3 is focused on the role of the A&R manager. Question such as: *What is the definition of an A&R manager?* and *What did its role look like before the online developments?* are discussed here. In chapter 4 you find an analysis of interviews with seven music professionals working in the Dutch music industry. Via grounded theory and the process of coding, these interviews are closely examined to understand how influential the role of the A&R manager is nowadays and to find out how gatekeeping networks currently work in this Dutch music industry. Amongst others, questions as: *What is the role of A&R managers according to music professionals;* and *Who is, in the eyes of the music professionals, the biggest gatekeeper in the music industry?* are answered here. The results of this analysis are discussed in the final chapter.

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[9] 'Cultural flows refer to multidirectional movements and re-allocations of human beings, artifacts and ideas within the ill-defined sphere of 'culture' in its global, national and regional dimensions. The term is widely applied in consumer culture, especially in relation to production/consumption processes and products'
Rodanthl Tzanell, 'Cultural Flows', researchgate.net, accessed on 1 July 2020,
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/254256809_%27Cultural_Flows%27

Methodology

In this research various methods are combined to achieve a new overview of gatekeeping in the music industry. A literary study of the gatekeeping theory gives an overview on the current theoretical debate, whereas in-depth qualitative interviews with music professionals working in the Dutch music industry add new perspectives on gatekeeping.

The literary study will be done on The Gatekeeping Theory by Pamela Shoemaker and Tim Vos. Since this theory dates back to 2009, this thesis aims to create a new understanding of gatekeeping that suits the present day, including the latest trends concerning digitalization such as streaming. In order to apply this theory to the music industry, other fields where gatekeeping plays a role, are examined closely. This includes the fields of film and journalism, since both have dealt with a changing gatekeeping concept due to online developments. Doing a literary study is important since it explains what the gatekeeping theory comprises, and by taking examples of related fields, it can be applied to the music industry.

The second part consists of an analysis of seven semi-structured, in-depth interviews with Dutch music industry professionals. These interviews are used to create an objective view of the profile of the A&R manager in the Netherlands. The respondents are either employed at a major record company, streaming service, radio station, concert promotor or pop venue. This selection of experts covers a substantial segment of the Dutch music industry, and they all are, in one way or another, responsible for bringing the music from artist to consumer.[10] Amongst others, the sub questions: *What is the interpretation of A&R managers according to music professionals;* and *Who is, in the eyes of the music professionals, the biggest gatekeeper in the music industry?* are answered here. To analyze the interviews, the method of grounded theory by Strauss and Corbin is used.[11] This specific theory helps explore the inner experiences of participants, it helps explore how opinions are formed and transformed, and most importantly for this research: it helps to explore areas that are not yet thoroughly researched.[12]

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[10] More information about the respondents and the interviews will be specified in chapter 4 (page 23)

[11] The method 'grounded theory' will be explained more elaborately in chapter 4 (page 23)

[12] Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin. *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory.* (California, Sage: Thousand Oaks, 1998), 5

Chapter 1: The Gatekeeping Theory

In order to understand gatekeeping as a concept, it is important to give some background information on its origin. After a quick history of the concept, I look closely at the definition of The Gatekeeping Theory and why this theory functions as the theoretical framework for this research.

A Quick History

The idea of gatekeeping was first positioned by Kurt Zadek Lewin (1890-1947). Lewin emigrated from Germany to the USA in the 1930s where he laid the foundations for research in human relations.[13] Lewin was a social psychologist, known for his field theory of behavior. This theory enfolds that human behavior is a function of an individual's psychological environment.[14] The metaphor of gatekeeping originated from this work, when Lewin completed a post-World War II study on how families select food. Shoemaker and Vos explain that 'Lewin thought of food as reaching the family table through *channels*. One channel is the grocery store, where food is purchased, but other channels also carry food, such as the family garden'.[15] Lewin decided to compare decision making filters to gates, because entry can either be permitted or denied by gatekeepers.[16][17] Lewin's study inspired others to continue to research the concept of gatekeeping, like David Manning White (1917-1993), a journalism and communication scholar, who researched how gatekeeping was practiced in American newsrooms in the late 1940s.[18] White was the first to translate Lewin's theory of channels and gatekeepers into a gatekeeper model.[19] With this, White found out that news organizations filter news through multiple 'gates', before the news is selected. Second, he learned that reporters and editors acted as gatekeepers, who were responsible for shaping the nature of the stories, determing whether the story should be published and if so, what aspects should be emphasized. Lastly, White concluded that anyone who decides whether information should be shared with the public can

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[13] Kurt Lewin Instituut, 'About KLI,' kurtlewininstituut.nl, accessed 5 January 2020, https://kurtlewininstituut.nl/about-kli/

[14] Encyclopedia Britannica, 'Kurt Lewin,' brittanica.com, accessed 5 January 2020, https://www.britannica.com/biography/Kurt-Lewin

[15] Pamela J. Shoemaker and Tim P. Vos, *Gatekeeping Theory* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 12

[16] Fandom, 'The Origin of Gatekeeping,' gatekeepinginonlinejournalism.fandom.com, accessed 5 January 2020, https://gatekeepinginonlinejournalism.fandom.com/wiki/The_Origin_of_Gatekeeping_Theory

[17] With this, Lewin proposed that the process of filtering, selecting and rejecting objects, according to a set of criteria, was relevant to the news selection process.

[18] Ibid: Fandom

[19] Pamela J. Shoemaker and Tim P. Vos, *Gatekeeping Theory* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 15

be classified as a gatekeeper.[20] Both Lewin and White have laid the foundation for the concept of gatekeeping to which many scholars are still referring to today.

The Gatekeeping Theory (2009)

The theoretical framework for this thesis consists of the Gatekeeping Theory by Shoemaker and Vos. This book is used as a foundation for this research, since it covers all aspects of gatekeeping (all-round approach). Shoemaker and Vos start at the origin of gatekeeping, explaining the earliest theories by Lewin and White. They continue by building on this concept applying it to the year 2009, when they wrote their research. Their take on the gatekeeping theory describes the 'powerful process through which events are covered by mass media, explaining how and why certain information either passes through gates or is closed off from media attention. This book is essential for understanding how even single, seemingly trivial gatekeeping decisions can come together to shape an audience's view of the world and illustrates what is at stake in the process'.[21] The purpose and 'the influence of the gatekeeping tradition, like any model, has been to direct attention to certain phenomena in a compelling manner'.[22] Not only do Shoemaker and Vos explain the concept of gatekeeping, they also address why it is important:

> Constructing a theory of gatekeeping is vitally important. Gatekeepers determine what becomes a person's social reality, a particular view of the world. Although a single gatekeeping decision may itself seem trivial, both varied messages and common messages emerge every day, making the gatekeeping process complicated and highly significant.[23]

But what is the exact definition of a gatekeeper? According to White, the definition of a gatekeeper is anyone who decides which information is shared with the public.[24] Shoemaker and Vos elaborate on this by adding that a gatekeeper basically controls whether information passes through the channel and what its final outcome is.[25] As Shoemaker and Vos say:

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[20] Ibid., 15-16.
[21] Pamela J. Shoemaker and Tim P. Vos, *Gatekeeping Theory* (New York: Routledge, 2009), Pre-face
[22] Pamela J. Shoemaker, Tim P. Vos and Stephen D. Reese. 'Journalists as Gatekeepers' in *The Handbook of Journalism Studies* (New York and London: Routledge, 2009), 75
[23] Ibid., 3
[24] Pamela J. Shoemaker and Tim P. Vos, *Gatekeeping Theory* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 15-16
[25] Pamela J. Shoemaker, Tim P. Vos and Stephen D. Reese. 'Journalists as Gatekeepers' in *The Handbook of Journalism Studies* (New York and London: Routledge, 2009), 74

Gatekeepers take many forms, for example: people, professional codes of conduct, company policies, and computer algorithms. All gatekeepers make decisions, but they have varying degrees of autonomy. Autonomy varies from an individual's idiosyncratic whims to sets of unbreakable rules interpreted by computer programs.[26]

It becomes clear that gatekeeping can be interpreted in many ways. For this thesis, I will use the definition of Shoemaker and Vos as a basis. When I refer to a gatekeeper, this is not necessarily a person. It can also indicate a platform or organization.

This following figure (1) shows the basic elements of gatekeeping studies. It gives an overview of how information flows and goes through the gates/channels:
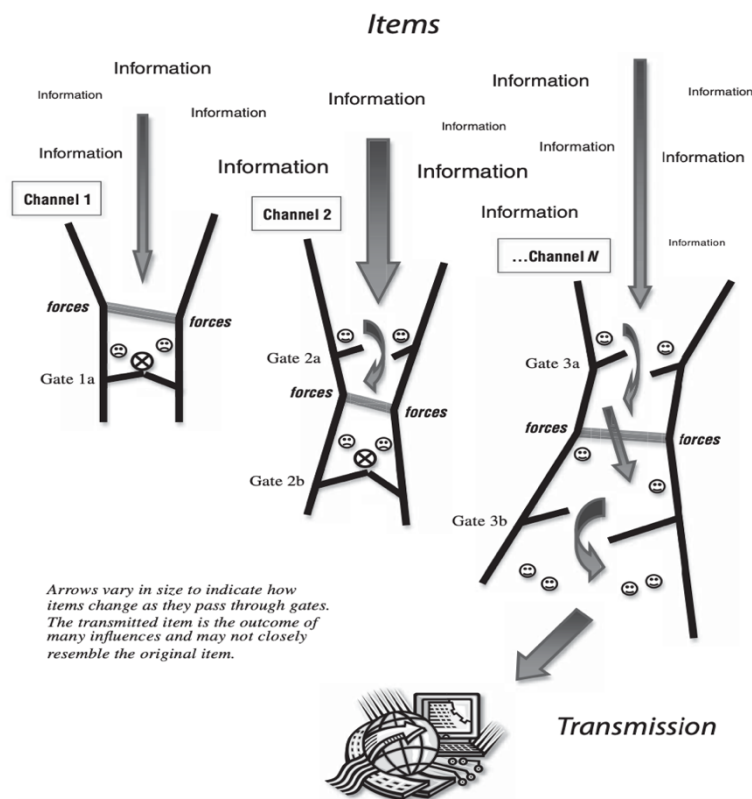
Figure 1: The gatekeeping process of how information flows according to the gatekeeping theory.[27]

Figure 1 shows a world of items that may enter the gatekeeping process, but not all items are selected, and pass the gate. Shoemaker and Vos explain that some might make their way into channels, which can be divided into sections, of which each can be entered only by passing

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[26] Pamela J. Shoemaker, Tim P. Vos and Stephen D. Reese. 'Journalists as Gatekeepers' in *The Handbook of Journalism Studies* (New York and London: Routledge, 2009), 74
[27] Ibid., 74

through a gate.[28] Shoemaker and Vos continue that 'forces facilitate or constrain the flow of items through gates, by varying in magnitude and valence direction and by working on either or both sides of the gate'.[29] These forces include for example certain criteria that an item must have, such as quality or good marketing purposes. So, figure 1 shows three channels and many information items, but only one item makes its way through a channel and is transmitted to one (or more) audiences. Shoemaker and Vos explain it further in the following passage:

> Negative or weak forces keep some items from progressing through the channels, and it is important to note that forces exist both before and after gates. For example, the expense of microwave remote equipment is a negative force in front of the gate, slowing a television station's ability to cover live events, but once the equipment is purchased and passes the gate, the purchase has a positive force, leading the news producer to use it often to justify the expense. The final element shown (in figure 1) is the outcome of the gatekeeping process, not only the result of being selected, but also the outcome of many influences on the item as it passes through channels, sections, and gates.[30]

All in all, Shoemaker and Vos explain that gatekeepers are decision makers who control the information flow to an entire social system. These decisions are usually based on personal preference, professional experience and social influences.[31] When consuming relevant content every day, gatekeepers help us to ignore lots of additional data that is calling for attention.

In the Gatekeeping Theory, Shoemaker and Vos use the term 'mass media' regularly when referring to the field of communication. Here they point out that 'films, music, books, and plays are also mass media, and, although they are less likely to be found in the gatekeeping literature, [we] believe that the ideas in Gatekeeping Theory can be useful for scholarship involving them and encourage creative thought'.[32] This confirms the lack of research in the field of music regarding gatekeeping, and shows that this theory can be applied to other fields.

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[28] Pamela J. Shoemaker, Tim P. Vos and Stephen D. Reese. 'Journalists as Gatekeepers' in *The Handbook of Journalism Studies* (New York and London: Routledge, 2009), 74
[29] Ibid., 74
[30] Ibid., 74
[31] Davie G. 'Gatekeeping Theory', masscommtheory.com, accessed 10 January 2020, https://masscommtheory.com/theory-overviews/gatekeeping-theory/
[32] Pamela J. Shoemaker and Tim P. Vos, *Gatekeeping Theory* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 6

Gatekeeping in the Music Industry

When applying the gatekeeping theory to the music industry, it tells us that gatekeepers are responsible for which music reaches our ears and which does not. They are the ones who decide what we hear on the radio, which playlist we see first on Spotify, and which artist we can go see perform live. Therefore, gatekeepers have a big impact on our everyday lives. Although not a lot is written about gatekeeping in the music industry, in the Gatekeeping Theory, a few examples about gatekeepers within music are mentioned. Sociologist Paul M. Hirsch was one of the first researchers who took an attempt into researching how power relations work outside the field of communication. According to Hirsch, organizations, including the mass media, act as cultural gatekeepers for the larger society.[33] Furthermore, he points out that 'a gatekeeping-type function (he calls it *preselection*) is probably necessary for all industries'.[34] Hirsch: 'There are always more goods available for possible production and marketing than there are actually manufactured, promoted and consumed'[35]. Where some organizations can use test marketing to decide which products should be brought to production, and where the test results act as an organizational gatekeeper, this does not apply to the music industry.[36] For the (popular) music industry, conventional market research procedures are unreliable, so preselection systems have been developed as a substitute. Such a system 'filters the available products, ensuring that only a sample of the available 'universe' is ever brought to the attention of the general public'.[37] This so-called preselection system was created by Hirsch in the 1970s. Regardless of the industry, Hirsch described that the preselection system has clearly differentiated roles and functions. A preselection system might work as following, as Hirsch explains:

> The *artist* provides the creative material, which is identified by an *agent,* who acts like a talent scout for the *producer,* who supplies the capital necessary to get the product under way. The *promoter's* job is to create and manage anticipated demand, while the *gatekeeper* stands between the industry and its consumers, deciding which products will be recommended or publicized to the *public,* the ultimate consumer of the product.[38]

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[33] Pamela J. Shoemaker and Tim P. Vos, *Gatekeeping Theory* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 63
[34] Ibid., 63
[35] Ibid., 63
[36] Ibid., 63
[37] Ibid., 63
[38] Ibid., 63

The cursive words above can be interpreted as so-called channels. 'The entrance to a channel and to each section is a gate, and movement within the channel is controlled by one or more gatekeepers or by a set of impartial rules.'[39] So according to Hirsch, anyone who is in control of a channel can be defined as a gatekeeper. Shoemaker and Vos say that although the terms *channels* and *gate* imply physical gestures, it is clear that they are not objects at all, but that they represent a process that describes why and how some items pass on their way, step by step, from discovery to use.[40] In other words: these channels are necessary to bring the eventual product from the artist to the consumer.

Diagram

In figure 1, I presented the gatekeeping process of how information flows according to the gatekeeping theory.[41] In 2008, Christopher Knab (music business consultant, author and lecturer) presented a diagram to explain how this process of gatekeeping works in the music industry (see figure 2).[42] Knab presents this model on the website 'Music Biz Academy' without further information. Although this diagram isn't scientifically substantiated, it does indicate who (or what) Knab interpreted as gatekeepers in 2008, and the so-called order of the channels that a product, in this case the music, needs to pass before it reaches the consumer. Therefore, this diagram will be used when exploring a new and up-to-date gatekeeping theory for the current Dutch music industry.

Knab says that: 'in order for a musician to expose their music to as many people as possible, several 'gates' must be opened for them. In the commercial marketplace for music, gatekeepers control the access to the musician's potential audience'[43].

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[39] Pamela J. Shoemaker and Tim P. Vos, *Gatekeeping Theory* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 13
[40] Ibid., 15
[41] Pamela J. Shoemaker, Tim P. Vos and Stephen D. Reese. 'Journalists as Gatekeepers' in *The Handbook of Journalism Studies* (New York and London: Routledge, 2009), 74
[42] On the website it states that this diagram was last updated in February 2008. The original date the diagram was created is unknown.
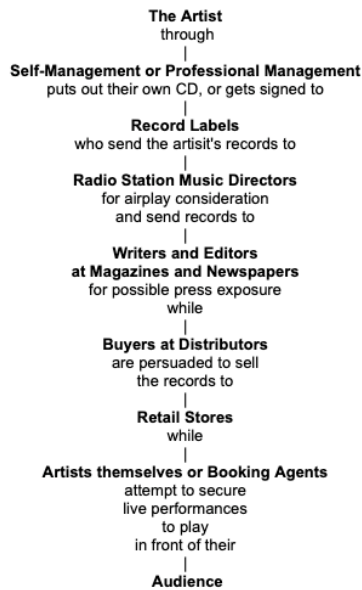[43] Christopher Knab. 'Who's guarding the gate?', musicbizacademy.com, accessed on 13 June 2020, http://www.musicbizacademy.com/knab/articles/gatekeepers.htm

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                                         Figure 2: Gatekeeping diagram as proposed by Christopher
         The Artist                      Knab. It lists the 'gates' that must be unlocked to reach an
          through                        audience.
            |
Self-Management or Professional Management
  puts out their own CD, or gets signed to
            |
        Record Labels
  who send the artisit's records to
            |
 Radio Station Music Directors
     for airplay consideration
       and send records to
            |
      Writers and Editors
   at Magazines and Newspapers
     for possible press exposure
            while
            |
     Buyers at Distributors
      are persuaded to sell
        the records to
            |
        Retail Stores
           while
            |
Artists themselves or Booking Agents
     attempt to secure
     live performances
         to play
      in front of their
            |
         Audience
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According to the gatekeeping diagram by Knab, there first needs to be an artist who makes the music. Second, he says that the artist needs a management to get signed to a record label. Here, Knab indicates that a record label is a vital gatekeeper for an artist to get the music to the audience through channels of radio, press and distributors. After that, the music ends up in retail, while in the meantime artists themselves or booking agents attempt to secure live performances for the artist to ensure that the music reaches the audience.

As seen in figure 2, this diagram does not pay any attention to online platforms or streaming services. For this reason, it is outdated and only gives an example of how gatekeeping might have worked before the rise of the internet. However, it is useful to keep this diagram in mind, since Knab indirectly states that the music of artists cannot reach the audience without certain gatekeepers, such as record labels and distributors. When looking at the order of the gatekeepers in the diagram, as proposed by Knab, I believe that online developments made a major impact on the gatekeeping process and that the role of the record label takes in a different position in the chain nowadays. To learn more about how online developments affect gatekeeping systems, I will, in the next chapter, look at two fields where the rise of the internet played a major role in changing the original gatekeeping process.

Chapter 2: Gatekeeping in Film and Journalism

In order to make the gatekeeping theory slightly more tangible, this chapter includes an analysis of gatekeeping within fields as film and journalism. Although the basics of the theory have been discussed, the fields mentioned provide a better understanding of how this theory can be applied to everyday life, and more specifically, how online developments impacted gatekeeping networks.

The Film Industry and its Gatekeepers

The book 'Gatekeeping in the Evolving Business of Independent Film Distribution' by Roderik Smits was analyzed to understand how gatekeeping works within the current film industry.[44] This specific book was chosen since it's the most recent book about gatekeeping in film and it involves the rise of VOD[45]/streaming, a movement I expect to see in the music industry as well.

In his book, Smits dives into the business of distribution: 'distribution is situated at the heart of the film business, representing a powerful gatekeeping function in connecting the structures of production and consumption.'[46] The distribution organizations, like the Hollywood studios, are metaphorically spoken of as gatekeepers, since they filter out products at different levels in the market. Smits mentions that these organizations 'exert control over processes of inclusion and exclusion, over the process of enabling access to some films and disabling access to others, and over the process of rendering films visible to audiences.'[47] Here, Smits argumentation can be connected to the chain of channels and gates that Shoemaker and Vos discussed. The process of distributing films within these organizations is organized by sales agents and distributors, who Smits describes as traditional gatekeepers in the sense that 'they have developed a long-established reputation in the distribution business as key organizations through which films are traditionally distributed.'[48]. Smits describes their roles and functions as following: 'The sales agents take care of the first selection from new film projects and they enable access to distributors in international markets. Next, the distributors

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[44] This book was specifically chosen since it was last reviewed in 2019. It provides up-to-date information, including online developments, regarding gatekeeping processes within the film industry. It also fits in the body of academic work on gatekeeping, since Smits makes use of gatekeeping theory by Shoemaker and Vos.
[45] Smits uses the abbreviation of VOD (Video-On-Demand) to refer to online consumer platforms that allow audiences to browse through collections and decide which films they want to watch and when they access those films.
[46] Roderik Smits, *Gatekeeping in the Evolving Business of Independent Film Distribution* (Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 1
[47] Ibid., 2
[48] Ibid., 2

make the second selection when they decide which films are made available to audiences in specific countries or territories.'[49]

Although this is still the conventional way of bringing movies from the producer to the audience, Smits adds a side note by acknowledging that recent online developments have heavily impacted the distribution business.[50] New online corporations as Netflix, Apple, Google, Microsoft and Amazon caused a change in the existing power dynamics.[51] Most importantly, these developments provide new opportunities for small-scale, stand-alone producers, because producers 'can retain control themselves over the distribution process and make films available without the intervention of sales agents and distributors.'[52]

Recent research has shown that Netflix and Amazon are the new online market leaders in Europe and the US.[53] They now exert control over distribution in today's film business, by operating as VOD platforms and by developing a film production and distribution branch.[54] Smits indicates that, with these new online platforms, there has been a shift in power control from the distribution organizations to the online corporations in the last decade.

With the growth of services like Netflix and Amazon into fully integrated studios, Smits wonders how the business of sales agents and distributors changed with these developments.[55] Here, Smits mentions that with all the changes that happened within film distribution, a new gatekeeper came to life:

> Content aggregators are online gatekeepers who aggregate large collections of films from rights holders (e.g. the producer, sales agents or distributor) in order to provide access for those films to VOD platforms. Given the fact some of the biggest VOD platforms work with enormous collections of films, they work with a group of selected distributors to acquire films, while they ask other companies to work with content aggregators. It is thus clear that content aggregators are a new type of gatekeeper in the business of distribution, playing an important role in the process of making films available online.[56]

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[49] Roderik Smits, *Gatekeeping in the Evolving Business of Independent Film Distribution* (Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 3
[50] Ibid., 4
[51] Ibid., 4
[52] Ibid., 4
[53] Ibid., 7
[54] Ibid., 7
[55] Ibid., 194
[56] Roderik Smits, *Gatekeeping in the Evolving Business of Independent Film Distribution* (Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 194

According to Smits, the upcoming market of online companies, and the role of the content aggregator, has an influence on the traditional gatekeeper roles. He explains that the sales agents actually benefit from the fact that services as Netflix and Amazon are prepared to pay substantial fees for distribution rights.[57] This is caused by a growing competition between traditional distributors and online distributors. Smits goes on explaining that 'while market competition is a serious issue for distributors, Netflix and Amazon work with sales agents and attend film festivals to watch new films and negotiate distribution deals'.[58] In that sense, the online platforms operate in the same way as traditional distributors. Another effect is that if more deals are closed with distributors with global distribution operations, such as Netflix and the Hollywood studios, that means that sales agents give more control away over the process of coordinating the release strategy in international market.'[59]

All in all, it can be said that the film industry deals with gatekeeping on a daily basis. Smits has demonstrated that sales agents and distributors have continued to play important gatekeeper roles, despite changes such as direct distribution and self-distribution. The online market might have developed and took over some control over the distribution process, but Smits research shows that it is still very challenging for them to take over the workload of distributors.[60]

Gatekeepers in Journalism

For the second example I take a close look at the field of news and journalism. For this, the book 'Gatewatching and News Curation: Journalism, Social Media, and the Public Sphere' by Alex Bruns is looked into.[61] This book thoroughly explains how influences, such as the growth of the internet and social media, have affected journalism. Since I believe that the online distribution of music will be a big factor in examining the gatekeepers of the music industry, I first want to see if I can find similar findings in journalism.

Bruns focus lies mostly in describing a transition from professional news to citizen news.[62] With this he describes the gatekeeping processes that take place now, where a lot of news is brought to the world by the audience themselves. In his words: 'more and more of the

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[57] Ibid., 195
[58] Ibid., 195
[59] Ibid., 198
[60] Ibid., 233
[61] This book was specifically chosen since it was written quiet recently, in 2018. For this reason, it connects to online trends and developments, something to be expected in the music industry as well.
[62] Bruns defines professional news as news from established news outlets and citizen news as non-journalists post articles.

small tidbits of news we encounter each day, are being conveyed through personal media'.[63] The switch from professional journalism to, what Bruns calls, 'citizen news'[64] did not come out of nowhere. In the late 1990s the do-it-yourself media ethos had risen up, since a deep distrust of the accuracy and objectivity of mainstream media was developed among readers of newspapers. Mainstream media was perceived as being too closely aligned with dominant political and corporate interest.[65] This eventually led to the principle of 'open publishing on a website called *Indymedia*, where there was no gatekeeping and no editorial selection process. Citizen news meant that the participants were free to upload whatever they choose, from articles to reports to announcements and appeals for equipment or advice'.[66] The example of *Indymedia* is interesting, since concepts like this occur in the music industry as well (for example YouTube and Spotify where anyone can upload their own content).

It might not be a surprise that the growth of the internet caused changes within the traditional news organizations. Bruns explains that citizen journalism challenged the role of mainstream journalists, editors, and outlets as news gatekeepers. He continues by saying that:

> Editors and news directors might still be minding gates for their organizations, but so many gates exist that one or two – or even a hundred – closed gates will not prevent information from being published. There will always be an open gate somewhere.[67]

There is a similar tendency in the music industry. Nowadays, anyone can put their music on a website (or platform like YouTube), without being interfered by an organization such as a record label. With the rise of online music platforms, more gates open.

Bruns explains that for journalism, it means that the mainstream journalists were no longer the only ones publishing news and a different view on gatekeeping was needed. With this in mind, Bruns introduced a new term: gatewatching. Gatewatching can be defined as 'the continuous observation of material that passes through the output gates of news outlets and

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[63] Axel Bruns, *Gatewatching and news curation: journalism, social media, and the public sphere* (New York: Peter Lang, 2018), 36

[64] Ibid., 20: Bruns defines citizen news as a number of attributes which make it distinct from professional journalism, including unpaid work, absence of professional training, and often unedited publication of content, and may feature plain language, distinct story selection and news judgment, … free accessibility and interactivity.

[65] Ibid., 20

[66] Ibid., 22

[67] Ibid., 26

other sources, in order to identify relevant such material for publication in the gatewatcher's own site.'[68]

The increase of influence by the internet did not stop. With the rise of social media platforms, the role of professional news media changed again and still is subject to change. Bruns explains that 'with the growing centrality of social media as platforms for all forms of news engagement, the existential question of a decade ago 'who is a journalist?' has been replaced with 'who is a publisher?'.[69] One answer to this has to be *Facebook* and *Twitter,* and many more social media spaces through which journalism and news engagement is being conducted in the contemporary media environment.[70] It is a complicated matter, which is not easy to put into a fixed model of gatekeeping. For this reason, Bruns pleads for the following:

> Our ability to fully understand the multifaceted and dynamic news environment within which we now operate will continue to be restricted if we continue to apply categorical distinctions between industrial news production and individual news consumption, between professional and citizen journalism, between private and public engagement, that have now outlived their usefulness. We must instead come to regard news as a networked practice involving a wide variety of stakeholders interacting simultaneously, through a broad range of platforms, channels, formats, and communicative acts.[71]

I believe that Bruns' view is one to take into account when looking at the music industry, since Bruns indicates that gatekeeping networks within the news sector are always changing, and, in contrast to before the digital developments, it is no longer possible to make fixed distinctions between who or what is a gatekeeper and who or what is not. All the networks need to operate together in order to keep the news flow organized. As discussed in the following chapter, the music industry deals with some of the same issues, such as an ever-changing sector and digital developments.

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[68] Axel Bruns, *Gatewatching and news curation: journalism, social media, and the public sphere* (New York: Peter Lang, 2018), 27
[69] Ibid., 369
[70] Ibid., 370
[71] Ibid., 370-371

Chapter 3: Gatekeeping and the A&R manager

By analyzing gatekeeping in the film and news industry, the dynamic nature of gatekeeping is emphasized. In this chapter I focus on gatekeeping within the music industry, with a specific focus on the A&R manager. I start by defining what an A&R manager is and what its tasks are within a record label. Next, I shortly describe the evolution of the role of the A&R manager within the music industry.

The A&R manager

First of all, A&R stands short for artist and repertoire. This is a division of a record label that is, according to Richard Strasser, responsible for the discovery and development of new talent.[72] In Richard Strassers' opinion the principal responsibility of the A&R department is twofold: 'the discovery of talented artists for a record label and the discovery of repertoire for the label's artists to record.'[73] Essentially, the managers that work at an A&R department scout both new and already established talent. Since the established artists are often under contract at other record labels, this requires negotiations between labels.[74] Strasser continues by explaining that 'both roles require the department to negotiate contractual relationships between all parties, schedule recording sessions, and acquire publishing contracts with the record label's affiliated publishing company or independent publishing companies'.[75] Not only is the A&R department responsible for scouting and coaching new talent, it also supervises various administrative activities, such as planning and monitoring budgets (like studio costs, talent costs and expenses as lodging and travel).[76] So, the A&R department, and thus A&R managers, mainly work directly with the artists. They scout new talent, coach them and make efforts into helping the artist develop the best they can.

The Evolution of the A&R Manager

Reviewing the traditional role of an A&R manager throughout the last decades will show how much this role has changed, especially since the rise of the internet.[77] When looking at

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[72] Richard Strasser. *Music Business: the key concepts* (London and New York: Routledge, 2010), 14
[73] Ibid., 14
[74] Ibid., 14
[75] Ibid., 14
[76] Ibid., 14
[77] Jake Udell. 'Evolution of the A&R', artofthemanager.com, accessed on 22 May 2020, https://artofamanager.com/2018/03/evolution-of-the-ar/

Strassers' definition of the A&R manager, it becomes clear that its role is inextricably linked to the recording industry. Records were invented by Thomas Edison in 1877 and were originally called phonographs.[78] The development of phonographs over the next few decades ushered in the first record companies, with Columbia Records[79] being the first to record discs who saw commercial value and market potential. Although phonograph records existed since the 1880's, for the first 50 years the album and Long-Playing record format (LP) did not exist commercially.[80] In the 1950's, however, the phonograph record found more success. This was thanks to technological developments in recording, sound reproduction and the growth of national radio broadcasting.[81] It is said that the A&R manager found its origin and was most evident during this period, since there was a significant increase of the number of artists who signed to a major record label.[82] During this period it was often the case that A&R managers were also record producers and either worked or were hired by record labels to work with their artists on composing, arranging, recording and producing their music.[83] Throughout the 1960's A&R's focused more on signing artists that could write their own songs, rather than seeking songs for their performers.[84]

In 1964, Stuart Hall and Paddy Whannel said that the A&R man, 'really is the record producer, who puts the singer and his manager in touch with the media through the disc company. In other words: they were very influential during the entire process of bringing the music from the artists to the audience. The A&R selects the artists and the song, decides the style, length, and accompanying group as well as the place for recording. His role is vital, for he exercises a real power of choice over what material gets recorded.'[85] Here, Hall and Whannel, state clearly that the A&R manager had some sort of power in deciding which music reaches the audience and which does not. They continue by explaining that: 'a song can be recorded many times until it sounds just right to the A&R man's ear, if necessary a good first chorus can be spliced with a good second chorus from a different take to make the perfect

[78] Parlesc, 'The History of A&R', musickite.wordpress.com, accessed on 7 July 2020, https://musickite.wordpress.com/2014/04/14/the-history-of-ar/

[79] Columbia Records is an American flagship recording label. It was founded in 1888 and was the first record company to produce recorded records as opposed to blank cylinders. Columbia Records went on to release records by an array of notable singers, instrumentalists and bands and still operates today under the ownership of Sony Music Entertainment.

[80] Parlesc, 'The History of A&R', musickite.wordpress.com, accessed on 7 July 2020, https://musickite.wordpress.com/2014/04/14/the-history-of-ar

[81] Ibid: Parlesc

[82] Ibid: Parlesc

[83] Ibid: Parlesc

[84] Ibid: Parlesc

[85] Simon Frith and Andrew Goodwin. *On Record.* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), 29

record.'[86] This illustrates that the A&R manager in the 1960s was in a powerful position, making a lot of decisions for the artists.

According to Jake Udell, the music industry skyrocketed in the 80's and 90's and producers and marketing departments took over some of the artist development roles. Since then A&R's became more and more focused on scouting and signing new talent.[87] But as the internet birthed piracy and the sales of CD's went down and revenue declined, labels had to cut artist development budgets at the end of the 90's. Around this period, online developments continued and the introduction of social media in the early 2000's changed everything even more. Udell says that 'for the first time ever, artists were able to speak directly to their fans however and whenever they saw it'.[88] With the industry on the rise and the online developments, labels are doubling down and re-designing, and in some cases re-building, their infrastructure 'to support the A&R efforts needed to consistently break artists'.[89] This re-building meant that A&R's were still responsible for signing talented artists with growing audiences, but with more music coming out, they also have to differentiate their artists to become the signal in the noise. A&R's now need to provide the insight and connections to throw fuel on the fire the artist has lit.[90] Udell mentions that: 'Previously, other than setting up key collaborations or finding the right song for the artist to cut, the above activities were usually reserved for marketing departments, whereas over the past couple years, the most flexible labels and smartest A&R's have become great marketers themselves.'[91] Here, Udell mentions an important change in the role of the A&R manager since the rise of the internet. This changed role returns during the interviews in the following chapter.

Also Zwaan and Ter Bogt (2009) agree that the Internet changed the role between artists and music professionals. They say that: 'the Internet has been described as a democratizing medium, in that it enables musicians to bypass the 'middle-men' of the record industry and reach audiences directly'.[92] Record labels, however, were still needed to promote and market these artists further.[93] Zwaan and Ter Bogt state that: 'Record companies still occupy a central position, as they have the ability to boost a musician's career by financing album recordings, enhancing access to national media and securing national distribution. The oversupply of

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[86] Ibid., 29
[87] Ibid: Udell
[88] Ibid: Udell
[89] Ibid: Udell
[90] Ibid: Udell
[91] Ibid: Udell
[92] Koos Zwaan and Tom F.M. ter Bogt. *Breaking into the Popular Record Industry: An Insider's View on the Career Entry of Pop Musicians.* (Sage Journals: 2009), 90
[93] This means that 'the bargaining power of the 'offline record companies is still largely intact'

aspiring artists forces record companies to make selections, and the A&R manager plays an important role in deciding who will be signed'.[94]

What both Zwaan and Ter Bogt and Udell say here is interesting, since they point out that, although Internet has had an influence, the A&R manager still maintains its role as gatekeeper, since they are the ones deciding which artists are signed to the label or not. This means that according to Zwaan and Ter Bogt, the A&R manager still maintains a vital position within the gatekeeping chain. Udell agrees that there will always be a need for great record-making A&R's 'as there is nothing more important than hit records.'[95]. Since brand development and the use of social media is becoming essential to achieve hit acts and their record, the new emerging lane of A&R's also fulfills the role of directors, photographers and social media stars.[96] Udell: 'They create media complementing the artist's vision and create community around them. In the process, these creatives add tremendous value to the musician's brand and shape the public's perception of the artist.'[97]

According to Udell, the labels, and A&R's are beginning to understand the importance of building the creative community around the artists.[98] Therefore, the focus shifts from creating and picking the best songs for the artist, to building a community for the artists. Although the main tasks within the function of the A&R manager, signing and developing artists, are still part of the task package, the way they fulfill these tasks have, according to Udell, changed drastically.

But is this really the case? Do A&R managers really fulfil a role as marketeers, since the online developments and is this also currently happening in the Dutch music industry? In the next chapter, Dutch music professionals will elaborate on their view of the position of the A&R manager and its possibly changed position as a gatekeeper.

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[94] Ibid., 91
[95] Jake Udell. 'Evolution of the A&R', artofthemanager.com, accessed on 22 May 2020, https://artofamanager.com/2018/03/evolution-of-the-ar/
[96] Ibid: Udell
[97] Ibid: Udell
[98] Ibid: Udell

Chapter 4: Music Professionals on Gatekeeping

Up until now, I have looked at the original gatekeeping theory, how this theory has been used in other fields than communication and how we can understand gatekeeping within the field of music, by zooming in on the A&R manager as a gatekeeper. But how can we apply this to the present? How do music professionals look at gatekeeping within the Dutch music industry? How do power relations, and gatekeeping, work in the field according to them? Most importantly: Do they think that the A&R manager is still an important gatekeeper nowadays, and if not: who is? To find an answer to these questions, I spoke with seven music professionals working in the Dutch music industry[99].

I chose to speak with these specific people and their respective functions, because they represent the music industry as a whole. When, metaphorically, making a pie of the music industry and looking at who determines which music reaches the consumer, you will end up with these respondents. They contribute to bringing the music from the artist to the audience. It is a mix of professionals working at radio stations, major streaming platforms, pop venues, record labels and booking agencies. The all-round approach of this qualitative research is necessary to get a broad perspective of how the role of the A&R manager is seen within the music industry. Furthermore, each professional has its own view on gatekeeping, coming from a different area in the field and each with many years of experience. For this reason, seven interviews obtain enough data to answer the main research question.[100]

The interviews are analyzed through the method of coding, more specifically, grounded theory.[101] Therefore, I start this chapter by shortly explaining this approach. Second, I share a few short remarks about the interviews. Lastly, I interpret he results found through coding and explain my findings.

Grounded Theory

My data consists of seven semi-structured, in-depth interviews with an average length of 45 minutes. Appendix A contains an overview of the respondents' backgrounds. The blueprint for the interviews included questions about the respondent's definition of an A&R manager, their

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[99] See Appendix A for more information about the respondents.

[100] In the further research section I make several recommendations about how to improve the interviews to explore this topic further and more extensively.

[101] Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin. *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory*. (California, Sage: Thousand Oaks, 1998)

view on streaming services, as well as their overall view on gatekeeping within the Dutch music industry.[102] In the interviews I chose to work with several theses[103] and all of the interviews were recorded and transcribed.[104] The method of analysis is based on the method of grounded theory as described by Strauss and Corbin (1998).[105] The reason I specifically chose this method is because it helps explore the inner experiences of participants, it helps explore how opinions are formed and transformed, and most importantly for this research: it helps to explore areas that are not yet thoroughly researched.[106] Since the music industry, and therefore its gatekeepers, changes constantly, grounded research can help identify certain patterns within gatekeeping that are not researched yet. Besides, grounded theory offers explanations for why events or happenings occur.[107] By using grounded theory to analyze the interviews, this method does not only give an answer to the question if the A&R manager is still a gatekeeper, it also tells us the reasons why. In this way, grounded theory aims at constructing a theory from data[108], which in this research means that the gained knowledge from analyzing, results in an overview of how gatekeeping works in the Dutch music industry nowadays.

During the first phase of my analysis, open coding, text fragments were (manually) given codes to identify the main theme.[109] In the second phase, axial coding, the coded segments were compared both within and between interviews and connections between different codes were established, also known as the focused coding.[110] The third phase, selective coding, consisted of producing a full description of these connections and the respondent's indication for my research question.[111]

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[102] For the interviews I created a basic list with theses to ask the respondents. Depending on how the expert responded, this list was either followed, or further questions were asked to create more clarity. For an example of the theses list, see Appendix B. Please note: since the interviews were with Dutch speaking respondents, all transcriptions and theses are in Dutch.

[103] The approach of using theses was consciously chosen, in order to challenge and provoke the respondents slightly. Through these theses I had the opportunity to find out their personal opinion, and not simply the opinion within their job's position of what they were expected to answer.

[104] For privacy reasons the transcriptions of the interviews will not be added as an appendix in this thesis. If you wish to have access to the transcriptions, please contact the author. Please note: since the interviews were with Dutch speaking respondents, all transcriptions are in Dutch. During the analysis, the codes were translated to English.

[105] Strauss and Corbin say that: 'Grounded theory is a form of qualitative research developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) for the purpose of constructing theory grounded in data'. To continue: 'It allows for identification of general concepts, the development of theoretical explanations that reach beyond the know and offers new insights into a variety of experiences and phenomena'.

[106] Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin. *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory*. (California, Sage: Thousand Oaks, 1998), 5

[107] Ibid., 12

[108] Ibid., 15

[109] See Appendix C for a complete overview of all open codes used in the first phase of the coding process.

[110] Stephen D Lapan, Marylynn T. Quartaroli, e.a. *Qualitative research: an introduction to methods and designs.* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2012), 42-43

[111] Ibid., 42-43

One thing to acknowledge is that during the interviews the word 'power' was used multiple times. For example: An A&R manager has more 'power' than a booker. Within many fields of research, the word power has been a call for problems, and often comes with a negative connotation.[112] However, when talking about gatekeeping, looking at the concept of power is almost unavoidable. One gatekeeper simply exerts more power, or makes more important decisions than the other when it comes to bringing the product from the maker to the consumer.[113] For this analysis, I refer to power as explained by French postmodernist Michel Foucault.[114] Foucault uses the term ''power/knowledge' to signify that power is constituted through accepted forms of knowledge, scientific understanding and truth.'[115] To continue, Foucault says that 'we must cease once and for all to describe the effects of power in negative terms.'[116] Instead of the negative connotation, we must look at power as if in fact 'power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth.'[117] Therefore, by using the word power in the interviews and analysis, the purpose is to gain a closer look at how the respondents look at certain power relations within the music industry and thus have influence on the processes.

Results

Although a lot of other themes emerged from the data, I made a selection during the *focused coding*, from which thirteen categories emerged[118]. Within these categories I made a distinction between respondents with an A&R background and respondents without an A&R background. I made this distinction since I am working with data that includes personal opinions and personal experiences as an A&R manager, by Ingmar Persson described as 'the bias towards oneself'.[119][120] Table 1 provides an overview of the frequency at which these codes occurred

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[112] Michel Foucault *Discipline and Punish: the birth of a prison* (London: Penguin, 1991), 194

[113] Pamela J. Shoemaker and Tim P. Vos, *Gatekeeping Theory* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 63

[114] Foucault was one of the few writers on power who recognized that 'power is not just a negative, coercive or repressive thing that forces us to do things against our wishes, but can also be a necessary, productive and positive force in society' - John Gaventa, *Power after Lukes: a review of the literature* (Brighton: Institute of Development Studies, 2003)

[115] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: The Will to Knowledge* (London: Penguin, 1998), 63

[116] Michel Foucault *Discipline and Punish: the birth of a prison* (London: Penguin, 1991), 194

[117] Ibid., 194

[118] See Appendix C for an overview of how the categories were formed.

[119] Ingmar Persson. *The Retreat of Reason: A dilemma in the philosophy of life.* (Oxford Scholarship Online: 2006), 1

[120] Persson mentions that the central element of bias towards oneself is one of self-concern and self-approval. Since the focus of this research lays on the A&R manager, the bias of the respondents with a background as an A&R manager must be taken into consideration during the analysis.

from the various perspectives and added up as a total. For each category I will explain what it means and how they relate to the concept of gatekeeping.

Category	With A&R Background	Without A&R Background	Total (All Respondents)
Multiple Gatekeepers	10,2%	25,7%	16,9%
Streaming Services as Gatekeeper	19,1%	10,0%	16,7%
A&R Manager as Gatekeeper	14,5%	16,7%	15,3%
Changed Music Industry (Fragmentation)	15,5%	14,3%	14,0%
Modern Artist Independent	13,2%	14,3%	13,5%
Changed Role of A&R Manager	10,9%	5,0%	7,8%
Importance of Data	5,9%	3,0%	4,4%
No One (in the industry) is Gatekeeping	3,0%	3,3%	3,7%
Unimportance of A&R Manager	4,3%	2,0%	3,1%
Unimportance of Streaming Services	2,3%	1,3%	1,8%
Negative Effect of Streaming	0,3%	2,3%	1,3%
Unimportance of Data	0,3%	1,3%	0,8%
Bookers Not Important	0,7%	0,7%	0,7%

Table 1: The frequency in which categories occur in the analyzed data, expressed as percentage. The percentage indicates the times the respondents mentioned a certain category. For example: there are 1000 pieces of coded text in total. 100 of these pieces belong to the category 'multiple gatekeepers'. This means that the respondents mentioned this category 100 times in total during the interviews, or when expressed in a percentage, 10%.[121]

Multiple gatekeepers

In the category 'multiple gatekeepers' all respondents agree that the role of a gatekeeper can be filled in by many positions. The respondents particularly mentioned: the importance of bookers, managers, programmers, publishers, the live music industry, showcase festivals and radio. This illustrates the importance of people who have a gatekeeping role, other than the A&R manager. As earlier noted by Hall and Whannel, before the rise of the internet, the record labels and the A&R manager were seen as very influential.[122] According to the respondents, the roles are now more divided. One of the respondents, Léon Happé, explains that:

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[121] See Appendix D for an overview of all used codes with the total times they were mentioned, including the percentages. Furthermore, Appendix C provides an overview of which codes were used in each category.
[122] Simon Frith and Andrew Goodwin. *On Record.* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), 29

In the past, artists depended enormously on a record company to release their music. That has of course changed. I think that this has created more of a situation of partnership instead of facing each other. Or that there is a certain balance of power at least. I think the power relationship no longer exists.[123][124]

With this, Happé says that there is more balance between the gatekeepers, where one is not necessarily more important than the other. Wilbert Mutsaers agrees by saying that:

As the world has now developed, also with the advent of streaming, gatekeeping has to be seen in a different light... the model has changed... power is divided between everyone nowadays.[125]

In the gatekeeping theory, Shoemaker earlier mentioned that all gatekeepers make decisions, but they have varying degrees of autonomy.[126] As Happé and Mutsaers mention, they think that this degree of autonomy has decreased, and people are working together more than ever in the music industry. The importance of working together is discussed further in the category 'Changed music industry'. Although, the respondents say there is less autonomy, it is interesting that the role of the booker as gatekeeper, was frequently mentioned in particular.[127] The live music industry has grown since artists have put more emphasis on touring and concerts to make money.[128] Besides, it has become of more importance for artists to make money, since the sale of the physical product has declined[129]Therefore, all respondents agree that having a booker is important, since a booker can make sure an artist actually has a stage to perform on.[130] Mutsaers emphasizes this need as follows:

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[123] Interview Léon Happé.
[124] Note: all quotes used in this research were originally in Dutch. For the purpose of this research they were translated to English.
[125] Interview Wilbert Mutsaers
[126] Pamela J. Shoemaker, Tim P. Vos and Stephen D. Reese. 'Journalists as Gatekeepers' in *The Handbook of Journalism Studies* (New York and London: Routledge, 2009), 74
[127] See Appendix D: Overview of all used Codes with Percentages
[128] Clive Young. 'Concert Industry Continues Growth in 2020', prosoundnetwork.com, accessed on 12 June 2020, https://www.prosoundnetwork.com/live/concert-industry-continues-growth-in-2020
[129] Clive Young. 'Concert Industry Continues Growth in 2020', prosoundnetwork.com, accessed on 12 June 2020, https://www.prosoundnetwork.com/live/concert-industry-continues-growth-in-
[130] Interview Kim Bloem

Sure, most artists need a booker ... how do you know as an artist where you should and shouldn't play? How does exclusivity work? Don't throw in your own glasses by playing just near a town, where they have a big festival in summer. A booker has that knowledge beforehand.[131]

In line with the importance of bookers is the percentage of the category 'bookers not important' The low percentage (0,7%) indicates that the respondents think that bookers actually are very important. Therefore, a booker fulfills a vital position and functions as a gatekeeper in getting the artist on a stage, since 'they negotiate contracts for live performances and basically make sure the wheels of show turn smoothly'.[132]

Streaming Services as Gatekeeper[133]

In table 1, topics in the category 'streaming services as gatekeepers' (16,7%) were mentioned almost as much as 'multiple gatekeepers' (16,9%). Codes that fall into this category include: the importance of YouTube, Spotify, playlist curators and online platforms and streaming in the broadest sense. The fact that the percentages lie this close together, indicates even more that the respondents talk about multiple gatekeepers, of which streaming services are one. The rise of streaming services, such as Spotify, have dominated the music industry for several years now.[134] As mentioned by Peter Robinson in the Guardian: 'times have changed: in a landscape dominated by services such as Spotify, Apple Music, Tidal and Amazon, it is possible to have a hit without the press and radio (or much of the public) even noticing you.'[135] Singer Kiiara, for example, had a global hit (Gold), off the back of 312 million streams on Spotify alone.[136] Michiel Veenstra agrees that Spotify is a big player within the streaming services:

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[131] Interview Wilbert Mutsaers

[132] Heather McDonald. 'Learn what the role of a music agent is', thebalancecareers.com, accessed on 13 June 2020, https://www.thebalancecareers.com/music-agent-2460883

[133] The category 'unimportance of streaming services' is in line with the category 'streaming services as gatekeeper'. Only 1,8% of the respondents mention that streaming services are unimportant, whereas 16,7% mention they play a large role as gatekeeper. This indicates that streaming services have an important position within the current music industry.

[134] Pwc. 'Playing Field', pwc.nl, accessed on 12 June 2020, https://www.pwc.nl/en/industries/entertainment-media/entertainment-and-media-outlook-for-the-netherlands/music.html

[135] Peter Robinson. 'Streams ahead: the artists who made it huge without radio support', theguardian.com, accessed on 12 June 2020, https://www.theguardian.com/music/2016/dec/01/artists-made-it-huge-streaming-spotify-apple-music

[136] Ibid: Robinson

Well, I think a really large gatekeeper is Spotify. Because it contains the largest number of streaming listeners in the Netherlands by far. And Spotify modified the algorithm a few years ago so that their own playlists always come first in search results. If you open it, you will never find my playlist at the top. Everything in Spotify playlists is determined by maybe two or three people in the Netherlands. They make those playlists. Therefore, they have a very important gatekeeper role in the Netherlands.[137]

Specifically, the mention of the makers of Spotify playlists is noteworthy here. These so-called 'playlist curators' were called influential several times among the respondents. Also noticeable is that respondents with an A&R background allocate 'streaming services as gatekeepers' as the largest category. There are several explanations for this: the first being that the A&R managers experienced the emergence of streaming platforms up close, since it changed the recording industry (and thus the job of A&R managers and record labels).[138] And secondly: Since, the A&R's work for a record label, they are often in contact with streaming services, since they deliver the music directly to these platforms.

A&R Manager as Gatekeeper

Although all respondents spoke more about multiple gatekeepers or streaming services, they all agree that the A&R manager still has an important position as gatekeeper (15,3%). As discussed earlier Hall and Whannel mentioned that the role of the A&R manager was vital, before the rise of the internet, since an A&R manager exercised a real power of choice over what material got recorded.[139] The data provides evidence to support that the role of the A&R manager is still important nowadays. The respondents mention that streaming might have had an impact on the role of the A&R manager, but its position is still vital. In this category, the position of the A&R manager was linked to the importance of record labels, since, according to Strasser, A&R is a division of a record label.[140] Important to mention is that the code 'the importance of record labels; was mentioned the most in all interviews.[141] Joey Ruchtie said the following about the position of the A&R manager in the music industry nowadays:

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[137] Interview Michiel Veenstra
[138] Media update. 'How streaming changed the music industry', mediaupdate.co, accessed on 12 June 2020, https://www.mediaupdate.co.za/media/147338/how-streaming-changed-the-music-industry
[139] Simon Frith and Andrew Goodwin. *On Record.* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), 29
[140] Richard Strasser. *Music Business: the key concepts* (London and New York: Routledge, 2010), 14
[141] See Appendix D

> I think the final choices are still determined by the artist and his A&R manager, but I think they do take the following into account: What does my consumer want? What does the distributor (streaming services) of my music want? [142]

With this, Ruchtie indicates that the A&R manager has adapted its job profile to the new reality of streaming and focuses on working together with other gatekeepers.

Although times have changed, Veenstra explains that A&R managers are still necessary when discovering new artists:

> There are still artists who are picked up at a very early stage (in their career) by an A&R manager of a label, such as during *Muzikantendag[143]* with a demo or during *Popronde[144]*. So, they get picked up before they have exposed themselves online.[145]

The results in this category tell that record labels, and therefore A&R managers, still maintain a vital gatekeeper position within the Dutch music industry.

Changed Music Industry (Fragmentation)

In the category 'changed music industry' (14,0%) topics such as: fragmentation of music industry, importance of working together, importance of network and transience of success were mentioned. The changed music industry was a topic that regularly came up in the interviews when talking about gatekeeping. The rise of streaming caused an increased competitive climate, especially online.[146] This competition and change forced the music industry to find new ways to work effectively. As seen in in the category 'multiple gatekeepers', all respondents agree that power is more divided, due to this fragmentation. As Ruud Lemmen says: 'It is not so much about talking about power, but it is a large system that works together, depends on each other'.[147] When talking about a changed music industry, Ruchtie mentioned the transience of success as a result of the rise of streaming. He explains:

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[142] Interview Joey Ruchtie
[143] *Muzikantendag* is an event in the Netherlands where musicians can meet professionals from the music industry.
[144] The *Popronde* is a travelling festival in the Netherlands, where talented Dutch bands can present themselves.
[145] Interview Michiel Veenstra
[146] Mike Masnick. 'Competititon in the music space is great: Fragmentation in the music space is dangerous', techdirt.com, accessed on 13 June 2020, https://www.techdirt.com/articles/20150330/17530530492/competition-music-space-is-great-fragmentation-music-space-is-dangerous.shtml
[147] Interview Ruud Lemmen

It's just completely different. Much more fragmented. This has to do with the fact that the gatekeeper function has shifted more to the public. It has become more democratic. People know very well what they like, and we work towards that, together.[148]

Modern Artist Independent

Another cause of a changed music industry is that the modern artist has become more independent (13,5%). There is no major difference between the respondents with (13,2%) and without an A&R background (14,3%). According to Rolling Stone, the independent artist sector keeps growing.[149] This mainly indicates that artists upload their own music to online platforms and produce their music in their home-built studios (the so-called 'do-it-yourself' mentality).[150] All respondents agree that there are currently other ways to fame than record labels. This results in a changed role for record labels. As Mutsaers explains:

> …That funding power of a publisher or a label. Sometimes you don't need it at all, because you just made it at home. I just passed a poster of NAAZ, she just made everything in her living room. Billie Eilish, also an extreme example, just made everything at home with a midi set. So that asset of a label to say: but you need us, no longer applies. Their role is now different than just financing.[151]

The respondents mention that artists have become more independent, this shows that there has been a shift in gatekeeping. Where artists before the rise of the internet mostly depended on record labels to bring their music to the audience[152], they now have the ability to do that themselves by, for example, uploading their music to online platforms.[153]

Changed Role of A&R Manager

When looking at gatekeeping, the respondents mentioned multiple times that the role of the A&R manager has changed. Noteworthy is that the percentage of respondents with an A&R

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[148] Interview Joey Ruchtie
[149] Tim Ingham. 'A new report says independent artists could generate more than 2$ Billion in 2020', rollingstone.com, accessed on 13 June 2020, https://www.rollingstone.com/pro/features/raine-group-independent-artists-2-billion-in-2020-967138/
[150] Ibid: Ingham.
[151] Interview Wilbert Mutsaers
[152] Patrik Wikström. 'The music industry in an age of digital distribution', bbvaopenmind.com, accessed on 13 June 2020, https://www.bbvaopenmind.com/en/articles/the-music-industry-in-an-age-of-digital-distribution/
[153] Ibid: Wikström

background (10,9%) is twice as high as the respondents without an A&R background (5,0%). This has to do with the fact that the respondents with an A&R background have experienced first-hand how their job has changed. Earlier I discussed the evolution of the A&R manager as described by Udell.[154] He mentioned that A&R's are still responsible for signing talented artists, but that A&R's now are more involved in the marketing process, since the online utterance has become more important.[155] Happé:

> The market has changed, the way of consuming has changed, so also how you approach the consumer, the fan, has changed. And because of that, for example, an entire release strategy has changed… We (record labels) are increasingly becoming a service company nowadays… Today the relationship is: you are partners. It's very simple: without us those artists are still there, but without those artists, we are not there. And that's the difference in that we need them more than they need us… I think that's a healthy ratio too. It also keeps us on our toes. We have to show our relevance time and time again to the artists.[156]

What Happé explains here is telling, since he gives an example of how the role of the A&R manager has changed over the years. Due to online developments and the fact that artists have become more independent, having a record label is no longer an artist's first priority.

Importance of Data and Unimportance of Data

With a shift to digital platforms, comes more access to data. Since the categories 'importance of data'(4,4%) and 'unimportance of data'(0,8%) are opposites, they are both discussed here. Looking at the percentages, it is clear that the respondents think that data is important. Numbers have long been a powerful tool in the music business (like album sales and the count of radio spins)[157], but with music consumption becoming digital, there is an ever-increasing amount of available information. More often, numbers are being used to discover potential breakout songs, help advance artists' careers, and even determine the sound of the music itself'[158]. Respondents with an A&R background (5,9%) specifically think that data is important, since it can help them

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[154] Jake Udell. 'Evolution of the A&R', artofthemanager.com, accessed on 22 May 2020, https://artofamanager.com/2018/03/evolution-of-the-ar/
[155] Ibid: Udell
[156] Interview Léon Happé
[157] Interview Léon Happé
[158] Shawn Setaro. 'How data is making hits and changing the music industry', complex.com, accessed on 13 June 2020, https://www.complex.com/music/2019/09/data-changing-music-industry

give better advice to artists.[159] But also, respondents without an A&R background use data, like Kim Bloem elaborates: 'I also occasionally get my information from Spotify. How often is someone streamed, in which region, all that sort of things. This data is important for me to estimate how many people are willing to buy a ticket'.[160]

No One (in the Industry) is Gatekeeping

The category 'no one (in the industry) is gatekeeping' (3,7%) refers to topics such as: the audience as gatekeeper and that gatekeeping is a gut feeling. This category mainly indicates that gatekeepers in the music industry are influenced by the opinions of the audience/consumers and therefore, the influence of gatekeepers has decreased. In the category 'changed music industry' I cited Ruchtie when he mentioned that the gatekeeper function has shifted more to the public.[161] However, before the music reaches the audience, gatekeepers are still necessary.[162] According to the respondents, the gatekeepers in the music industry adjust to the feedback of the audience more than ever.[163] For the A&R managers this means that they are more influenced by the opinion of the consumer. For example, when a song goes viral on YouTube or Spotify, and that artist is not signed to a label yet, an A&R manager might approach this artist to work together, since it is clear that the audience likes the song.[164] Therefore, the feedback of the audience can be seen as a social influence and now acts as a new way of talent scouting for the A&R manager.

Unimportance of A&R Manager

The category 'unimportance of the A&R manager' (3,1%) is the opposite of the category 'A&R manager as gatekeeper' (15,3%). These percentages tell that the role of the A&R manager might be less important than it used to be, but among the respondents the A&R manager is still seen as a gatekeeper. In the category 'changed role of A&R manager' I cited Happé when he mentioned that record labels, and thus A&R managers, are dependent on the artists and the trust

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[159] Interview Léon Happé
[160] Interview Kim Bloem
[161] Interview Joey Ruchtie
[162] Christopher Knab. 'Who's guarding the gate?', musicbizacademy.com, accessed on 13 June 2020, http://www.musicbizacademy.com/knab/articles/gatekeepers.htm
[163] Gabrielle Tutheridge. 'What is the role of gatekeeping journalist's in today's media environment?', medium.com, accessed on 13 June 2020, https://medium.com/@gabrielletutheridge/what-is-the-role-of-gatekeeping-journalists-in-today-s-media-environment-2034a30ba850
[164] Interview Léon Happé

of the artists in the record label.[165] This can be expressed differently by stating that the role of the A&R manager is unimportant in certain situations. As John van Luyn explains:

> A&R managers used to have a key position. If you had those against you, then it was not possible (to become successful)… it is not like that anymore… now it (talent scouting) goes a lot through streaming services, vlogs and blogs.[166]

Remarkable is that the percentage of the respondents with an A&R background is higher (4,3%). Therefore, they seem to confirm that their influence has decreased, whereas the other respondents (2,0%) see this differently.

Negative Effect of Streaming

The category 'negative effect of streaming' (1,3%) is closely related to the category 'unimportance of streaming services' since they both indicate a pessimistic take on streaming services. Interesting here is that the percentage of the respondents without an A&R background is evidently higher (2,3%). Lee Mcintosh explains that: 'the amount of time it takes for one persons' streams to count towards an album sale takes much longer than it would if the person went to the store and just purchased the album'[167]. When talking about negative effects, it mainly concerns the impact it has on data. Like Veenstra says:

> A lot of people, especially young urban people, who listen to hip-hop a lot, don't buy it. That's the reason it was always invisible in the Top 40.[168] When streaming came, that part was suddenly visible. In fact, because they are people who often do not buy but listen instead, it has a lot of streams. The record buyers are still the same people, but they may make less use of streaming. Those number are not visible in the data from streaming.[169]

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[165] Interview Léon Happé
[166] Interview John van Luyn
[167] Lee Mcintosh. 'The positive and negative impact of music streaming services', lyricallemonade.com, accessed on 13 June 2020, https://lyricallemonade.com/p/the-positive-and-negative-impact-of-music-streaming-services
[168] The Dutch Top 40 is a weekly chart with the most popular songs in that moment.
[169] Interview Michiel Veenstra

Chapter 5: Analysis

In the results of the interviews I made a distinction between the codes by dividing them into thirteen categories. In order to understand the entire gatekeeping network, I have included all relevant characteristics found in the data into these categories. In this chapter, I first discuss the results of all respondents, and after I look at the differences between the respondents with- and without an A&R background. By doing so, this chapter analyzes the interpretation of the interviews as a whole and answers the research question: *Is the traditional role of the A&R manager as gatekeeper still applicable to the present day?*

All Respondents

An important finding is that the respondents stated that in the live music industry, artists have a small chance of success without a booker. According to the respondents the reason that the role of the booker is now more important than ever, is due to the growth of the live music industry. That fact that the importance of a booker is stressed in the results, confirms that the music industry has changed. Therefore, the category 'changed music industry' substantiates the high percentage of the category 'multiple gatekeepers'. The respondents stated that power nowadays is much more divided. This division is apparent from the data, since it becomes clear that all categories are, in one way or another, linked to each other. This means that all networks and organizations within the music industry need to operate together in order to keep the gatekeeping network organized.[170] It's therefore not surprising that the largest category is 'multiple gatekeepers' (16,9%). This tells that all respondents agree that the role of a gatekeeper can be filled in by many positions, of which the booker is one of the most important ones.

The growth of the live music industry is not the only reason that the music industry has changed, and thus led to more gatekeepers than ever. The data shows that the rise of the internet and the streaming services, has led to a more fragmented music industry.[171] All respondents were clear that with this fragmentation of the music industry, the roles have become more divided and the degree of autonomy has decreased for all gatekeepers.[172]

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[170] This process was earlier mentioned by Bruns when he said that all the networks need to operate together in order to keep the (news) flow organized

[171] Mike Masnick. 'Competititon in the music space is great: Fragmentation in the music space is dangerous', techdirt.com, accessed on 13 June 2020, https://www.techdirt.com/articles/20150330/17530530492/competition-music-space-is-great-fragmentation-music-space-is-dangerous.shtml

[172] Shoemaker earlier said that all gatekeepers make decisions, but they have varying degrees of autonomy.

Especially the arrival of streaming as online development was mentioned as a game changer. Therefore, it is no surprise that the percentages of the categories 'multiple gatekeepers' (16,9%), 'streaming services as gatekeeper' (16,7%), and 'changed music industry' (14,0%), are among the most mentioned. The categories are a matter of cause and effect and build on one another.

However, it is interesting that the category 'A&R manager as gatekeeper' (15,3%) also belongs to the top 3. Earlier, Udell mentioned that the role of the A&R manager has changed.[173] Respondents agree that the tasks of the A&R manager have changed, as seen in the category 'changed role of A&R manager' (7,8%), but that the role of the A&R manager is still vital. About this changed role, Happé said: 'An artist doesn't need us (A&R managers) to make his music available… our existence is now based on development, promotion and marketing. Not so much distribution anymore.'[174] Although the role has changed, A&R managers are, nevertheless, still essential. Ruchtie mentioned about this that: 'A platform like Spotify does not make artists, it only gives them a stage. The A&R manager still maps out the career of an artist, at least in terms of songs and repertoire'.[175] Other respondents also mentioned that the network of an A&R manager is crucial when building an artist's career.

The data shows that A&R managers are still responsible for signing and developing artists, but the way they sign and develop these artists has changed. Hall and Whannel stated that in the 1960's, the A&R manager made a lot of decisions for the artists, like pairing them with the right producer. But since online platforms have become more important, the A&R managers cannot overlook the data coming from these platforms. Also, because of online developments, artists have become more independent. The process of recording and producing a record can now be done from one's own living room, the so-called do-it-yourself mentality. As a result, as Udell mentioned the role of the A&R manager is now more focused on marketing and service.[176] The A&R manager used to make most decisions for an artist, without their consent.[177] However, in the category 'changed role of the A&R manager', Happé explained that the market and the way of consuming has mutated. Because of this, the way you approach the consumer, the fan, has altered as well and the A&R manager had to respond to this

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[173] Jake Udell. 'Evolution of the A&R', artofthemanager.com, accessed on 22 May 2020, https://artofamanager.com/2018/03/evolution-of-the-ar/
[174] Interview Léon Happé.
[175] Interview Joey Ruchtie
[176] Jake Udell. 'Evolution of the A&R', artofthemanager.com, accessed on 22 May 2020, https://artofamanager.com/2018/03/evolution-of-the-ar
[177] Simon Frith and Andrew Goodwin. *On Record.* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), 29

development.[178] It is said that new talent used to come to the A&R manager, by for example sending demo's to a record label.[179] This meant that the A&R manager had the power to choose which demo he liked best and sign that artist to the label to build its career. Nowadays demos have almost vanished from the A&R managers desk.[180]

These results show that the process of talent scouting is different than before, since the A&R manager usually comes into play later for an artist. This is due to the fact that artists are now capable of putting their music online without interference of a record label or an entire team behind them.[181]. The A&R manager, however, still plays a part in scouting new talent, albeit he finds the talent often via streaming services, instead of listening to piles of demos.

When looking at the data, it sheds light on the changed role of the A&R manager. From the interviews, I conclude that A&R managers are now mainly involved in career building and career shaping, while talent scouting and producing records has moved more to the background. The focus now lies on creating what is already floating on social media or streaming platforms. The position of the A&R manager also includes many more skills nowadays. Where the A&R manager first mainly took care of artists signing, talent scouting and assessing what the market wanted to hear, the A&R now has to take the entire fragmented market into account. This means that the A&R manager has to contribute to the (political) vision and identity of an artists, that goes beyond his musical sound.

Even though the tasks and the way the A&R manager works have changed, he still maintains a vital gatekeeper position within the Dutch music industry. This is substantiated by the high percentage that the role of the record labels was called important by the respondents (9,1%).[182] This shows the importance of working together and the network a record label has. All respondents agree that, despite the rise of streaming services, it is hard to imagine a music industry without record labels and A&R managers.

A&R versus non-A&R

As mentioned earlier, I made a distinction between respondents with an A&R background and respondents without an A&R background. I made this distinction since the interviews obtain

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[178] Interview Léon Happé
[179] Interview Léon Happé
[180] Interview Wilbert Mutsaers
[181] Peter Robinson. 'Streams ahead: the artists who made it huge without radio support', theguardian.com, accessed on 12 June 2020, https://www.theguardian.com/music/2016/dec/01/artists-made-it-huge-streaming-spotify-apple-music
[182] See Appendix D

subjective views and personal experiences, also called 'the bias towards oneself'.[183] In the previous section I discussed the results when looking at the data from all respondents. In this section I shortly point out interesting differences between the respondents with or without an A&R background.[184]

First of all, it is striking that respondents without an A&R background mentioned the category 'multiple gatekeepers' the most with 25,7%, where the percentage of the respondents with an A&R background is only 10,2%. This difference can be attributed to the fact that respondents without an A&R background are employed in the positions of these multiple gatekeepers and have experience working with all these different gatekeepers. It can also mean that the 'bias towards oneself' might apply to them, since they have their own experience in being such a gatekeeper.

Another remarkable difference is that the respondents with an A&R background (19,1%) think that streaming services play a larger role as gatekeepers than the respondents without an A&R background (10,0%). As I explained earlier, the tasks of an A&R manager have changed, mainly due to the rise of streaming services. A&R managers work closely together with streaming services, by not only managing to get an artist in a certain playlist, but also to scout new talent. This explains that streaming services are of more value for the respondents with an A&R background.

Last, it is telling that the percentages of the respondents in the category 'A&R manager as gatekeeper', with (14,5%) or without an A&R background (16,7%) lie close to each other. This means that all respondents agree that A&R managers are gatekeepers. Noteworthy, however, is that the percentage of respondents without an A&R background lies slightly higher. This means that the respondents without an A&R background see the A&R managers more as a gatekeeper then they do themselves.

New Gatekeepers

From the data of the interviews it is clear that the gatekeeping system in the Netherlands has evolved over the years. There is now a more fragmented system of gatekeepers where there are no clear frameworks. Instead the emphasis lies on the network of all music professionals working together. Due to online developments A&R managers now focus more on career building than on signing and talent scouting, proving that the traditional role of the A&R

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[183] Ingmar Persson. *The Retreat of Reason: A dilemma in the philosophy of life.* (Oxford Scholarship Online: 2006), 1
[184] See Appendix E for the data of both categories

manager as gatekeeper is not applicable to the present day anymore. However, this does not say that the A&R manager is not a gatekeeper at all. The data shows that the A&R manager still has a position in the gatekeeping system, but there has been a power shift from the record labels to the streaming services.

Due to this changed music industry, new gatekeepers have arrived. When looking at the diagram by Knab[185] he puts the role of the record label, and thus the A&R manager, right beneath the artist and its (self-)management. The role of streaming services as gatekeepers is missing. Besides, Knab puts the booking agents almost at the bottom of the chain. As seen in the analysis, the role of the booker has become of more importance, since the artist can upload their own music to a streaming service. This means that an artist no longer needs a record label first to play live in front of an audience. Another new gatekeeper that was mentioned is the playlist curator. Streaming services have a large market share within the music industry and are functioning as a gate to a large audience/the consumer. When a playlist curator from for example Spotify adds your song to one of their playlists, it is guaranteed that your song will be heard by many.[186] Therefore, they exert power within the gatekeeping system.

Based on these findings and taking the diagram from Knab as an example, I suggest a new gatekeeping system when looking at gatekeepers within the Dutch music industry. This diagram (see figure 3) presents a more dynamic perspective on the gatekeeping theory, where certain 'gates' are optional and different routes are possible. It shows that an artist has multiple options to get their music to the audience. Besides, online platforms are added, and the booker has a more prominent position.

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[185] Christopher Knab. 'Who's guarding the gate?', musicbizacademy.com, accessed on 13 June 2020, http://www.musicbizacademy.com/knab/articles/gatekeepers.htm
[186] Interview Wilbert Mutsaers

ARTIST

gets or becomes a | gets picked up by | uploads music to | contacts a

MANAGER
Either self-management or professional-management

Helps you get signed at:

Can put you in contact with:

RECORD LABELS
This includes positions such as: A&R managers, marketeers, data-analists and promotors

has connections with

ONLINE PLATFORMS
(Such as Spotify, Apple Music and YouTube)

Playlist curator can create more exposure of your music to:

BOOKER

Attempts to secure live performances (via programmers)

sends songs to:

PRESS
RADIO/TV/ONLINE
DISTRIBUTORS
RETAIL STORES

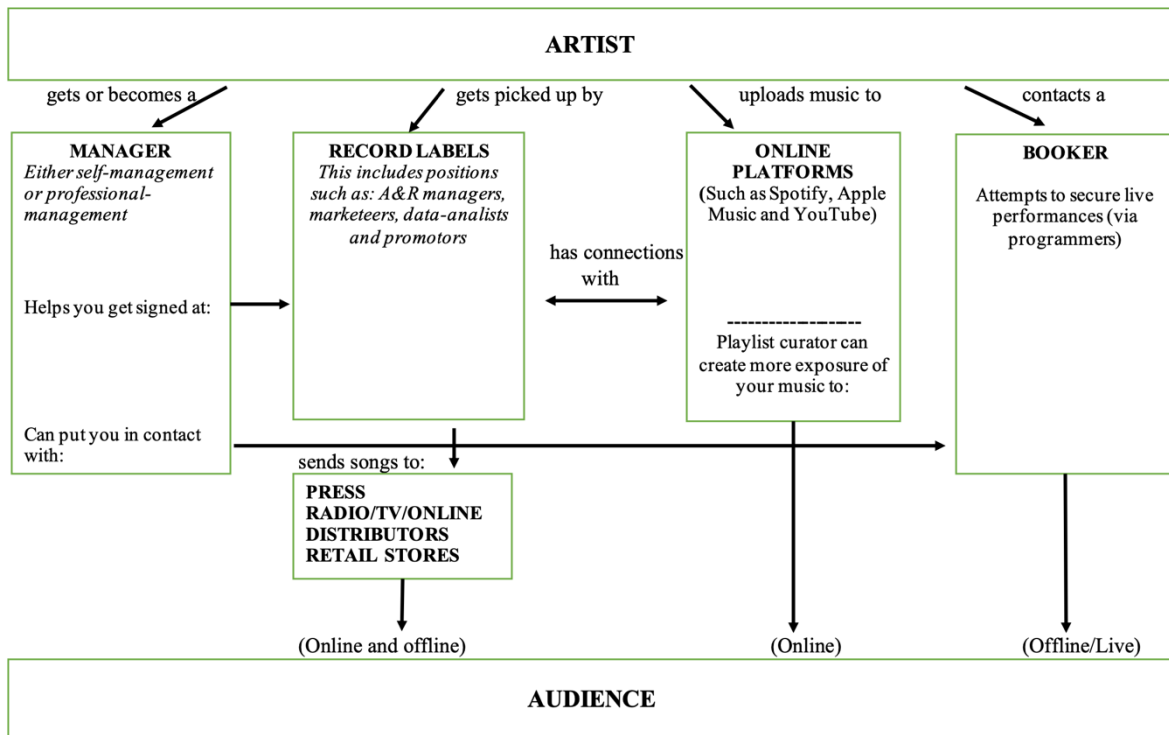(Online and offline) | (Online) | (Offline/Live)

AUDIENCE

Figure 3: A new gatekeeping theory for the Dutch music industry. The bold words indicate the gatekeepers and the arrows indicate which gatekeepers are connected to each other.

Conclusion

When talking about gatekeeping in the music industry, it is clear that power relations are constantly shifting and rapidly changing. I started this research by discussing the gatekeeping theory by Shoemaker and Vos. They explained that a gatekeeper stands between the industry and its consumers, deciding which products will be recommended or publicized to the public.[187] The examples of the film industry and journalism showed that within each field the traditional role of gatekeeper is connected to a certain function or job position within an organization. In the film industry the sales agents and distributor fulfill the traditional role of the gatekeeper and within news curation and journalism, the role mainly applied to the journalist himself. It has been said that the A&R manager took this role in the music industry.[188] From analyzing the researches by Smits and Bruns, it is clear that record labels and film distribution organizations traditionally fulfill the same role within the concept of gatekeeping. Film distribution organizations invest in the product, their films, just as record labels do in their artists. As Smits said, film distribution organizations originally had a lot of power over which films were brought to the audience and which were not. Before the online developments, the same is said about the record industry. Because A&R is a department within record labels, the role of the A&R manager and record labels are inextricably linked.

This study endorses the change in the music industry since the advent of the internet.[189] The data tells that roles are more divided and there is less autonomy within the concept of gatekeeping. For this research I have executed semi-structured interviews, but these mostly led to an open conversation and all opinions became subjective very easily. Each respondent thinks within its own framework and might under- or overestimate their own position within the music industry. As a result, the interviews are a key to a better understanding, but not leading.[190] The results of the study, however, provide an important addition to the literature, because as the respondents indicate, the music industry is dealing with fragmentation, which leads to multiple gatekeepers. Because of this fragmentation, the traditional role of the A&R manager as gatekeeper is not applicable to the present day anymore. Although there has been a power shift from the record labels to the streaming services, the A&R manager still has a vital position in

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[187] Pamela J. Shoemaker and Tim P. Vos, *Gatekeeping Theory* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 63

[188] Simon Frith and Andrew Goodwin. *On Record.* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), 29

[189] Jake Udell. 'Evolution of the A&R', artofthemanager.com, accessed on 12 June 2020, https://artofamanager.com/2018/03/evolution-of-the-ar/

[190] In the context of further research, I would recommend carrying out identical interviews
To create a more objective view, it would also be advisable to work with more data, e.g. more interviews.

the gatekeeping system. Due to online developments, the role of A&R managers now mainly includes career building. The focus lies on creating what is already visible on social media or streaming platforms and the A&R has to take the entire fragmented market into account. This means that the A&R manager has to contribute to the (political) vision and identity of an artists, that goes beyond his musical sound.

Another reason why the traditional role of the A&R manager has changed, is the arrival of new gatekeepers within the music industry. Bookers already played a role in the concept of gatekeeping[191], but from the data it becomes clear that the importance of this role has increased. Playlist curators of streaming services have also been mentioned as newcomer, since they decide which songs are being recommended to the audience, therefore they stand between the industry and the consumer.

This study shows that gatekeeping in the music industry is very different from the regular gatekeeping theory and that gatekeeping in this field needed to be updated due to the changing context of streaming and the do-it-yourself mentality. This research provided this update by creating a new gatekeeping diagram specifically for the Dutch music industry. Based on the findings from the qualitative interviews and literature, this diagram brings attention to the fragmented industry and it presents a more dynamic system of gatekeeping. This new gatekeeping theory is necessary to understand how music travels from the artist to the consumer/audience in the present day.

All in all, this research demonstrates the importance of gatekeeping in the music industry, since it deals with gatekeeping on a daily basis. It responds to the need to adjust the traditional gatekeeping theory for the Dutch music industry, to explore the gatekeeping relations between music professionals in the field. Nevertheless, further research is needed to expand the knowledge about gatekeepers in music. The in-depth interviews provided useful perspectives to investigate this, and to get representative research this should be broadened.

Further research

This research is just the tip of the iceberg of a much larger system of gatekeeping within the music industry. To elaborate the concept of gatekeeping within music even more, further research is necessary. Hereby, I make a few suggestions to continue research in this area.

To start off: the music industry itself is very broad. It can, for example, be split into a recording side and a live-circuit side. This thesis focuses on the music industry in its broadest

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[191] According to Knab (see figure 2)

sense. To make it more explicit, I would advise to zoom in more on specific sides of the industry. A focus could for instance be put on gatekeeping, solely in the live circuit. As already seen in the results of this research, this would probably differ from gatekeeping within the record industry. Everyone in the industry is dependent on- or working with another gatekeeper. A research question like: *How does the gatekeeping system differ between the recording music industry and the live music industry?* is an interesting one to answer.

Another approach for further research would be to enhance the view of the artists and/or the audience/consumer. Research regarding the gatekeeping role of the audience as curator becomes more and more relevant due to online platforms. In this research emphasis was put on the perspective of the music professionals. To elaborate on the gatekeeping network, it would be interesting to include the opinion of music professionals working in other positions, music journalists, scientists, the artists themselves and the audience. A different approach is also to just focus on A&R managers or non-A&R manager.

Furthermore, this research focuses on the current gatekeeping situation in the Netherlands. Therefore, it is not necessarily applicable to other countries. Further research could elaborate more on how the Dutch gatekeeping system is similar, or far from similar, to other countries.

Last, it could be interesting to look at the actor-network theory by Bruno Latour. This is a methodology with which you can map networks and how they relate to each other. Since speaking of power relations and how one gatekeeper is connected to another, this might be of value to understand the relations better.

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Appendix A – Respondent Background Information

Name:	Interview Date:	Position and name of Company:	Has previously worked for or works for:
Michiel Veenstra	07-01-2020	Program director and radio DJ at Kink FM	3FM, Radio Veronica, 538
John van Luyn	14-01-2020	Programmer at pop venue De Melkweg	A&R background
Joey Ruchtie	08-01-2020	Booker and programmer at Eurosonic/Noorderslag.	Rotown, Paaspop, Metropolis, Bevrijdingsfestival Groningen, De Oosterpoort
Léon Happé	03-02-2020	A&R director at Universal Music Group	[PIAS] – A&R background
Kim Bloem	20-01-2020	Head Promotor at MOJO Concerts	North Sea Jazz Festival
Ruud Lemmen	22-01-2020	Programmer at Poppodium 013 and founder of the hip-hop festival WOO-HAH!	Neurotic Records, Little Devil
Wilbert Mutsaers	21-01-2020	Head of Benelux at Spotify	BMG, Sony, Universal Music Group, 3FM, Radio 6, FunX, MOJO – A&R background

Appendix B – Blueprint Interview Questions (in Dutch)

Algemene vragen

- *Wat is uw officiële beroepsomschrijving?*

- *Hoelang bent u al werkzaam binnen de muziekindustrie?*

- *Bent u bekend met het concept gatekeeping?*

Stellingen:

Platenlabels:
1. *Socioloog Paul Hirsch zei in de jaren 70 dat de gatekeeper tussen de industrie en de consument in stond en bepaalde wat er wel of niet op de markt kwam. Daarmee was destijds de A&R van een label vrijwel de belangrijkste factor in het bepalen van welke artiest het zou maken.* De stelling: *Tegenwoordig speelt een streamingplatform als Spotify een veel grotere rol in het bepalen hiervan.*
2. *De muziekindustrie kan in zijn huidige vorm niet blijven bestaan zonder de financiële middelen van platenlabels. Met andere woorden: zonder platenlabels stort de muziekindustrie in elkaar.*
3. *De rol van de A&R-manager is onveranderd gebleven sinds de komst van o.a. streaming platformen.*
4. *Hoe zou u de rol van de A&R-manager hedendaags omschrijven?*
5. *Om door te breken als muzikant is het hebben van een label noodzakelijk.*

Streaming:
1. *De komst van streamingdiensten heeft een negatieve impact gehad op de muziekindustrie.*
2. *Spotify heeft momenteel meer macht als gatekeeper dan platenlabels*
3. *De radio is het grootste slachtoffer van de komst van streamingdiensten en leverde daarmee het grootste marktaandeel in. Daarmee is ook de invloed van radio dj als gatekeeper enorm geslonken.*

Live:
1. *Hirsch zei in de jaren 70 dat het de taak van de promotor/programmeur is om te anticiperen op vraag en aanbod van de consument. Daarmee had de promoter geen invloed op de trends en bekleedde geen rol als gatekeeper. Vandaag de dag is dat veel anders en fungeert de promotor wel degelijk als gatekeeper.*

(Denk aan de opkomst van steeds meer festivals en de groeiende rol van de live industrie doordat het de grootste bron van inkomsten is geworden).

2. *Om door te breken als muzikant is het hebben van een boeker noodzakelijk.*
3. *In de volgorde van voorselectie binnen de gatekeeping theorie (als geformuleerd door Hirsch) heeft een boeker vaak een grotere invloed op wat er op de markt komt dan een A&R-manager. Bent u het hiermee eens of oneens?*

Overig:
1. *Zelfs als een muzikant geen netwerk heeft binnen de muziekindustrie, kan hij/zij alsnog zijn weg vinden naar de consument.*
   (Denk aan het opbouwen van een carrière via platformen als YouTube.)

Slotvraag:
Is er volgens u één gatekeeper aan te wijzen binnen de Nederlandse muziekindustrie? Zo ja, wie/wat en waarom? Is het er meer dan één? Zo nee, waarom niet?

Heeft u nog andere opmerkingen of vragen die interessant kunnen zijn voor dit onderzoek?

Appendix C – Overview of Codes within Categories

Category	Meaning (Combined Codes)
Multiple Gatekeepers	IB: Importance of Booker, IM: Importance of Manager, ILMI: Importance of Live Music Industry, ISF: Importance of Showcase Festivals, IOPB: Importance of Publisher, IOPG: Importance of Programmer, IR: Importance of Radio
Streaming Services as Gatekeeper	IYT: Importance of YouTube, SSG: Streaming Services as Gatekeeper, IOP: Importance of Online Platforms, IS: Importance of Streaming, IOS: Importance of Spotify, PES: Positive Effect of Streaming, IPC: Importance of Playlist Curator, MCCS: Music Consumption Changed due to Streaming
A&R Manager as Gatekeeper	IARM: Importance of A&R Manager, IRL: Importance of Record Label, TANC: Task of A&R Manager has not changed
Changed Music Industry/Fragmentation	IMI: Importance of Music Industry as a Whole, FMI: Fragmentation of Music Industry, IWT: Importance of Working Together, IN: Importance of Network, TS: Transience of Success, CWI: Competition within Industry, TGP: Television as Gatekeeper in Past, DMI: Democratization of Music Industry, CLAS: Consumer less loyal to Artist since Streaming
Modern Artist Independent	URL: Unimportance of Record Label, OWTF: Other Ways to Fame than Record Label, AMIP: Artists more independent than in the Past, DIY: Do-it-yourself Mentality among Artists, ALM: Artists less loyal towards music industry, AG: Artist as Gatekeeper
Changed Role of A&R Manager	CRA: Changed role of A&R Manager, CRRL: Changed role of Record Label
Importance of Data	ID: Importance of Data, ISD: Influence of Spotify on Data
No One (in the industry) is Gatekeeping	GG: Gatekeeping is a Gut feeling, AS: Audience as Gatekeeper, CG: Consumer as Gatekeeper, GNES: Gatekeeping is no exact science
Unimportance of A&R Manager	UAM: Unimportance of A&R Managers
Unimportance of Streaming Services	UOP: Unimportance of Online Platforms, US: Unimportance of Spotify
Negative Effect of Streaming	NES: Negative Effect of Streaming on Music Industry
Unimportance of Data	UD: Unimportance of Data
Bookers not Important	UB: Unimportance of Bookers

Appendix D – Overview of all used Codes with Percentages

Note: The blue colored codes were mentioned by all respondents. N/A means that this category was not used during the 'focused coding'.

Code	Code Definition	Notes	TOTAL	Percentages
IRL	Importance of record label		58	9,1%
IB	Importance of Bookers		42	6,6%
IARM	Importance of A&R manager		30	4,7%
CRA	Changed role of A&R		26	4,1%
ID	Importance of Data		26	4,1%
IWT	Importance of Working Together in Industry		26	4,1%
IS	Importance of Streaming		25	3,9%
OWTF	Other ways to fame than record label		23	3,6%
CRRL	Changed role of record label		22	3,4%
ILMI	Importance of Live Music Industry		22	3,4%
IOS	Importance of Spotify		21	3,3%
IN	Importance of Network		20	3,1%
URL	Unimportance of Record Label		20	3,1%
UAM	Unimportance of A&R manager		19	3,0%
FMI	Fragmentation of Music Industry		19	3,0%
IOP	Importance of Online Platforms		17	2,7%
AMIP	Artist more independent than in the past		16	2,5%
PES	Positive effect of Streaming on Music Industry		14	2,2%
DIY	DIY Mentality among Artists		14	2,2%
TS	Transience of Success		13	2,0%
IOPG	Importance of Programmer		13	2,0%
UR	Unimportance of Radio	N/A	12	1,9%
IPC	Importance of Playlist Curators		11	1,7%
US	Unimportance of Spotify		10	1,6%
GG	Gatekeeping is a gutfeeling		10	1,6%
ISF	Importance of Showcase Festivals as Gatekeeper		9	1,4%
NES	Negative Effect of Streaming on Music Industry		8	1,3%
IM	Importance of Managers		8	1,3%
IR	Importance of Radio		8	1,3%
SSG	Streaming Services as Gatekeeper		7	1,1%
AG	Artists as Gatekeeper		7	1,1%
IYT	Importance of YouTube		6	0,9%
TANC	Task of A&R has not changed		6	0,9%
UD	Unimportance of Data		5	0,8%
AS	Audience as gatekeeper		5	0,8%
DMI	Democratization of Music Industry		5	0,8%
GNES	Gatekeeping is no exact science		5	0,8%
CWI	Competition within industry		4	0,6%
UB	Unimportance of Bookers		4	0,6%
USFG	Unimportance of Showcase Festivals as Gatekeeper	N/A	3	0,5%
ALM	Artists less loyal towards music industry		3	0,5%
AG	Anyone can be a gatekeeper		2	0,3%
MCCS	Music Consumption has changed with the coming of streaming		2	0,3%
UGIP	Unimportance of Gatekeeping from industries perspective		2	0,3%
FPCA	Feeling a personal connection with artists	N/A	2	0,3%
ISD	Influence of Spotify on Data		1	0,2%
IMI	Importance of Music Industry as a whole		1	0,2%
CLAS	Consumer less loyal to artist since streaming		1	0,2%
TGP	Television as a gatekeeper in the past		1	0,2%
UOP	Unimportance of Online Platforms		1	0,2%
TPI	Transience of professionals in industry	N/A	1	0,2%
CG	Consumer as gatekeeper		1	0,2%
IOPB	Importance of Publishers		1	0,2%
IOTM	Importance of traditional media		1	0,2%
			639	100,0%

Appendix E – Data A&R managers versus non-A&R managers

WITHOUT A&R BACKGROUND - in order		TOTAL	Percentages
Combined Codes			
1. Multiple Gatekeepers	IB+IM+ILMI+ISF+IOPB+IOTM+IOPG+IR	77	25,7%
2. A&R Manager as Gatekeeper	IARM+IRL+TANC	50	16,7%
3. Changed Music Industry/Fragmentation	IMI+FMI+IWT+IN+TS+CWI+TGP+DMI+CLAS	43	14,3%
4. Modern Artist Independent	URL+OWTF+AMIP+DIY+ALM+AG	43	14,3%
5. Streaming Services as Gatekeeper	IYT+SSG+IOP+IS+IOS+PES+IPC+MCCS	30	10,0%
6. Changed Role of A&R	CRA+CRRL	15	5,0%
7. No One (in the industry) is Gatekeeping	GG+UGIP+AS+CG+GNES	10	3,3%
8. Importance of Data	ID+ISD	9	3,0%
9. Negative Effect of Streaming	NES	7	2,3%
10. Unimportance of A&R Manager	UAM	6	2,0%
11. Unimportance of Data	UD	4	1,3%
12. Unimportance of Streaming Services	UOP+US	4	1,3%
13. Bookers Not Important	UB	2	0,7%
		300	100,0%

WITH A&R BACKGROUND - in order		TOTAL	Percentages
Combined Codes			
1. Streaming Services as Gatekeeper	IYT+SSG+IOP+IS+IOS+PES+IPC+MCCS	58	19,1%
2. Changed Music Industry/Fragmentation	IMI+FMI+IWT+IN+TS+CWI+TGP+DMI+CLAS	47	15,5%
3. A&R Manager as Gatekeeper	IARM+IRL+TANC	44	14,5%
4. Modern Artist Independent	URL+OWTF+AMIP+DIY+ALM+AG	40	13,2%
5. Changed Role of A&R	CRA+CRRL	33	10,9%
6. Multiple Gatekeepers	IB+IM+ILMI+ISF+IOPB+IOTM+IOPG+IR	31	10,2%
7. Importance of Data	ID+ISD	18	5,9%
8. Unimportance of A&R Manager	UAM	13	4,3%
9. No One (in the industry) is Gatekeeping	GG+UGIP+AS+CG+GNES	9	3,0%
10. Unimportance of Streaming Services	UOP+US	7	2,3%
11. Bookers Not Important	UB	2	0,7%
12. Unimportance of Data	UD	1	0,3%
13. Negative Effect of Streaming	NES	1	0,3%
		304	100,0%