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## CONTEMPORARY UKRAINIAN ART UNDER THE PRESSURE OF COMMERCIALIZATION (BASED ON CONTENT ANALYSIS)

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*This article presents a sociological analysis of the processes of commercialization (commodification) of contemporary Ukrainian musical culture in the context of globalization, digitalization, and the challenges of wartime. The theoretical framework of the study is built on a synthesis of critical theory of society: J. Baudrillard's concepts of simulacrum and hyperreality, G. Ritzer's theory of "McDonaldization", the ideas of the Frankfurt School (T. Adorno, G. Marcuse), and the critique of the society of the spectacle (G. Debord). The authors postulate the presence of a structural dichotomy in the Ukrainian musical field, where one pole ("popular") operates according to the logic of market success, standardization, and adaptation to the algorithms of digital platforms, while the other ("alternative") strives to maintain authenticity and a critical function at the cost of marginality. An empirical test of the hypothesis was conducted using a content analysis of song lyrics by popular (DOROFEEVA, Artem Pivovarov, "Okean Elzy") and alternative ("Blooms Corda", "Palindrom") artists. The results confirmed the dichotomy: the lyrics of commercially successful artists are dominated by simplified emotional themes (love, experiences), trendy social media vocabulary, and minimal use of complex metaphors, indicating a focus on predictability and ease of consumption. Meanwhile, the work of alternative artists is characterized by reflective themes (inner search, social criticism), greater linguistic density, and specific imagery, indicating a priority for authenticity. The study revealed a correlation between high digital success rates and signs of "McDonaldization" of creativity. The conclusions outline the limitations of the study (limited sample, focus primarily on textual content) and prospects for further research: expanding the methodology, studying the influence of streaming platform algorithms and the AI, and analyzing the transformation of musical culture in wartime. This article contributes to our understanding of the specific pressures of commercialization on contemporary Ukrainian art and the mechanisms behind the formation of cultural dichotomies.*

**Keywords:** commercialization of art, commodification, Ukrainian music, simulacrum, McDonaldization, content analysis, popular music, alternative music, digital platforms, society of the spectacle, cultural authenticity.

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### Setting the problem in its general form and its connection with important scientific or practical tasks

The fundamental transformations of the very nature of art under late capitalism and globalized consumer society are that art, and in particular music, ceases to function as an autonomous sphere of cultural expression or critical reflection, acquiring the status of a commodity. This process, which J. Baudrillard describes as the transition from "representation" to "simulation" [1], and George Ritzer conceptualized through "McDonaldization" [2], leads to the formation of a cultural hyperspace, where authenticity is replaced by simulacra, and uniqueness by seriality [3]. In Ukraine, these global trends are amplified by modern challenges, creating ontological uncertainty: is modern popular music art, or is it exclusively a product of digital platform algorithms and market logic? Is commercialization compatible with wartime conditions? Is commercialized culture consistent with the needs of educating citizens? This, *at the ontological level*, determines the relevance of this study.



At the *epistemological level*, the relevance lies in the need to overcome fragmentation in the analysis of this phenomenon in the Ukrainian context. Although critical theory (J. Baudrillard, Z. Bauman, T. Adorno, G. Marcuse, E. Fromm, G. Ritzer, G. Lukács, L. Althusser, A. Gramsci, G. Debord, W. Benjamin) provides a powerful tool for understanding macroprocesses of commodification, there is a lack of empirically grounded micro-research linking these abstract concepts to the concrete practices of Ukrainian artists. The study is intended as an attempt to fill this gap by proposing a systemic analysis that integrates the theoretical frameworks of simulation and rationalization with empirical analysis of creative content (lyrics) and digital strategies of artists.

Here we proceed from the fact that *the problematic situation at the ontological level* consists in the emergence of a deep structural contradiction in Ukrainian musical culture. After all, on the one hand, there is a powerful pressure from global market mechanisms and digital platforms, which through recommendation algorithms, editorial playlists and success metrics (number of listenings, subscribers, "likes", views, advertisements) form the demand for a standardized, predictable and easily consumed product. This leads to the "McDonaldization" of art [2], where the priorities, according to G. Ritzer, are efficiency (quick success), standardization, calculation (and its particular case in the form of virality) and control (adaptation to trends), analyzed as quantification by G. Lukacs [4] and as alienation from the spectacle by G. Debord [5]. On the other hand, in art, the desire for authenticity, artistic depth and cultural identity is immanently and transcendently, implicitly and practically preserved, which is currently realized primarily and mainly in niche, alternative segments. This creates a field of tension between the logic of market success and the logic of artistic value. And to analyze this, we do not have enough tools to analyze the specific mechanisms of this transformation, which constitutes the *epistemological dimension of the problem*. Traditional sociological analysis often focuses on institutional aspects or public discourse, neglecting the internal content of the cultural products themselves – their texts, images, symbolism. To understand *how* commercialization affects creativity, it is necessary to move on to the analysis of the "symptoms" of this process in the very fabric of art, that is, in texts and discourses as practices of art, which are the direct material of creative activity.

**The purpose** of our research is to analyze the processes of commercialization of contemporary Ukrainian music through the prism of critical theory (the concepts of simulacrum and McDonaldization), identify their specific manifestations in the creative practice of popular and alternative artists, and conceptualize the structural dichotomy that is forming in the Ukrainian musical field.

To achieve this goal we set the following **tasks**: 1. To systematize theoretical approaches to the analysis of the commodification of art (J. Baudrillard, G. Ritzer, W. Benjamin, Frankfurt School); 2. To identify ontological and epistemological aspects of the problematic situation that has developed in Ukrainian musical culture; 3. Based on the content analysis of song lyrics, to compare creative strategies, linguistic features and thematic dominants of popular commercial artists and representatives of the alternative scene; 4. To analyze the processes of formation of two poles – "simulative-McDonaldized" and "authentic" – in contemporary Ukrainian art.

**The object** of this study is modern Ukrainian musical culture in the context of globalization and digitalization. **The subject** are specific mechanisms and manifestations of the impact of commercialization (commodification, McDonaldization) on the creative content and strategies of Ukrainian musical artists, as represented in the lyrics of their songs.

In the study, we proceed from **the key hypothesis** that the modern Ukrainian music field is structured in a deep dichotomy, where one pole ("popular") functions according to the principles of simulation and McDonaldization, that is, focusing on market success through adaptation to algorithms and mass taste, while the other ("alternative") tries to maintain authenticity and a critical function, "paying" for this with marginality and "rejection" in commercial terms.

This key hypothesis will be tested through a number of **consequential hypotheses**, including: 1. The lyrics of popular commercialized artists will be dominated by standardized, emotionally simplified themes (love, experiences), trendy vocabulary of social networks and a minimum of complex metaphors will be used, which indicates a desire for maximum predictability and ease of perception; 2. The lyrics of alternative, less commercially successful artists may more often contain complex, reflexive themes (inner search, social criticism, existential questions, provocative problems), specific imagery and greater linguistic and semantic density, which indicates an orientation towards authenticity rather than universality; 3. Digital indicators of success (number of listens, subscribers) will correlate with the presence of signs of "McDonaldization" while low indicators will correlate with signs of authorial authenticity, which confirms the structural conflict between market logic and the logic of artistic value.

**Analysis of recent researches and publications in which the solution to this problem was initiated and which author relies**

The research is based on **critical social theory**, in particular:

1. *Jean Baudrillard's concepts of simulacrum and hyperreality*, which allow us to interpret mass culture as a sphere of production of signs that have lost contact with their referents [1; 3];
2. *G. Ritzer's theory of "McDonaldization"*, which provides a toolkit for analyzing the processes of rationalization, standardization, and control in the cultural sphere [2];

3. *Walter Benjamin's ideas of "loss of aura"*, describing the transformation of art in the face of technical reproducibility [6];

4. *Cultural critics of the Frankfurt School* (T. Adorno, M. Horkheimer, G. Marcuse, E. Fromm), which views mass culture as an industry that produces standardized products for the manipulation of mass consciousness [7; 8];

5. *Ideological critique of the society of spectacle and quantification* (G. Lukács, L. Althusser, G. Debord, A. Gramsci), which analyzes the social production of ideological consent on the basis of the "society of spectacle" as a specific order of domination of the quantitative dimension over the qualitative, of appearance over the essence, of ideological structure over authentic subjectivity, of the hegemony of order and system over the niche microresistance [9; 10; 11; 12].

**The methodological basis** of the study is content analysis as a systematic quantitative and qualitative analysis of song lyrics. It allows to identify objective patterns in the use of vocabulary, themes, images, to compare creative strategies of different groups of artists and to obtain empirical confirmation of theoretical theses. It is complemented by **a comparative method** used to contrast data on popular and alternative performers, as well as analysis **of statistical data** (Spotify, social networks) to find a connection between creative characteristics and indicators of public success.

It is on this basis that we offer lace from the following concepts:

- *the commodification (commodification) of art*, which we interpret and operationalize as a spectacular process of transforming a work of art from a form of spiritual expression or aesthetic experience into a consumer product, the value of which is determined primarily by market laws of supply and demand, rather than by internal artistic criteria;

- *simulacrum* – a copy that has no original; a hyperreal sign that replaces reality and begins to produce its own meanings. In the context of art, a work that imitates "art" but is a product of market logic and media, devoid of an authentic connection to experience or critical function;

- *McDonaldization* – a process of quantified and spectacular rationalization, in which the principles of fast food restaurants (efficiency, calculation, predictability, control, quantification, measurability) are extended to various spheres of social life, including culture. In art, it manifests itself in the standardization of forms, orientation towards quick success, dependence on quantitative indicators;

- *authenticity in art* – the quality of a work that consists in its inseparability from the unique creative idea and personality of the author, its connection with a specific cultural context, experience or truth, as well as in its ability to be an act of not utilitarian, but internally determined creative expressiveness;

- *hyperreality* – a state of spectacle society in which simulations (media images, signs, brands) due to their quantified power become more real or meaningful than the reality itself, which they supposedly represent.

## **Presentation of the main research material with full justification of received scientific results**

### **The Frame and Ramp of Simulation in the Society of the Spectacl.**

Art, in particular music, in the conditions of a society of spectacle is transformed into a commodity with a quantified, measurable and comparable value, and not simply into a form of expression or intellectual research. The processes of transformation of consumption and cultural practices, caused by commodification, create conditions for the further unification of art. This leads to the formation of standard, easily recognizable (and, accordingly, framed and consumed) forms, which become the basis of mass culture. This idea can be traced in the works of J. Baudrillard [13], who believes that in the conditions of a consumer society, art loses its authenticity and becomes a simulacrum, reflecting only market values, and not cultural or aesthetic ones. Such art is no longer artistic (self)expression, but becomes part of an economic system, where its value is determined by the market, and not by artistic content.

Such a society is a space where consumption becomes symbolic, and objects, including art, become signs that function in a simulation system. The metaphor for the space of this art is hypermarket, where not only material consumption takes place, but also the formation of new social and cultural meanings through interaction with signs. Here, consumption turns into a process that affects the organization of everyday life, travel routes, social interaction, social inequalities, biographical trajectories, value orientations, bonds of friendship and love, even identity. Hypermarkets in this context are only the focus and node of a system that centralizes not only goods, but also the very logic of consumption in a globalized world. Within a radius of tens of kilometers, arrows point to hypermarkets, which become a kind of "sorting centers" and places where people not only make purchases, but also interact with each other, creating new social connections. Hypermarkets transform consumption into a social process, forming a new sociality, but more importantly, they centralize not only goods, but also the population, influencing the organization of people's daily lives – schedules, travel routes and general behavior [13]. This allowed S. Žižek to call hypermarkets "temples of capitalism" [14], and, recalling the methodology of E. Durkheim and his follower P. Bourdieu regarding the homology of secular and church rituals and structures [15], this cannot but push us to the hypothesis of the framing of artistic activity by the supermarket paradigm.

If visiting hypermarkets is not only a physical activity, but also an intellectual one, where people engage in "work" related to interaction with objects and cultural signs, then such a new form of work includes constant, implicit and practiced confrontation, examination and coding – in other words, consumers are constantly trying to find "object-answers" to their "questions". People do not just buy goods, but seek answers to their questions in interaction with them. Such a "new hermeneutics" of the "dead author" and the "reader who evaded responsibility" also generate new practices of interaction with art. It is no longer the author with his authenticity, but templated, framed, standardized, quantified consumer goods that demand an "answer" from consumers, and the "answer" itself is already contained in their "questions", which is how the eternal and happy satisfaction of the consumer is achieved, his transformation into a "battery that feeds itself". Additional tightness (so to speak, the external control loop and the "second-order matrix") is created by messages broadcast through goods and advertising, which also work in a similar way – they become signs that prompt reflection and responses. That is, the hypermarket becomes a place where new meanings and social relations are formed through interaction with consumer goods as a constant simulation of dialogue with the society of the spectacle and the spectacle itself [5; 12].

The hypermarket is represented as a place where there is no depth, relief or perspective, but instead there is only a continuous flow of goods and advertising signs, constantly replacing each other and thereby creating the illusion of infinity, omnipotence, comprehensiveness, totality and homogeneity. The "workers"<sup>5</sup> are only engaged in restoring the "advanced stage" of the goods, maintaining the illusion of their continuous presence. Self-service emphasizes this spatial homogeneity, where people interact directly with the goods, and not through intermediaries. However, the question arises as to who is actually manipulating whom: the consumer – the goods or the goods – the consumer. And in the end, who exactly is the goods and who is the consumer. This is especially relevant in the context of the proliferation, dissemination and increasing representation of "AI creativity", generated by machine algorithms of visual or audio content. In this sense, we can already say that the production of symbolic reality has already gone further than the production of material things: at least in material production, the use of 3D printers<sup>6</sup> is still less accessible than the use of AI.

It is significant that historically negative, condemned structural characteristics, such as control and repression, in hypermarkets in particular and in the society of the spectacle in general, are integrated into the system of signs of simulation. Surveillance of buyers through cameras is no longer real control, but rather an illusion of repression, existing in parallel with advertising that calls for relaxation and carefree choice of goods. Seduction and power merge in the focus of disciplinary violence [17], built into the very biophysics of power and the biopolitics of consent to it. This contrast creates a tension between the freedom of consumption and the control observed on the part of the hypermarket: after all, if the "meeting place"<sup>7</sup> was for a long time the traditional market, now it has given way to the hypermarket. The hypermarket is a symbol of a new way of life, where the clear boundaries between city and village have disappeared, a place of "total emptiness" that hides its qualitative emptiness through a constant spectacular whirlwind of quantification.

The void is filled by new objects, hyperreal objects that serve as centers of simulation, creating the effect of neutralizing the territory. They do not simply perform their functions, but become poles around which a new social reality is formed. J. Baudrillard emphasizes that these structures lead to crisis or catastrophe, noting that important events, such as May 1968 in France, began in places where traditional territoriality and functionality of knowledge were lost [13]. It is significant that in the field of art, for example, the breakdown of traditional structures of art also implies a breakdown of territoriality, that is, the use of space and territory as part of artistic expression or its imitation. Such are the famous installations of Marcel Duchamp or Damien Hirst.

So, the society of the spectacle is changing under the influence of hypermarkets and new forms of consumption, and with it music and art in general are changing. Hyperreality arises in music, when the sound becomes artificial and is not tied to a specific place or culture. With the loss of territoriality, authenticity is lost: the settings of modern technology allow, in sufficiently high-quality headphones, to imitate and simulate a concert hall, organ hall, philharmonic hall, theatre stage, etc. This is how art becomes global and anti-territorial, which leads to the similarity of styles, as in hypermarkets, where all products become the same. This process reflects a cultural shift where authenticity and meaning are replaced by simulation, and consumption<sup>8</sup> becomes the primary way of interacting with the world around us.

Musical art, under the influence of commodification and mass media, is also turning into a superficial product. This can be seen especially clearly through advertising, which, according to the ideas of J. Baudrillard (with the frankly provocative title "Absolute Advertising, Zero Advertising"), not only changes the way of perception, but also becomes the dominant form of cultural expression, replacing deep meanings with instant, easily digestible messages that imitate meaning, simulate communication, emulate the spectacle of identity and authenticity [5]. And

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<sup>5</sup> And in the modern world, such are the observers themselves, as the concept of the prosumer [16].

<sup>6</sup> The closest equivalent in terms of generative pre-trained transformers.

<sup>7</sup> Of people among themselves, cities and villages, holidays and everyday life, consumption and communication.

<sup>8</sup> And the willingness to be an object for consumption by structures.

only the lack of depth, the superficiality and the speed with which advertising has become the dominant form of expression in modern society, absorbing all other cultural and communication forms, reveal the true nature of this phenomenon, linked only to a quantified hegemony that, in the McDonald's regime, disseminates dehumanized and dehumanized indicators and acts of self-referential measurement [9; 10; 11]. Advertising is no longer simply the promotion of goods or services, it has transformed into the main way in which humanity perceives and interacts with the world around it. Everything that previously had a deep meaning – art, morality, law, history, science or culture – is spectacularly reduced to simple, instantaneous messages that are quickly forgotten. And this is well consistent with what Guy Debord writes about the relationship between spectacle and history [12]. This leads to the creation of a superficial product that has no depth or meaning. Advertising becomes a kind of "zero degree of meaning" (almost according to R. Barthes), where all original ideas and views lose their individuality and turn into something general, understandable to everyone, but at the same time devoid of depth [13].

The mass media do not simply transmit information, but dictate certain paces of life and adaptation to them. Under their influence, people, as well as such spheres of social life as science, politics and art, acquire an "obsession with novelty", which is manifested in a constant desire to create something new and differ from the previous one. However, although society is in pursuit of new ideas, no one really understands where this novelty comes from and whether its reserves are unlimited. As N. Luhmann notes in this regard, eloquent evidence of this is the downright neurotic obsession of science, politics and art with constantly creating something new, although no one knows where the novelty of the new comes from and how large its reserve is [18]. Novelty is measurable; novelty is seductive; novelty is hegemonic<sup>9</sup>; novelty is spectacular (because it constantly commands attention). And art cannot fail to "take this into account" in its functioning.

In this accelerating vortex, art, advertising and propaganda begin to merge into a single whole, as both form the language (or rather, the sociolect, according to R. Barthes [19]) of mass consumption. Propaganda turns into marketing, their messages become increasingly similar, and as a result, the economic and political spheres are no longer separated: they are united in the sociolect of advertising, which promotes ideas, but the ideas themselves are reduced to the consumption of goods and brands. This causes a purely spectacular loss of social context, history, biography, culture; sociality begins to merge with advertising language, creating the impression of a widespread presence. Social relations, which previously had their autonomy, authenticity, uniqueness and meaning, become part of advertising discourse, which leads to their superficiality and sliding along this surface. Advertising not only fills the information space, but also shapes the perception of reality, imposes classifications (according to P. Bourdieu [20]) of aesthetics, becomes a familiar element of life, imposes its rules and criteria of perception, destroying other possible forms of expression and communication.

Advertising, which was once just a message about a certain product or service, then became a means of communication and (self)expression, is now being transformed in a totalitarian way into an independent (but not authentic) product that blends with itself. It not only tries to convince people to buy goods, but also becomes part of information and communication systems that control and manage individuals. This leads to its transformation into something more than just communication: it turns into a system that tries to be self-sufficient, self-referential and autopoietic [18], where advertising itself becomes an end, not a means. Such a transformation is caused by the influence of technologies and new forms of communication that simplify the perception of art, reducing it to a hyperreality, where the main thing is not the content, but the possibility of consumption. Advertising uses the aesthetic elements of art to create an image that attracts consumers, but at the same time devalues art itself, since its meaning is determined only by commercial interests. It uses ideological statements and techniques of subjectivation in the course of interpellation [10], but destroys the very possibility of ideology. It appeals to the moral-ethical components of thinking and structures of behavior, but reduces morality to success and representation. As a result, not only ideology or morality, but also art becomes part of the global economy, where its consumption becomes the main criterion of value. Such commercialization leads to the loss of uniqueness and depth of the work of art, because it is no longer an independent expression of ideas, but turns into a product subject to the laws of the market. Art, once a source of inspiration and reflection, now acts only as a tool for commercial gain.

### **McDonaldization, advertising and cloning: art under attack.**

The totalitarianization of advertising is also manifested in the fact that it no longer performs its original function of attracting attention to a product or service, does not concern specific people, companies or events, but itself becomes a space where the product loses its visibility and status. But this applies not only to advertising: art, morality, ideology, dissolved in advertising speech, share this fate. This may indicate a loss of connection between consumers and products, which are now disguised under various forms of advertising, and ultimately – a loss of connection between a person and his life (biography, history, the world around him) as the highest phase of alienation [5]. J. Baudrillard uses such interesting metaphors as "gloomy luxury" and "sarcophagus of the product" to thereby emphasize how advertising has turned into an inactive object that no longer evokes emotions, but only

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<sup>9</sup> Since speed, awareness, presence "in the flow" and "in the resource" are associated with belonging to power and power.

reflects a general insensitive attitude to consumption. And art, which has sincerely and actively entered this universe, trying to get its share of the profits from the spectacle, does not avoid it. Modern society is trying to leave the past behind, forgetting about its roots and authenticity. And the very constant efforts of society to preserve such a "culture" speak of the fear of loss and the desire to preserve memories of the past, even if it has become "buried", spectacted and speculated (in both senses of the word), as well as of the indecision in a society that does not know how to cope with modern realities that lead to the degradation of values. Civilization, which has reached its apogee, has fallen into a state of involution and self-devouring, where everything that was once significant is now transformed into a soulless form. Such a society is no longer capable of creating or supporting something truly real.

In this sense, J. Baudrillard's appeal to the metaphor of clones [13] is indicative, through which he sociologically conceptualizes cloning and its socio-cultural consequences, which are inextricably linked to art and commercialization. Cloning in such a conceptualization is a cultural phenomenon that reflects the fears and desires of society, because in it the idea of the original disappears, since the clone becomes an exact copy, devoid of uniqueness, which leads to a blurring of the boundaries between reality and its representations and questions the very nature of human identity. A copy has power and imaginary wealth, but only if it remains immaterial. A real attempt to materialize this copy, that is, to realize dreams of doubling, leads to the destruction of this idea. In general, it is felt that J. Baudrillard criticizes society's desire to achieve absolute identity precisely through technology, questions the ethics (and most importantly, the authenticity and anthropologicality) of such aspirations.

Indeed, cloning destroys traditional notions of individuality and identity, eliminating the "self" as a subject: a clone is a simple reproduction, not a mere reflection, as in the case of a mirror. In a mirror, the subject can find himself in another's shadow, while in cloning this element of self-alienation is absent. This reduces the person to the materialization of a copy without imaginary or symbolic aspects, the clones themselves becoming mere industrial goods, produced without a personal dimension.

The anthropological dimensions of cloning imply understanding it as the culmination of a process of body modeling that not only undermines traditional notions of personality but also questions the very existence of individuality – not just the social roles of the author or reader. That is, it leads to the disappearance of the subject as a single, unique entity, because a clone is not an individual, but a simple repetition; then the genetic code becomes a "prosthesis" in the deepest sense, it does not simply replace or recreate a missing organ, but becomes a matrix from which identical beings can arise, subject to the same genetic program. The seriality inherent in cloning turns a person into a set of interchangeable elements, similar to the mass production of industrial goods. And here it is impossible not to appeal to the commodification of art: just as cloning erases the concept of the original, the technical reproducibility of a work of art, previously described by W. Benjamin, deprives it of its "aura" – that unique quality that distinguishes the original from the copy [6].

Thus, art, like cloned beings, loses its authenticity, individuality, depth; it becomes part of the consumer mechanism, reducing creativity to a product, the main value of which lies not in its originality, but in the possibility of rapid reproduction, computability, quantification and sale. This undermines the idea of individuality in art, because creators are forced to focus on standardized forms that are easily adapted to market demands. Moreover, the recognition of the creator as a subject and actor becomes only the result of his agreement to be "inserted" and mounted in certain assemblages and frames, orders and regimes. Otherwise, practices of disciplinary violence [21] may well be used against his authenticity and subjectivity for the purpose of (re)ordering. Thus, there is a transition from authenticity to serial repetition, where value is determined not by content, but by commercial expediency.

So, in art in such a context, creativity is transformed into a commodity, and unique works of art become part of mass production. There is a loss of individuality and originality, since just as cloning reduces the individual to repetition, so the commodification of art reduces it to a commodity that loses its authenticity. Creativity becomes part of the mechanism of mass consumption, when the importance, authenticity, "aura", the essence of the original is supplanted by the desire to create (or rather, to represent) something that is spectacularly easily reproduced and quantifiably easily sold. And technologies in such practices become nothing more than rational tools and embodied instrumental rationality [22], which undermine traditional ideas about individuality and originality, and this leads to the formation of new norms, where the value of a work is measured only in the context of the possibility of being reproduced, and not unique.

Art ceases to be a simple reflection of reality and becomes a complex imitation. It no longer simply depicts the world, but actively creates a new reality that has no real basis. This directly means that it becomes a simulacrum, a copy without an original, and thus, as a simulacrum, it becomes part of the mechanism of commodification, where value is determined not by aesthetic or cultural criteria, but only by market conditions as a complex system of material and symbolic reproduction of society. Art turns into a commodity that is consumed, bought and sold in accordance with the laws of the market. As a result, authenticity is lost, and the very act of (re)creation of art is subordinated to economic benefit, political expediency, ideological hegemony. Works of art begin to be evaluated according to their commercial value, and not according to their cultural or aesthetic content. In the conditions of mass production and reproduction, art is no longer practiced as something real and true – it turns into a simulation in which meaning and authenticity are blurred or completely absent. Art becomes part of a

consumer culture where the most important thing is not what it expresses or what emotions it evokes, but how much it costs and how it can be sold or consumed.

Thus, art loses its authenticity, its value is determined not by cultural significance, but by market mechanisms, which is well conceptualized in the concept of "McDonaldization" by George Ritzer [2]. Let us recall that he emphasizes that such principles of organization as efficiency, predictability, control and standardization, on which the McDonald's restaurant chain is based, are gradually turning into basic principles of the functioning of the modern world. This is not just an expansion of fast food restaurants, but a process of global rationalization of social life. Here it is impossible not to mention M. Weber, who praised rationalization as an inevitable trend of the Western world, interpreting it as a process that ensures increased computability and manageability of social structures, simplifying the achievement of effective goals, and metaphorizing it as "disenchanted the world". That is, as the removal of magic, supernatural from life and an increase in predictability and instrumentality in human behavior.

G. Ritzer, developing the ideas of M. Weber, emphasizes in McDonaldization the latest stage of rationalization, but applies this approach to the sphere of mass consumption: for example, fast food restaurants with their high formal rationality reflect the logic of modern society, where both staff and visitors are forced to focus on rational ways to achieve their goals. The "window for motorists" provides speed and efficiency, thereby reinforcing the key principles of McDonaldization. Another example is bureaucracy as an organizational model, which is based on clear rules of hierarchy, formalities, which allows to ensure efficiency in management, submission to formal rules, impersonality in decision-making, specialization of knowledge. However, G. Ritzer criticizes bureaucracy as dehumanizing, since the focus on efficiency often leads to the loss of individuality and humanity. From the same perspective, he also analyzes the influence of the scientific management system developed by Frederick Taylor and Fordism on "McDonaldization" [23]. Taylorism sought to optimize work processes through a scientific approach to labor management, which led to the division of labor into small operations that could be performed automatically, while Fordism emphasized automation and increased productivity in mass production, particularly through assembly line technology.

And in themselves these phenomena would not be dangerous, but McDonaldization, Fordism and rationality have a common nature with the Holocaust (and here G. Ritzer rhymes with Z. Bauman [24]), emphasizing that both phenomena demonstrate the effects of formal rationality, but in completely different contexts. The emphasis on efficiency, predictability and control can be compared with the principles of "McDonaldization", and bureaucracy was used as a tool to implement this terrible event. Moreover, modern systems of formal rationality can lead to similar disasters if the circumstances are favorable. This is facilitated by the main elements of "McDonaldization", which include:

- efficiency, which achieves maximum productivity at minimum cost;
- predictability, where customers can count on standardized products and services regardless of where they order them, which gives a sense of security and stability;
- quantitiveness: the quantity of goods and services available becomes more important than their quality. Customers often feel they are getting more for their money in terms of volume rather than taste or satisfaction.

The study of these processes becomes especially relevant in the context of globalization, where service and product standards are becoming common to different countries and cultures, and in the field of art, the principles of "McDonaldization" have also become a major factor in success and penetrate many areas of activity.

For example, *efficiency* lies in the optimal approach to meeting the needs of the client: in "McDonaldization", fast food preparation and the ability to receive an order without leaving the car emphasize the maximum simplicity of the process. In the field of art, you can see a borrowed idea, ensuring a "fast" result. A quickly created work of art – fast publication, fast popularity, fast result, etc. *Calculatability* in McDonaldized systems emphasizes measurable indicators – portion size, number of minutes spent, number of user calls, number of recommendations, volume of "sold" advertising, cost of materials and "expenses", cost of service, etc. Therefore, quantity acts as a substitute for quality: in particular, the more product or service for a lower price, the better; modern culture perceives "more" as "better". Employees also focus not on quality, but on how quickly they can complete the task, because their work is also reduced to quantity – to do more for less pay. The principle of *predictability* ensures that, regardless of place or time, the product will be identical. Burgers at McDonald's in New York and Tokyo will taste the same as those purchased in a year or a month, which provides comfort: customers know what to expect, without unpleasant surprises. And employees adhere to the same principle, performing everything according to a predetermined scenario, which provides managers with control and confidence in the level of quality. Finally, *control*, as the fourth principle, is observed at all levels: customers are limited by the number of dishes on the menu, uncomfortable seats encourage them to leave the establishment faster, but employees are also controlled through clearly regulated tasks and the use of special technologies to maintain discipline. Managers are able not only to control the customer experience, but also to ensure that employees follow clear standards [2].

In contemporary art, the principles of McDonaldization can be traced through a similar desire for simplification, schematization, stereotyping, and a commercial approach. Cultural works acquire a commercial

form, are simplified, and standardized for the mass consumer. Thus, art, like McDonald's products, becomes predictable, controlled, and designed for maximum efficiency, primarily in the commercial component. Artists, under the pressure of modern market demands, are forced to create works that correspond to mass tastes, rather than their own creative impulses.

Thus, musical art in modern society loses its authenticity, turning into a simulacrum that meets market conditions, but is devoid of cultural or aesthetic significance – or, at least, its own "aura" and independent meaning. It is increasingly subject to the principles of standardization and templateization dictated by commercial logic, which makes the artistic product predictable and maximally adapted to the mass consumer. The lack of depth and the advantage of fast consumption create superficial cultural phenomena in which uniqueness and creative intent give way to efficiency, rationalization, market value and advertising. The commodification of musical art not only changes its functions, but also simplifies its content, reducing its ability to be a source of cultural shifts. Processes are taking place that contribute to the transformation of art into a part of the global economy, where its role is determined by commercial goals. The uniqueness and deep meaning of the work recede into the background, giving way to commercial expediency. Art is indeed taking on the characteristics of a simulacrum, where value is determined not by cultural content but by the ability to be easily created, reproduced, and sold. This is exacerbated by the processes of globalization and market transformations that significantly affect all cultural spheres, including music.

### **Lyrics as Merchandisers: Content Analysis of Songs by Ukrainian Performers.**

The research used the content analysis method, which allows you to explore the content of text or visual materials, identifying certain patterns, the frequency of use of words or themes, and determining how certain ideas or messages are represented in the media.

A number of artists were selected as the object of the study based on several criteria. Firstly, this is their digital popularity, which was measured by the number of listeners on Spotify, subscribers on YouTube, Instagram and TikTok. In particular, artists DOROFEEVA, Artem Pivovarov, "Ocean El'zy" demonstrate high indicators. Secondly, the selection took into account the presence of these artists in editorial playlists Spotify, which indicates their integration into the streaming services' algorithms and access to a wide audience. In the case of the artists "Blooms Corda" and "Palindrome" the focus was on their authenticity and positioning as an alternative to mass culture. Their popularity on digital platforms is less large-scale, but this emphasizes their orientation to a niche audience. Additionally, the posters of the artists' previous and upcoming concerts were analyzed, where the venues were indicated (hence the capacity of the concert venues). This made it possible to assess the scale of the artists' concert activities. Thus, the selection of artists was based on a comprehensive approach that took into account their popularity in the digital space and activity in concert activities.

In the content analysis of song lyrics, we set ourselves the goal of analyzing which words and themes are most common in the work of artists from different music scenes – popular and little-known. This will allow us to identify patterns in the creative practices and styles of musicians and reveal the relationship between the creative process and commercial requirements. To conduct such an analysis, song lyrics were used as the main units of observation. Here it will be important for us to pay attention to the following aspects, which we propose to conceptualize as indicators of the commercialization and commodification of art, its embedding in the processes of McDonaldization:

1. Types of themes and imagery: lyrical themes that predominate in songs, such as love, emotional experiences, struggle, self-expression, etc.
2. Frequency of use of certain words: for example, whether certain words are frequently used in the lyrics of popular artists. At the same time, for lesser-known artists, it can be determined whether they use specific terms or concepts that are more typical of creative and non-commercial environments.
3. Language style and expressions, i.e. whether the lyrics of popular artists contain more pragmatic or simple expressions that can be aimed at attracting a wide audience, or whether the lyrics of little-known musicians contain more provocative and complex artistic images and creativity.
4. A tendency to use trending or commercial themes, i.e. popular phrases or concepts that are well received within the framework of broad trends: this could be the use of social media language or popular trends on platforms.
5. The number of metaphors, symbols, and images, for example, popular artists may use more images that are banal and standard metaphors that are well perceived by listeners and adapted to commercial standards, while little-known artists are more likely to use deep or specific symbols.

Our methodological invention allows us to identify important sociocultural aspects related to the influence of musical trends and dynamic and fluid market demands on artists' creativity. It should be noted that our analysis will not hide obscene lyrics from the sample, as it is important to include all types of content for accurate analysis. Despite the fact that some songs contain obscene language or elements subject to censorship, we believe that these lyrics can also be important for understanding the creative process of artists, especially in the context of their

attitude to commercial demands and cultural trends, as well as for analyzing differences in creative approaches between popular and little-known artists.

DOROFEEVA's songs cover a wide range of topics, from love and relationships to personal experiences and social themes. She often addresses themes of love, emotional experiences and relationships between people, with a predominance of lyrical themes, in particular love, emotional experiences and self-expression: "And I kept crying and crying, I tore my soul..." or "Again, my temple is hurting. And I drowned the pain in your love". Analyzing the lyrics of five songs ("And I was still crying", "Heartbeat", "Let them write", "I love, but not quite", and "So that it wouldn't happen"), we can identify common words that are often found in her work: "I", "you", "heart", "pain", "love". The writing style is simple and emotionally rich, which helps attract a wide audience: "Microscopic cracks in my heart. I treat them with love – it beats again"; "We should be together. We are like those flowers in the middle of winter".

Regarding the tendency to use trendy or commercial themes, then the lyrics of the songs actively integrate modern trends and the language of social networks into their texts, for example, terms related to Internet culture: "I'll throw you in the ban ban ban ban. Ban ban ban ban", or with technical devices: "I will turn on the sound at full volume, I will disappear – and I will not enter".

Similar results are obtained from the content analysis of the lyrics of Artem Pyvovarov's songs: lyrical themes, in particular love, emotional experiences and self-expression, prevail. For example, in "Baraban" he sings about emotional tension and the desire to express himself through music: "Beat! Beat! Beat! Beat! Beat wild beats, Baraban, baraban!". Artem Pyvovarov also actively integrates words and images into his songs that reflect modern trends – from technical to political. For example, in the songs "Dumy" and "Oh, Panno!" he adapted Taras Shevchenko's poems, giving them a modern sound. But the "analysis of common words" gave us completely different results: analyzing the lyrics of five popular songs on Spotify ("Dumy", "Ochi", "Oh, Panno!", "Manifesto" and "Dumy"), common words were found that occur in all these compositions – "eyes", "beat", "heart", "think".

For comparison, if we analyze the lyrics of 5 songs by the band "Ocean El'zy", the words "I", "you", "sweetheart", "window", "sky", "wine" are most common. In the songs "As Never", "In the Sky", "I So Want...", "Flower" and "Without Fight" often uses the word "you", which emphasizes the personal nature of the addressee of the song. The word "I (me)" is also present in all songs, which appeals to the first person, a personal approach to expressing thoughts and feelings, emulating privacy and subjectivity, simulates authenticity and a personal aura. The combination of these words appeals to the imitation of the interaction between the lyrical hero and the addressee, which is the central element of many compositions as a way of involving intimacy and personality in the performance. There is also a feeling that indicates the importance of communication and expression of feelings (see, for example, "In the Sky"): "On my street it has long been spring. And the spirit takes hold as if from a height, Because I live like this, as if I were flying, As if I were flying Every moment, when you are with me!".

In addition, the word "Heaven" is found in the lines "I so want to be with you, as this land is to heaven", which emulates and dramatizes the depth and scale of the lyrical hero's feelings for the addressee, comparing the desire for him with the desire for the sky, which is a symbol of height, inaccessibility and boundlessness. But such a public, de-intimized feelings, their objectification is precisely an illustration of the process of spectacularization and commodity McDonaldization, where unique and sometimes even unnameable feelings acquire purely commodified labels. Such a comparison appeals to a strong desire to be with a loved one, which can be compared to the desire for something grand and unattainable, but in fact, in continuous simulation, it profanes it and reduces it to mechanical metaphors. In particular, these popular songs are united by a common theme of demonstration and manifestation of "deep emotional experiences" related to love, loneliness and inner searches, longing for a loved one, the desire to be with them, as well as the pain of betrayal and lack of mutual understanding. These songs claim to be close and understandable to the masses precisely through involvement, appeal and embedding in difficult-to-name (but that is why they are significant for many and "recognizable" by many) topics and issues.

For comparison, a content analysis of the lyrics of songs by little-known Ukrainian artists was conducted. For example, the group "Blooms Corda" in the song "Maybe" appeals to the theme of inner search and doubt. The lyrical hero reflects on the possibility of changes in life and seeks answers to questions about himself and his place in the world. This reflects the desire for self-knowledge and personal development, in particular in the words: "Maybe you are not a great poet, not a comet researcher", but also in the simultaneous appeal to the everyday here-and-now "Just enjoy life!". Another song "My California" transports the listener to the image of an idealized place that symbolizes dreams and the desire to escape from reality. This place becomes a metaphor for the search for happiness and harmony, reflecting the desire for a better life: "Concrete and graffiti, but the best girls live there"; "My California is where her lips and the sunny hare are". In the composition "Letter to Catherine" the lyrical hero addresses a fictional person, expressing his feelings and reflections, addressing issues of communication, emotional expression, and the need for understanding: "As soon as I leave home, I feel like a mangosteen among vegetables not of our latitudes". "A Song about War" reflects the experiences and consequences of war, raising issues of violence, loss and recovery. It serves as a reminder of the importance of peace and humanity: "Sing, sing my little bird, let your song echo, in the blooming summer mornings, and do not forget that war"; "Give, give your smile, it

is so radiant, forget everything that once was and do not forget that war". Finally, in the composition "In Search of a Sweet Person" the lyrical hero is looking for a close person with whom he can share emotions and experiences with an appeal to mutual understanding and emotional support in relationships: "But will I be able to meet a person who will be sweet to me?".

Thus, lyrical themes encompass inner search, the desire for idealized places, emotional expression, the aftermath of war, and the need for emotional support. The compositions reflect the desire for self-discovery, the search for harmony and understanding, which is characteristic of artistic expression, not designed solely for commercial success, but aimed at transmitting emotional and philosophical ideas to listeners.

Finally, an analysis of the lyrics of the artist "Palindrome" was conducted. In them, common themes and images can also be identified that are repeated in all compositions. For example, the theme of internal search and self-knowledge, one's own development and the need for support: "I need a couple of shoes very much, and tie my shoelaces, friend". In "I'm afraid" the hero expresses fear of the unknown and the desire to find support: "I'm afraid that I won't find you"; "It's become dark in these courtyards, now I'm afraid here, I see dodgers who smoke hookahs, but I'm afraid to go to the shopping center without Liana"; "I'm afraid of turning into music to which I f\*\*\*\*\* about the weather, going in a taxi to my birthday". The theme of loss and pain is also raised, in particular, the song "There Was a Spring" describes the loss of a loved one and the pain of separation: "You didn't sleep all night again, Come back, maybe that's enough?" In "Muteness" the author manifests emotional emptiness and alienation: "Water has covered my neck, It seems I am mute", as well as fear and uncertainty: "Sometimes I see a strange dream, Where I am looking for a crumb of truth". The theme of hope and the search for harmony is present in the song "Good Words", where the lyrical hero is looking for positive emotions and harmony: "I am looking for good words, To tell you". The common word for all these songs is "I". This also appeals, as in one of the popular groups above, to the personal nature of the experiences and the internal dialogue of the lyrical hero, but we note that this is a completely different appeal. The texts of this author are aimed at reflecting deep emotional experiences associated with internal search, losses, hope, fear and the need for emotional support. The use of the first person singular ("I") in Barthes' style names and denotes the intimacy and personal nature of these experiences, although this type of art is also associated with the Barthesian barrier between expression and meaning [19].

Thus, according to the content analysis, the commodification of musical art in Ukraine is manifested through the close integration of creative processes with commercial requirements. Popular performers in the analysis (DOROFEEVA, Artem Pivovarov and "Ocean El'zy") are oriented towards trending topics, platform algorithms (Spotify, TikTok) and simplification of texts for mass perception. At the same time, lesser-known performers, such as "Blooms Corda" and "Palindrome" appeal to authenticity, write meaningful musical works, but have a limited audience. The method of content analysis revealed such signs of commercialization as the use of popular words and images in the texts, adaptation of music to the algorithms of digital platforms, and a focus on simple and emotionally rich themes that are easily perceived by a wide audience. The impact of commodification on the creative process also lies in the fact that popular performers adjust music to market standards, focusing on demand. The consequences of commodification for consumers are manifested in the perception of music as a product: popular artists satisfy the demand for easily accessible and emotionally understandable content, while listeners of alternative music strive for greater immersion in the works, depth of meaning, and emotional connection with the performers.

### **Conclusions and prospects for further research.**

The study confirmed the key hypothesis about the structural dichotomy of the modern Ukrainian musical field. Based on the concepts of simulacrum (J. Baudrillard) and McDonaldization (G. Ritzer), as well as the critical theory of the Frankfurt School, we conceptualized the deep contradictions between the market logic of commodification, aimed at standardization, efficiency and quantified success, and the desire for authenticity, depth and critical function inherent in art. Content analysis of the lyrics of popular (DOROFEEVA, Pivovarov, "Ocean El'zy") and alternative ("Blooms Corda", "Palindrome") performers revealed differences in creative strategies, which confirms this dichotomy. Popular music is dominated by simplified emotionally rich themes (love, relationships), trendy vocabulary of social networks, a minimum of complex metaphors, which indicates an orientation towards predictability and ease of consumption. Conversely, in the works of alternative artists, reflexive themes (inner search, social criticism, existence), greater linguistic density and specific imagery are more common, which indicates the priority of authenticity. The correlation of well-quantified indicators in popular artists with signs of McDonaldization confirms the structural conflict between market success and artistic value.

The *limitations* of the study are the relatively small and selected sample of artists, which makes generalization difficult. The content analysis of song lyrics does not cover other important aspects (musical envelope, visual aesthetics, production strategies), and the focus is mainly on digital content, which can create distortions. The theoretical framework, although powerful, may weigh the specifics of the local cultural context of Ukraine in the context of war. Methodologically, the analysis of quantitative indicators of success does not take into account the qualitative aspects of the impact on culture.

That is why the prospects for further research include expanding the sample, conducting comparative studies to identify Ukrainian specifics, qualitative methods (for example, in-depth interviews with artists and producers), a comprehensive analysis of multimedia strategies (video clips, social networks), studying the role of streaming platform algorithms and their impact on creativity, as well as the expansion of artificial intelligence as a tool for generative creativity and its consequences for authorship. Also relevant is the study of the interaction of commercialization with the challenges of war, in particular the analysis of changes in the subject matter and emotional tone in music after 2022.

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## СУЧАСНЕ УКРАЇНСЬКЕ МИСТЕЦТВО ПІД ТИСКОМ КОМЕРЦІАЛІЗАЦІЇ (ДОСВІД КОНТЕНТ-АНАЛІЗУ)

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*Стаття є соціологічним аналізом процесів комерціалізації (коммодифікації) сучасної української музичної культури в умовах глобалізації, цифровізації та викликів воєнного часу. Теоретична рамка дослідження*

будується на синтезі критичної теорії суспільства: концепції симулякра та гіперреальності Ж. Бодрійяра, теорії «макдональдизації» Дж. Рітцера, ідей Франкфуртської школи (Т. Адорно, Г. Маркузе) та критики суспільства спектаклю (Г. Дебор). Автори постулюють наявність структурної дихотомії в українському музичному полі, де один полюс («популярний») функціонує за логікою ринкового успіху, стандартизації та адаптації до алгоритмів цифрових платформ, а інший («альтернативний») прагне зберегти автентичність та критичну функцію ціною маргіальності. Емпіричну перевірку гіпотези здійснено методом контент-аналізу популярних текстів пісень (DOROFEEVA, Артем Пивоваров, «Океан Ельзи») та альтернативних («Blooms Corda», «Паліндром») виконавців. Результати підтвердили гіпотезовану дихотомію: у текстах комерційно успішних артистів домінують спрощені емоційні теми (любов, переживання), трендова лексика соцмереж та мінімальне використання складних метафор, що свідчить про орієнтацію на передбачуваність та легкість споживання. У той же час творчість альтернативних виконавців характеризується рефлексивними темами (внутрішній пошук, соціальна критика), більшою мовною щільністю та специфічною образністю, що вказує на пріоритет автентичності. Дослідження виявило кореляцію між показниками успіху та ознаками «макдональдизації» творчості. У висновках зазначено обмеження роботи (обмежена вибірка, фокус переважно на текстовий контент) та перспективи подальших досліджень: розширення методології, вивчення впливу алгоритмів стрімінгових платформ та ШІ, аналіз трансформації музичної культури в умовах війни. Стаття робить внесок у розуміння специфіки тиску комерціалізації на сучасне українське мистецтво та механізмів формування культурної дихотомії.

**Ключові слова:** комерціалізація мистецтва, коммодифікація, українська музика, симулякр, макдональдизація, контент-аналіз, популярна музика, альтернативна музика, цифрові платформи, суспільство спектаклю, культурна автентичність.

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