Universal Spotification? The shifting meanings of “Spotify” as a model for the media industries

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ABSTRACT

Ever since the music streaming service Spotify was launched in 2008, it has been referred to as a model for an ongoing transformation of the media industries. Dozens of other technology startups have promised to deliver “a Spotify for books”, “a Spotify for movies”, “a Spotify for journalism” or even “a Spotify for art”. Yet, most attempts to replicate the model has actually failed. Analyzing a large body of Swedish and US news articles from 2008–2018, this article demonstrates how the metaphor of “Spotify” has been filled with very different meaning. Not only has the early promises of relying on advertising to make consumption “free but legal” been discarded, in favor of subscription-based models. Another major trend in the development of streaming services, including Spotify, has been the shift toward curation and algorithmic recommendation systems, which has added new associations to the metaphor or “a Spotify for x”.

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Introduction

Spotify is not only the name of a technology company, and of its streaming music service. Ever since this service was launched in 2008, “Spotify” has also frequently served as a metaphor for a model that is supposedly is not limited to music, but replicable in a wide range of media industries and cultural forms. Dozens of technology startups have thus made headlines by promising to create “a Spotify for literature”, “a Spotify for film”, “a Spotify for magazines”, etc. The underlying hypothesis seems to be that “Spotification”, as we may call it, has a universal character.

Yet, the essence of this model is far from stable. On the contrary, the metaphor of “Spotify” has meant different things at different points in time. One possible reason for this is, obviously, that Spotify itself has changed a lot since the service was launched (Eriksson, Fleischer, Johansson, Snickars, & Vonderau, 2018, p. 31–67). It also seems likely that the attempts to follow the model set by Spotify have confronted actual differences between media. Music is not consumed nor commodified in the same way as news, movies or literature. But the very idea of a model implies, to a certain degree, that such differences can be ignored.

The overall purpose with this paper is to question the jargon of business models by providing a descriptive account of the instability and ambiguity of one such presumed
model. Thus, it does not primarily examine Spotify the company or Spotify the streaming music service, but Spotify the business metaphor. It traces the shifting meanings attributed to the presumed Spotify model, and how the hype surrounding Spotify has been spilling over to other companies by means of metaphor.

Notes on hype, research methods and disposition

The remaining sections of the paper will examine the shifting meanings attributed to Spotify, as a model for change in different media industries. The examination is guided by a theoretical framework that stresses the fundamental *precarity* (as opposed to autonomy) of technology startups – including Spotify, as well as its many epigoni. The precarity results from their dependency on venture capitalists willing to cover the losses, as these startups (with few exceptions) are not profitable. In order to attract capital, they need to sustain what is commonly known as *hype* or *buzz*.

In historicizing the development of services like Spotify, the element of hype – speculations, rumors and promises circulated by the press and in social media – should not be discarded as a kind of noise, but rather examined as a constitutive part of a commercial reality. Hype comes first, modeling the future out of the present. In the study of digital media, a relevant approach might therefore be to “follow the hype” (Eriksson et.al. 2018, 35–37). In this case, it means following the mutual buildup of hype between Spotify and the many companies using Spotify’s trademark in promoting themselves, but also examining the many cases when this relation breaks down and the metaphor does no longer hold.

To provide some necessary context, the next section presents a summary of Spotify’s history, with emphasis on the early years. After that follows three sections analyzing how Spotify, from 2009 onwards, came to be seen as a *model* in its native Sweden. This empirical basis for this analysis consists of all mentions of Spotify in major Swedish newspapers, and a selection of magazines, in the company’s earliest years (2006–2009). The number of articles found for this period in the database Mediearkivet Retriever was 60.

The subsequent sections build on an attempt to trace the meaning of “a Spotify for *x*” in an international context, 2008–2018. Ebsco’s database Academic Search, covering a wide range of mostly US magazines, was used to locate other services that were compared to Spotify. In all, this database search resulted in 199 articles mentioning Spotify, up until 2012, of which 81 were selected as relevant for this analysis. The most frequently occurring magazines in this data set were those either covering the advertising business (*Advertising Age, Marketing Week*) or the music business (*Billboard, Music Week, Rolling Stone*). From 2012 onwards, the total number of articles on Spotify in US magazines has skyrocketed. Attempts were made to limit the scope by searching for phrases like “a Spotify for” and “a Spotify of”, but as it turned out, Academic Search unfortunately disregards words like “a”, “for” and “of” when searching for exact phrases. Therefore, it was of limited use for the latter period. However, all articles mentioning Spotify in a selection of US technology news media (Techcrunch, Pando, Wired and Gigaom) were scanned, in order to select those about other services were likened to Spotify. While this data set includes several hundreds of articles, the vast majority does either focus only on Spotify, or mentions it just in passing. Finally, additional sources were found using Google Search for phrases like “Spotify for art” or “Spotify of journalism”, and for the names of particular services
already identified in the abovementioned searches. Combined, this article rests on a vast empirical material consisting of news articles written by professional journalists, mostly from Sweden and the US, both in print media and in online news outlets focusing on technology reporting. The choice of sources examined reflects the approach of “following the hype”.

**Spotify: the early years (2006–2010)**

The story of Spotify is often told as a salvation narrative about how the music industry was rescued from its deep crisis that had lasted for almost a decade, a narrative that soon became part of the company’s own storytelling. Already in 2009, Spotify’s CEO Daniel Ek explained in an interview: “From the very beginning, our vision was to offer a legal music service, as good or better than the pirate sites, giving users access to all music in the world, for free” (Huldschiner, 2009). Today, he would surely omit the last two words, as the current business model is built on getting users to pay a monthly fee (while advertisements bring in a mere 12% of revenues.) This is only one example of how Spotify has in fact not followed a straight path, guided by a firm entrepreneurial vision, but has rather adjusted its strategies and goals in an opportunistic way. While it has indeed served as a guiding light for other technology companies, Spotify itself has usually not been on the frontline of innovation, but followed trends set by other actors in the music, entertainment and technology industries.

At the time of birth, 2006, the nonsensical name “Spotify” was apt for a technology company which was initially not focused specifically on music. Its two founders both had a background not in music but in advertising technology, and the original business model was to distribute something that could attract users, so that the attention of users could be sold to advertisers. Spotify thus began by recruiting a team of skilled networking engineers to develop a technology for distributing data over the internet, using a peer-to-peer (P2P) technology similar to that of file-sharing. The media may here represent any kind of digital content, such as music, video, digital films or images”, as explained in its first patent application (Ehn, Hult, Niemelä, Strigeus, & Kreitz, 2007).

This was before the smartphone breakthrough, before “social media” became a buzzword, long before the hype around “algorithmic culture”. Rather, the supply of ever larger, smaller and cheaper hard drives – combined with the widespread yet largely illegal practice of file-sharing – fueled a culture of everyday archivism (Fleischer, 2014). All this was to be challenged by the rise of streaming music services, but the essence of “streaming” was never easily defined. In a strictly technical sense, streaming requires that the user has an unbroken internet connection. But today it has become commonplace that a streaming service – Spotify included – also offer their paying subscribers the additional feature called “offline streaming”, which technically is not streaming, but downloading. In practice, “streaming” refers not simply to a distribution technology, but also to a technology of surveillance (as it allows precise monitoring of individual media consumption), and to a business model built on subscriptions. But in the early years of Spotify, as indicated above, the idea was rather to make all music available for free, and to rely on advertising as a main source of income.
The emergence of a “Spotify model” in Sweden

In the beginning of 2009, the hype around Spotify reached a new level in Sweden. One sign of this was the coining of a new verb, “att spotifyera” (to spotify). Almost simultaneously, this occurred in two versions, one affirmative and one critical. In the first case, a columnist hailed Spotify for promoting a consumer culture no longer based on the hoarding of physical products: “I want my life to be spottified. I want to access everything, yet own nothing” (Svensson, 2009). According to the critical definition, established by left-wing bloggers, Spottification meant an enclosure of the commons (Boyle, 2003): charging for what was previously free, while at the same time “cutting the long tail” (Andersson Schwarz, 2013, p. 115).

Throughout 2008, the Swedish press had tended to portray Spotify as a revolutionary music service because of its promise to make legal those habits of music consumption that had been enabled by file-sharing networks, by offering immediate access to any music – at no cost for the consumer (Eriksson et al., 2018, p. 40–49). That music consumption could henceforth be financed by advertisements was seen as essential, and it resonated with the idea that “$0.00 is the future of business”, popularized by Californian business guru Chris Anderson (2008), who enjoyed a broad and enthusiastic reception in Sweden (Fleischer, 2017b).

It was in early 2009 that Spotify became more widely recognized by commentators in Sweden as the model for digital distribution, not only of music – and as a possible resolution to social conflicts over copyright enforcement. For the past three years, the file-sharing question had been moving toward the center stage of Swedish politics, and this culminated during the first half of 2009. After several years of police investigation, the criminal case against the founders of search engine The Pirate Bay finally went up in the district court of Stockholm in February. While court hearings were still ongoing, the Swedish parliament voted in favor of implementing an EU directive that would open new possibilities for copyright holders to sue individuals suspected of illicit file-sharing. Later the same spring, the court announced that each of the four defendants connected to The Pirate Bay was found guilty of abetting copyright infringement, each one sentenced to one year in prison, plus a total of €3 million in damages (Andersson Schwarz & Snickars, 2010; Andersson Schwarz, 2013, 117–154; Eriksson et al., 2018, p. 40–49).

Press coverage was largely “unfavorable to the positions taken by rights-holders”, as the US Embassy reported back home in a cable that was later made public by Wikileaks. For the Swedish government, the “political sensitivities” surrounding copyright enforcement was at this time “very delicate”. The US embassy noted a risk that the strong media attention to file-sharing issues “gives the Pirate Party a boost in the EU Parliamentary elections in June 2009” (Embassy Stockholm, 2009). This was exactly what happened the same summer. After receiving 7 percent of the Swedish votes, the Pirate Party gained entry to the European Parliament.

Most other parties had avoided to take a clear position on matters related to file-sharing. Asked about their stance on new copyright treaties, leading politicians – including Sweden’s prime minister Fredrik Reinfeldt – preferred to avert the question by instead pointing to Spotify as a model for the future (Sjöshult, 2009; Sveriges Television, 2009). In effect, politicians thus enrolled themselves in the branding of Spotify. No other company has since enjoyed a comparable amount of positive attention from Swedish members of parliament (Fleischer & Kullenberg, 2018; Fleischer & Snickars, 2018, pp. 79–94).
Voddler and the promise of “a Spotify for movies”

The proposal of “a Spotify for movies” was introduced in the Swedish debate in January 2009 by Bredbandsbolaget, an Internet Service Provider (ISP) that had already struck business deals with Spotify. According to Bredbandsbolaget’s CEO, a service like Spotify, but for movies, would be “the most effective way to combat illegal file-sharing” (Löwenfeldt, 2009). No company had yet promised to create such a service in Sweden, but the vision caught on because of its political appeal at this very moment.

July 1 news broke that Sweden would indeed get its “Spotify for movies”: a service named Voddler, backed by a substantial venture capital investment, announced that it would launch the same autumn (Mathisen, 2009). The timing was perfect: right in the middle of the yearly “Almedalen Week”, when virtually all Sweden’s politicians, lobbyists and political reporters convene at the island of Gotland for seminars and free drinks. Only a few weeks had passed since the electoral success of the Pirate Party, making file-sharing one of the hottest issues debated during the week. An editorial in the major tabloid Expressen hailed the Spotify/Voddler model as “the way out from the file-sharing quagmire” and speculated that it could even be “the way out of the financial crisis” (Nylander, 2009).

So, what was the supposed essence of this model? Which features were seen as necessary in order for a film service to qualify as “a Spotify”? The publicity about Voddler in Swedish press, as of mid-2009, suggests that this model involved three necessary criteria. First, it should distribute media as streaming on-demand over the internet. Second, it should constitute a legal alternative to media piracy. Third, it should be offered at no cost for the consumer. While this last criterion did not exclude the possibility of a paid premium version, it still implied a business model based largely on advertising – as was indeed the case with Spotify’s original business model, and Voddler’s.

Practically every headline about Voddler featured the word “free” (gratis). According to the Swedish press, this revolutionary service was to offer free streaming of Hollywood blockbusters at the date of premiere. If not, it would indeed not qualify as “a Spotify for movies”, as this model was still commonly understood.

From “a Spotify for movies” to “a Spotify for books”

The case of Voddler can be contrasted to that of Storytel, a streaming service for audiobooks which had been operating since 2005 and is now expanding internationally. In more recent years, Storytel has been commonly described in Swedish press as “a Spotify for audiobooks”. Yet, this was not the case in 2009–10, for the reason that Storytel was a paid subscription service. It was not in the advertising business, and did not offer a free version, thus it did not qualify as “a Spotify”.

Yet it tried. In a press release from June 2009, Storytel declared as its ambition “to develop into a kind of Spotify for audiobooks” (TT Spektra, 2009) Unsurprisingly, news reporters asked when the free version was coming. “We have looked into it, but the audiobook business is not ready for it yet”, Storytel’s CEO Jonas Tellander answered (Eriksson, 2009; Geistrand, 2009).

Later in 2009, Storytel released its first application for the Iphone, and soon attracted a growing number of paying subscribers (Strömberg, 2018). Within a few years, the
description of Storytel as “a Spotify for audiobooks” was in fact established in the Swedish press – not because Storytel had changed, but the metaphorical meaning of “a Spotify” had lost its former association to claims like “$0.00 is the future of business”. Voddler, on the other hand, saw neither profits nor growth. It kept its promise to be “a Spotify for movies” by sticking to a model based on advertisement and free access, but as the service was launched later in 2009, the assortment of movies was meager. It simply was not possible to get licenses for the free distribution of newer movies from the main players in the movie industry. Voddler then tried to make a virtue out of necessity, instead emphasizing the “long tail” of independent and older movies. Some newer movies were instead made available for streaming at a pay-per-view basis. But if only some movies were to be available for consumers without cost, this was widely seen as a betrayal of the promise to become “a Spotify for movies”. Voddler itself tried to emphasize another similarity with Spotify, namely that both services used a peer-to-peer network to keep down bandwidth costs. In the following years, Voddler struggled to get users and tried to modify its business models, but finally went bankrupt in 2018, after having lost about 30 million USD in total (Wahlqvist, 2018).

In 2009, however, there was still widespread enthusiasm in Sweden over the idea of an emerging model for media distribution, defined by the three abovementioned characteristics. Spotify was doing it with music, Voddler was doing it with movies – what would be the next step? The idea of a “Spotify for e-books” gained traction. This was widely interpreted as a prediction that digital books would eventually be free of charge, and that advertisements on book pages might be inevitable. Not only bloggers, but also some well-known authors and book publishers were open to the idea of such Spotification (Andersson 2009; Fleischer, 2017b; Skugge, 2009).

One attempt at creating such a “Spotify for e-books” was called Litfy, a Swedish startup that made some headlines in 2011 when the service was presented. Similar to Spotify’s original model, the idea here was to insert advertisements inside e-books, then distribute them freely, while also giving users the choice to pay a monthly fee for an ad-free version (Videla, 2011). Unsurprisingly, this never took off. Litfy failed to get licenses from any major book publisher and was soon forgotten.

Slightly more successful was the Spanish startup 24symbols, which also in 2011 gained publicity by promoting its new service as “a Spotify for e-books”. This meant, initially, a promise to make any book free for reading, with interruptions for advertisement; like Spotify, 24symbols planned to pay 70% of advertising revenue in compensation to rights holders. This also did not work, and 24symbols soon had to switch toward a business model based on paid subscriptions.

Around year 2010–11 a shift was clear in the Swedish discourse about new business models. The analogical meaning of “Spotify” drifted away from the advertising-based model, toward the subscription-based model.

**International Spotification, 2011–14**

Spotify launched its service in the US in mid-2011. This set off a new wave of metaphorical referencing, with dozens of startups marketing themselves as “the Spotify for x”. I will focus on the cases that enjoyed significant international publicity, most of which occurred in the period 2011–14. The reporting on these startups, American as well as European,
contains clear indications to what the metaphorical meaning of “Spotify” had become in the international context.

The $x$ could stand for different kinds of digital media content. The four most common types in this period, that will be considered here, were art, books, magazines and news. It is worth noting that there was now almost no talk about “a Spotify for movies”, for the reason that this concept was now commonly associated with Netflix.

Indeed, during the same period (2011–14), many startups were also presented as “a Netflix for $x$”. There was a certain metaphorical overlap between Spotify and Netflix, which were sometimes referred to as two streaming services representing the same model. Yet, there were important differences. Netflix never had an ambition to offer “everything”, as Spotify did with music. On the other hand, Netflix began commissioning its own exclusive content, beginning with House of Cards in 2013. Furthermore, even before Netflix opened its streaming service in 2007, when it still distributed dvd’s by mail, it began putting a lot of effort into the development of recommendation algorithms. Spotify in fact did not, until its “curational turn” in the mid-2010’s. The result of this turn has been a service which no longer assumes that the user knows what music to search for, but rather caters “the right music for every moment” through a scheduled and personalized set of playlists (Eriksson et al., 2018; Morris & Powers, 2015). Like several other streaming services – with Netflix as the most prominent example – Spotify tries to move away from the business of digital distribution, trying instead to become the producer of a unique service (Fleischer, 2017a; Fleischer & Snickars, 2018).

A major point in Spotify’s curatorial turn was its acquisition of music analysis firm The Echo Nest in 2014, laying the ground for the introduction next year of Discover Weekly, a personalized playlist feature that has since been seen as central to Spotify’s competitive power (Eriksson et al., 2018 pp. 63–66, 82–84). But before that point, “Spotify” was not a metaphor that brought associations to algorithmic culture, as the talk of “a Netflix for $x$” could do. Considering these differences, the metaphorical use of “Netflix” must stay outside of this analysis, except in some particular cases of significant overlap.

The following three sections will discuss what the metaphorical meaning of “Spotify” was when used to describe services for art, literature, and journalism, respectively.

A Spotify for art?

A short-lived startup named Artify made headlines in 2012, promising “a new way to experience art”. Although its naming alluded to Spotify, its business model – renting out physical art works to subscribers – was rather promoted as “a Netflix for art”. Despite financial backing by high-profile investors like Peter Thiel, Artify shut down its business after just a year (Fernandez, 2012; Griffith, 2013).

A necessary condition to quality as “a Spotify for art”, so it seems, was that art should be streamed to subscribers. At least two startups began promoting this business model in 2014. “We envision a future when infinite interchangeable art on flat screen panels replaces much of today’s ‘static art‘”, Artkick (2014) explained on its website. Artkick’s catalog consisted of digital representations of paintings by artists who had been dead for over 70 years, so that no copyright licenses were needed. The streaming service was offered for free but “may have advertising eventually”, and a planned premium version would also include newer artworks. According to the New York Times, this would qualify
as “a Spotify for art” (Hardy, 2014). Despite flashy headlines, however, Artkick never seems to have taken off and the startup has shown no signs of life since 2015.

Also in 2014, a Swedish service named Curater was promoted as “a Spotify for art”, but with a slightly different meaning. Rather than offering a huge catalog of old artworks for streaming-on-demand, the art idea of Curater was more similar to broadcasting, with a schedule of exclusively curated art exhibitions being streamed to all subscribers (Bergman, 2014). Behind this was a major Swedish creative agency, but soon Curater was forgotten, like so many other attempts to make fine art an object of Spotification. Since 2015, we have found no further attempts to promote “a Spotify for art”.

A Spotify for e-books?

“It worked for Netflix with TV and movies. It’s starting to work for Spotify for music. So why not e-books, then?” (Perez, 2013). This line from the news site Techcrunch encapsulates the spirit of a lively discussion which culminated (at least in the US and UK press) around 2012–13. It concerned the possibilities for “a Spotify for e-books” or “a Netflix for e-books”, and what it must offer to consumers in order to work (Andrews, 2012; Bridle, 2014; Osnos, 2014; The Economist, 2015). Over time, it is possible to discern a shift in the most popular metaphor, away from Spotify and toward Netflix. This might mirror the successive accommodation with the fact that the major publishers were not so keen in granting a distribution license for all e-books to any subscription service. The offering of “everything” was essential to the Spotify metaphor, but not the Netflix metaphor, thus the latter persisted.

This can be seen, for example, in the publicity around Oyster. In 2012 it raised 3 million dollars from the high-profile venture capitalists of Founders Fund – to create a “Spotify for books”, as it was widely reported (Griffith, 2012). A year later, its e-book subscription service was opened, and like its competitor Scribd, it could in fact offer titles from all the Big Five book publishers in the US. Yet, none of these services never got close to offering “all books” like Spotify is offering “all music”. Soon the references to Spotify became more sporadic, and both services were more often described as a “Netflix for books”. Oyster, acquired by Google, announced the shutdown of its service after two years. Scribd persisted but had to introduce limits on the number of books that each user could access in a given month, thus moving further away from the unlimited consumption widely seen as essential to the “Spotify model” (Alba, 2015; Rowe, 2018).

A Spotify for magazines, journalism or news?

“Readly works like a Spotify for Swedish magazines”; these words opened the first press release from the Swedish startup Readly (2013), as it launched its service. A few years earlier, the likening with Spotify would have been understood, in a Swedish context, as a promise to consumers that they need not pay for the service. This had now changed. When Readly promoted itself as “a Spotify” in 2013, this meant a model where users pay a monthly price to get “unlimited access” to “a wide assortment”.

Readly never offered a free version, but apart from that the economic model is similar to Spotify’s in that 70% of subscription revenues are paid directly to the rights holders. Just like Spotify, it has seen a steady growth in users, but no profits, yet it has managed to
expand internationally thanks to additional rounds of venture capital. Throughout its existence (2013–18), Readly has repeated as its slogan that it is “the Spotify for magazines”.

Not everyone has agreed. Readly simply presents a digital facsimile of the paper magazine, page by page. There is no so-called “unbundling” of individual articles, which limits the potential for algorithmic recommendation systems. In a sense, it is like if Spotify would cater music not as songs, nor as playlists, but only as full albums. According to an alternative interpretation, unbundling of the paper magazine would be a necessary feature for any service to qualify as “a Spotify for magazines” (McKenzie, 2012).

The unbundling of print media has been driven further by the Dutch startup Blendle, focused more on newspapers than on magazines. Blendle has indeed sometimes promoted itself as a “Spotify for journalism”, but is more frequently described as an “iTunes for journalism”. This is logical, since Blendle is in fact not a subscription service, but rather provides an easy way to pay for access to individual articles (Gani, 2014; Lomas, 2014).

Yet the founder of Blendl has emphasized the similarity to Spotify, by defining Spotify chiefly as a tool that “makes it easy to discover the best songs” (Klöpping, 2016). From such a perspective – given that songs can be compared to articles – it is indeed doubtful if Readly can qualify as “a Spotify for magazines”.

**Conclusions**

Soon after Spotify launched its streaming music service in 2008, the idea gained traction that Spotify was not only a music service, but also a model that could be replicated in several other media industries. During the decade that followed, numerous technology startups promised to create “a Spotify for movies”, “a Spotify for books”, “a Spotify for magazines” or even “a Spotify for art”. Through the examination of a large source material – mostly news reporting from Sweden and the US – this article has demonstrated the instability of “Spotify” as a model, and how attempts to create “a Spotify for x” has often failed to uphold the metaphoric connection to the music service, as it has been understood. The idea of Spotify as a model implies a neglect of the different ways in which different media are commodified and consumed. What works for music does not necessarily work for news reporting, fine art, literature, or movies. In the cases of movies and books, the main problem has been that the major rights holders have not been very eager to grant licenses to services that might pose a risk to their existing sources of revenue. When it comes to the possible Spotification of journalism and print media, there is also a larger confusion about its object – is it about digital facsimiles of printed matter, or does Spotification imply an unbundling of individual articles, together with algorithmic systems to help users find their way? Yet, it seems like it is in the area of journalism that the idea of implementing a “Spotify model” today stands strongest. In contrast, the idea of “a Spotify for art” has not made any headlines for many years.

Looking back at the period of 2008–2018, it should be clear that there has not been one model represented by Spotify, but rather a historical sequence of different models, with partly overlapping characteristics. First it was about giving users access to everything, *for free*, financed by advertisement. Then it was about selling this access to the users in the form of monthly subscriptions. The emphasis on “everything” has since weakened a bit, though it still plays a stronger role for the metaphor of Spotify, than for the metaphor of Netflix. Meanwhile, the idea of Spotify as a model has been loaded with new associations
to curation and algorithms, which were not previously present, following Spotify’s “curational turn” in the mid-2010’s.

Ten years after the term “Spotification” was first coined, it should be clear that this does not represent one single trajectory. Furthermore, it does not seem like Spotify has been in control of the metaphoric meaning of its own name. Rather, we see a process of continuous negotiation regarding what the presumed model actually stands for, as it is imposed on other media forms than music, while Spotify itself keep changing its service and its business model. While many technology startups have indeed tried to leech on Spotify’s trademark, claiming to be “a Spotify for x”, this has been far from a sure recipe for success, as comparisons may easily backfire. Indeed, it is still an open question whether Spotify’s business can yet be deemed a success. After all, the company has throughout its existence generated enormous losses, which are very far from being offset by the modest profit reported, for the first time, in late 2018 (Mulligan, 2019). Yet, this company’s very precarity, its dependency on venture capital, has generated an amount of hype that has spilled over in all directions, thereby influencing attempts to disrupt a wide range of media industries.

Note
1. In this section, I follow the history of Spotify that we have presented in Eriksson et al. (2018).

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