

Songwriting in the Postdigital Age: Using TikTok and Instagram as Online Informal Learning Technologies

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Context

Postdigitality as a framework concept emphasizing the complete digital permeation of all areas of life; "**Compositional Turn in Music Education**" (Allsup, 2013: 50; Kaschub/Smith 2013) ensures high relevance of generative processes (composing) in music education; the British **Musical Futures** project (Green 2008) as a concept of open learning with informal methods in music lessons

Subproject Erfurt: Songwriting at school

RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

- What digital cultural practices can be identified in collective songwriting?
- How are informal and extracurricular actors involved in the formal learning process?

METHODOLOGY:

- Grounded Theory (Charmaz 2014, Clarke 2005)
- Qualitative Network Analysis (Hollstein/Strauß 2006; Rürup et al. 2015)

HEURISTICS:

- Social Network Theory (White 1992)
- Community of Practice (Wenger 1998; Kenny 2016)

METHODS:

- Videography, guided video-stimulated-recall interviews, drawing network maps, learning diaries

Research Association MusCoDA

The research association *MusCoDA - Musical Communities in the (Post)Digital Age* investigates songwriting processes as an example of collective creativity in (post)digital communities.

Research Objective

Development of teaching concepts and didactic conclusions based on a comparative study of informal and formal learning practices in bands under the conditions of postdigitality.

Subproject Karlsruhe: Songwriting in informal contexts

RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

- Which post-digital practices can be reconstructed in differently contextualized songwriting settings?
- How do human and non-human actors constitute a songwriting practice?

METHODOLOGY:

- Grounded Theory (Charmaz 2014)
- Situational Analysis (Clarke 2005)

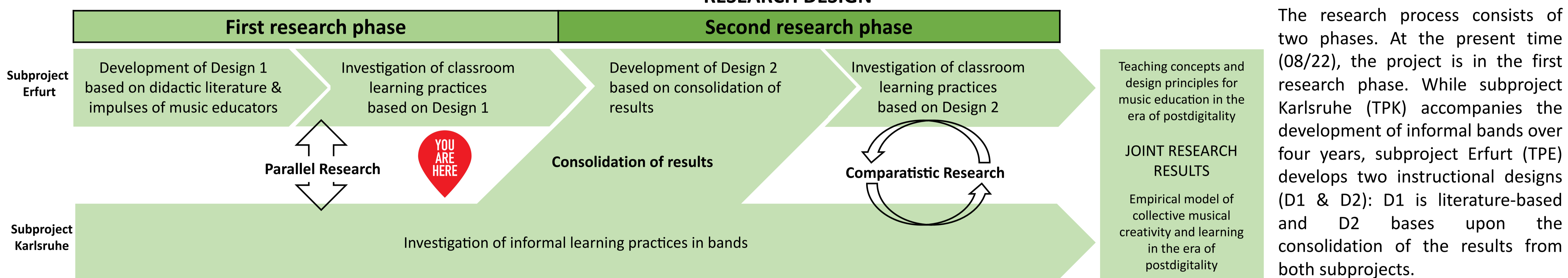
HEURISTICS

- Actor-Network Theory (Latour 2005)
- Communities of Musical Practice (Wenger 1998; Kenny 2016)

METHODS:

- Qualitative interviews, video-stimulated-recall interviews
- Video-ethnography & participant observation (Bergold/Thomas 2012)

RESEARCH DESIGN



INITIAL FINDINGS

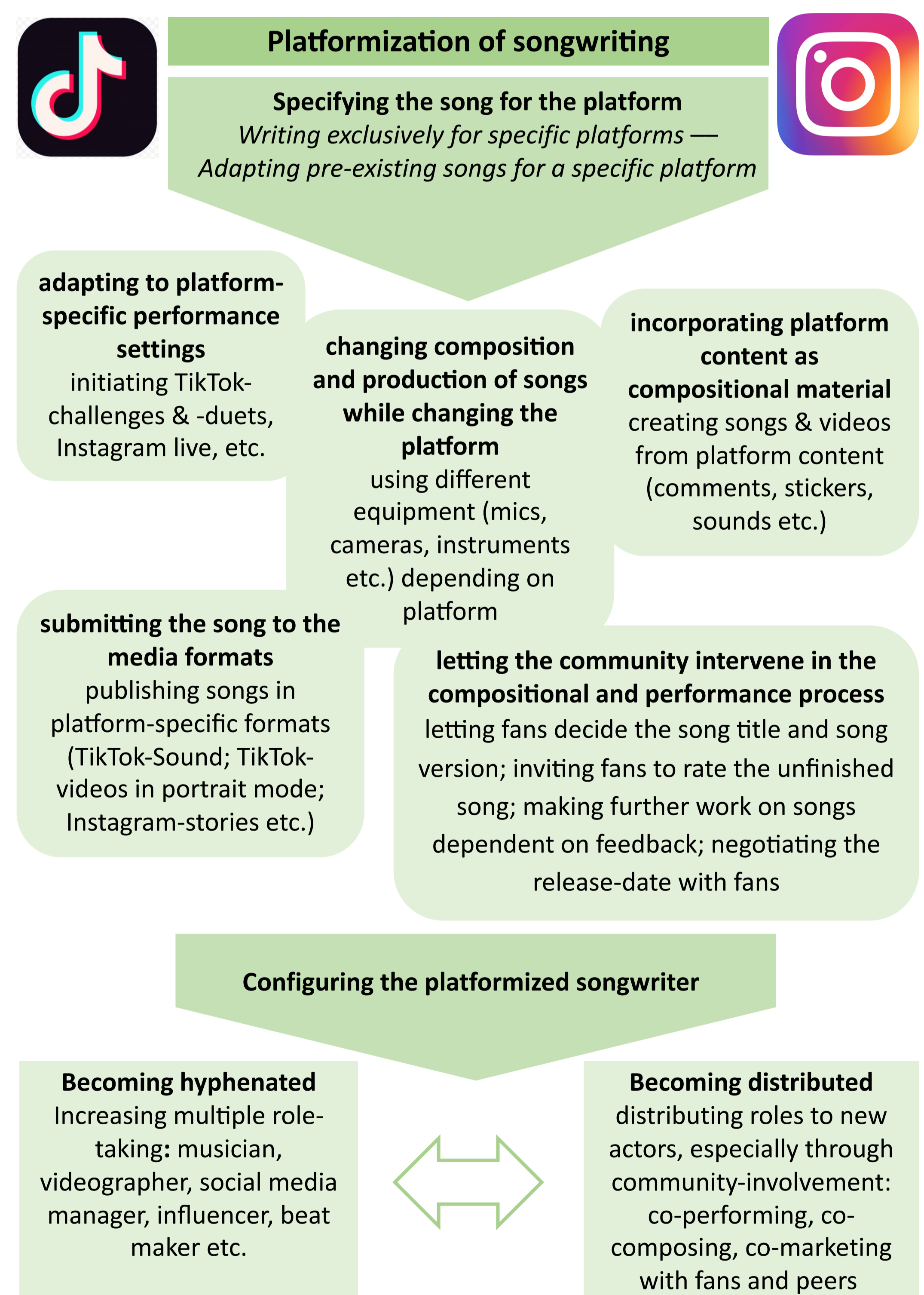
Drawing on concepts from Community of Musical Practice and Actor-Network Theory, learning is considered not only as social practice and as participation in online and offline communities, but also as an effect of heterogeneous networks composed of human and non-human actors. Learning is not seen as an individual, merely cognitive process, but as the formation and transformation of actor-networks, i.e., as a practice of assembling and mediating humans and technologies.

In this context, we understand a song as an actor-network (Godau/Haenisch 2019) that simultaneously produces and relates the human subjects, musical instruments, real and virtual spaces, analog and digital technologies, labels, streaming services etc. involved. With the integration of social media platforms into the song-actor-network, these platforms become powerful actors whose affordances and constraints permanently change the way songs are composed, produced and performed. We call this transformation the **platformization of songwriting**.

The **platformization of songwriting** takes very different forms, varying between **writing exclusively for specific platforms** and **adapting pre-existing songs for a specific platform**. While in the first case a song is completely tailored to the technical requirements and social expectations of a platform, in the second case the song has to be adapted after finishing the production. There are a variety of intermediate stages between these poles, so that songs are created in a constant negotiation with the sociomaterial conditions of the platform.

While creating and uploading content for TikTok and Instagram, **submitting the song to the specific media formats** is key: this concerns, for example, the duration of the songs or the image formats of the music videos. Through these technical constraints new song-versions are often created. **Adapting the song to platform-specific performance settings** like *challenges* and *TikTok-duets* leads to new participative performance practices that involve the community members as active co-performers. Through functions as *stickers* and *comments*, suggestions for titles and song-textes, as well as feedback reach and influence the songwriters, **letting the community intervene in the compositional and performance process**. Musicians often transform comments, sounds, *sticker* answers etc. into song-material, **incorporating platform content as compositional material**. Depending on the technical requirements and aesthetic quality expectations of the specific platform, a different use of equipment (mics, cameras, instruments etc.) can be observed, **changing composition and production while changing the platform**.

As a consequence, the learning subject formed in this actor-network is situated in the tension field between two processes, which we call **becoming hyphenated** and **becoming distributed**. While the concept of the hyphenated musician has already been described by Théberge (1997), it takes on extreme features under conditions of platformization of songwriting. What is meant is that musicians take on a multitude of roles and in this way achieve a high degree of autonomy. Here, a transition from learning as specialization and expertization to learning as taking on multiple roles can be observed. This practice is contrasted with a practice of distributing roles to new actors. Above all, it can be observed how fans and peers are involved in decisions that influence composition or marketing, how they can become co-composers and co-performers, and thus how the community can be actively involved in all relevant processes from the initial idea to the final performance of the song. Here, learning is linked to sharing artistic and economic responsibilities with strangers, as well as increasing the songwriters' dependence on community participation.



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