

SPOTIFY ECONOMY

PROFIT MAXIMIZING AS A SYSTEM

"The real competitor is silence."
- Spotify (internal)

ACTORS & INCENTIVES



SPOTIFY

- Interest: growth & profit
- Incentive: more listening time, lower cost
- Power: platform, data, playlists
- Sees: engagement, scale
- Does not see: damage to music ecology
- Externalizes: risk onto artists



LISTENER

- Interest: convenience, price, music
- Incentive: convenience > reflection
- Power: low switching costs
- Sees: playlists, ease, price
- Does not see: power structure, payout logic
- Externalizes: indifference



ARTIST / INDUSTRY

- Interest: income, reach, autonomy
- Incentive: dependence on platform reach
- Power: low (individually)
- Sees: chance of audience
- Does not see: viable alternative at scale
- Externalizes: accepting low pay

LEGEND

- + = more leads to more
- = more leads to less
- || = delay
- = weak / indirect
- R = reinforcing loop
- B = balancing loop

ASSUMPTIONS

- people want convenience
- attention is scarce
- music = background utility
- more scale = better

More listening time

More data
& insight

Better algorithms /
perfect fit content

More engagement,
less silence

Scale & cost advantage

Profit-maximizing
behavior feels normal

Less moral resistance

Consumers choose convenience

Market rewards
scale & efficiency

Criticism of Spotify

Interest in alternatives
(Qobuz, etc.)

Human curation & better payouts

Less willingness
to switch

Too small, too late, too much friction.

Less passive
Spotify use

More attentive
listening

Higher price,
clunkier UX,
smaller catalog,
weaker algorithm

(R1)

R1 - SCALE &
ATTENTION LOOP

More for Spotify,
less for music.

R2

R2 – NORMALIZED
CYNICISM

 B1 – WEAK CORRECTION

EPISTEMIC STATUS

W = alert
F = fact
H = hypothesis
U = unknown
N = normative judgment
(most relate to H)

CONVENIENCE
ABOVE ALL



UNINTENDED COLLECTIVE OUTCOME

- Music becomes background wallpaper
- Fake content crowds out real music
- Artists earn too little
- Creation & diversity weaken
- Attention economy wins, culture loses
- What shocks us morally, we reward economically

WHY DOES THE BRAKE STAY WEAK?

- Low switching costs, high laziness
- Music is not treated as a critical subject
- Alternatives cost more and feel less smooth
- The harm is diffuse and culturally distant
- People condemn the behavior in one role and reward it in another

THESIS: Spotify's system persists because listeners are not critical, and listeners are not critical because Spotify has trained them not to be. The two reproduce each other.

The grave is partly dug by the same people who complain about it.