

Journal of Arts, Music, Design & Creative Industries



Digital Streaming and Career Sustainability in Jamaica's Music Industry: Rethinking Success for Independent Reggae and Dancehall Artists

Azaria Glenmore & Marlon Barrington

Digital Streaming and Career Sustainability in Jamaica’s Music Industry: Rethinking Success for Independent Reggae and Dancehall Artists

^{*1}Azaria Glenmore & ²Marlon Barrington

How to cite this article: Glenmore, A. & Marlon, B. (2026). Digital Streaming and Career Sustainability in Jamaica’s Music Industry: Rethinking Success for Independent Reggae and Dancehall Artists. *Journal of Arts, Music, Design, and Creative Industries*, 1(1), 18–31.

Abstract

This article examined how digital streaming is reshaping career sustainability for independent reggae and dancehall artists in Jamaica. Jamaica possesses one of the world’s most influential music cultures, yet the commercial value generated by its music has historically exceeded the share captured by many local creators and music enterprises. The study used an integrative documentary review of peer reviewed research, Jamaican policy documents, copyright and collecting society materials, international cultural economy reports, and music industry data. The findings showed that streaming has expanded international reach, lowered distribution barriers, strengthened access to listener data, and created new pathways through which independent artists can connect with diaspora and global audiences. However, visibility does not automatically translate into sustainable earnings. Platform based royalty systems, playlist and algorithmic gatekeeping, fragmented rights administration, uneven business skills, high promotional demands, and dependence on foreign digital intermediaries continue to limit the capacity of many Jamaican artists to convert cultural influence into stable income. The findings further indicated that streaming works best when treated as one component of a diversified career model that combines recorded music royalties with publishing, live performance, synchronization, brand partnerships, merchandising, direct fan relationships, and effective rights management. The article concluded that success in Jamaica’s contemporary music economy should be assessed not only through streams and visibility but through ownership, recurring revenue, rights capture, audience development, and long term career resilience. It recommended stronger music business education, improved metadata and rights registration, coordinated export support, better use of analytics, and public policy that strengthens Jamaican creators’ bargaining position in the global platform economy.

Keywords: *Digital Streaming, Reggae, Dancehall, Independent Artists, Creative Economy, Jamaica*

1.0 Background of the Study

Jamaica occupies an exceptional position in the global music economy because its cultural influence is far greater than the size of its domestic market. Reggae, ska, dub and dancehall have shaped popular music, sound system culture, production techniques, fashion, language and performance practices across many regions. UNESCO's inscription of reggae music of Jamaica on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity recognizes the form as both a distinctive Jamaican cultural expression and a vehicle for social commentary, identity and community life (UNESCO, 2018). The global recognition of Jamaican music therefore reflects not only commercial appeal but a deep cultural asset whose economic value depends on the capacity of local creators to retain rights, reach audiences and participate effectively in international markets.

The economic importance of culture has also become more explicit in Jamaican public policy. The Government's 2025 Green Paper on the National Policy for Culture, Entertainment and the Creative Economy identifies entertainment, culture and the creative industries as strategic contributors to national development and places emphasis on intellectual property, data collection, trade, investment, technology, infrastructure and the mobility of creative practitioners (Ministry of Culture, Gender, Entertainment and Sport [MCGES], 2025). Jamaica Information Service reported that the sector generates more than five per cent of gross domestic product and supports nearly three per cent of employment, illustrating that creative work is not peripheral to the economy (Jamaica Information Service [JIS], 2025). These policy developments create an important context for examining whether the digital music economy is increasing the share of value retained by Jamaican creators.

Digital streaming has become central to that question because recorded music is now primarily distributed and consumed through platforms. Global recorded music revenue reached US\$29.6 billion in 2024, and streaming accounted for 69 per cent of total recorded music revenues (International Federation of the Phonographic Industry [IFPI], 2025). The growth of services such as Spotify, Apple Music, YouTube Music and Audiomack has reduced the importance of physical distribution and made music catalogs accessible across national borders almost instantly. For Jamaican artists, this transformation can be especially significant because the domestic population is small while demand for reggae and dancehall extends to North America, Europe, Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean diaspora.

The local digital environment is increasingly capable of supporting streaming consumption and music entrepreneurship. World Bank data indicate that approximately 90 per cent of Jamaica's population used the Internet in 2024, reflecting a substantial expansion of digital access compared with earlier periods (World Bank, 2025). Spotify entered Jamaica and other Caribbean markets in 2021, creating an additional formal streaming channel for local listeners and artists. Data released after its first year showed strong domestic interest in dancehall, reggae fusion, lovers rock and established Jamaican catalogs, while also demonstrating the international reach of Jamaican performers (Jamaica Gleaner, 2022). Digital access therefore strengthens both the local consumption base and the potential for artists to build audiences abroad.

Streaming also changes the mechanics of entry into the recorded music market. Independent artists no longer require a conventional record label to place a release in a physical distribution chain because digital distributors can deliver recordings to multiple platforms for relatively low upfront cost. This can reduce barriers for emerging Jamaican performers, producers and small labels,

especially those operating outside established Kingston based industry networks. Joseph (2024), however, argues that the major recorded music markets in the Caribbean were relatively slow to integrate streaming strategically, meaning that access to platforms did not automatically produce equivalent gains in monetization, rights administration or business development. The central issue is therefore not merely whether Jamaican music is available online, but whether creators can organize their rights and business practices to capture value from that availability.

The shift to streaming has also changed the meaning of musical success. Under a sales model, commercial performance could be measured through units sold, while the streaming economy measures repeated access, playlist exposure, monthly listeners, followers, completion rates and audience retention. Morris (2020) describes this environment as one in which music is increasingly optimized for platform infrastructures, data systems and recommendation mechanisms. These dynamics can encourage artists and teams to consider release frequency, song length, metadata, collaborations, social media activity and audience analytics alongside traditional artistic and promotional decisions. For Jamaican genres, whose production culture has historically included singles, riddims, dubplates and rapid response to social trends, some aspects of platform logic may appear compatible with existing practices, while others create new forms of gatekeeping.

A major advantage of streaming is discoverability beyond national boundaries. Digital platforms can place an independent Jamaican artist in the same searchable environment as major international acts, and algorithmic recommendations can connect songs to listeners who have never encountered the artist through radio, touring or traditional media. Balaji and Sigler (2018) showed how web based circulation increased the audiovisual mobility of Caribbean genres, including dancehall, by enabling local cultural forms to move through global digital networks. More recent industry data also indicate that artists increasingly generate meaningful listening and royalties outside their home countries, suggesting that streaming can function as an export infrastructure for music (Spotify, 2025). For a small island music economy, the ability to reach foreign listeners without equivalent physical distribution costs is strategically important.

Yet global reach is not the same as economic sustainability. Towse (2020) explains that streaming reorganized music economics by placing digital service providers between creators, rights holders and listeners and by replacing unit sales with subscription and advertising based revenue pools. The resulting payments are distributed through complex chains involving labels, distributors, publishers, collective management organizations and other rights owners. Independent artists who do not understand master ownership, publishing, neighboring rights, metadata and royalty collection may therefore accumulate streams without capturing all income to which they are entitled. This challenge is highly relevant to Jamaica because the country's international musical impact has historically coexisted with concerns about weak business structures and leakage of value from local creators.

Copyright and collective rights management consequently remain central to career sustainability. Jamaica's Copyright Act protects musical works, sound recordings and performances, while the Jamaica Intellectual Property Office advises creators to use recognized collective management organizations to facilitate licensing and remuneration (Jamaica Intellectual Property Office [JIPO], n.d.). The Jamaica Association of Composers, Authors and Publishers licenses musical works and distributes royalties to composers, authors and publishers, demonstrating that streaming income must be understood as part of a wider rights ecosystem rather than as a single platform payment (Jamaica Association of Composers, Authors and Publishers [JACAP], n.d.). Accurate work

registration, ownership splits and metadata are therefore essential business practices for artists seeking long term income from globally consumed Jamaican music.

The contemporary debate is also shaped by concerns over the fairness of streaming payment systems. The dominant pro rata model generally allocates revenue according to a recording's share of total streams, while user centric proposals would distribute each subscriber's contribution among the artists that subscriber actually listens to. Jensen (2024) and Bergantiños and Moreno Ternero (2025) demonstrate that different allocation models produce different incentives and distributional consequences, although no single reform automatically resolves all inequalities. For Jamaican artists, the debate matters because smaller markets and niche genres may benefit more from strong fan engagement and export audiences than from direct competition for aggregate global stream volume.

Career sustainability therefore requires a broader view than streaming royalties alone. Watson, Watson and Tompkins (2023) found that streaming, social media and live music can evolve together, with digital followings supporting royalty income and wider career opportunities. This suggests that a stream can have indirect economic value when it leads to concert demand, brand relationships, synchronization opportunities, merchandise purchases or stronger direct fan connections. For reggae and dancehall artists, international festivals, diaspora events, touring, sound system culture and collaborations can convert online discovery into income streams that are not captured in platform royalty figures.

The problem facing Jamaica is consequently one of conversion: how can extraordinary cultural visibility be converted into durable creator income, business ownership and domestic economic value? Spence (2019) argued that the global popularity of reggae and dancehall did not by itself guarantee sufficient policy or institutional support for Jamaica's music sector. The current platform era gives this longstanding problem a new form because artists can now reach audiences more easily while becoming dependent on infrastructures, recommendation systems and payment rules largely controlled outside Jamaica. This article therefore examines the opportunities and limitations created by digital streaming and considers how independent reggae and dancehall artists can build careers that are commercially sustainable without reducing artistic success to stream counts alone.

2.0 Literature Review

Joseph (2024) examined the adoption of music streaming services across major recorded music markets in CARICOM using structured interviews with regional experts, documentary analysis and audiovisual materials. The study found that streaming creates important opportunities for music visibility, discovery and monetization but that Caribbean markets have experienced delayed and uneven adoption. The research also identified copyright administration, business models, digital policy and industry capacity as central conditions affecting whether the region can benefit from streaming. For Jamaica, the study is important because it shifts attention from platform availability to the institutional and business capabilities required to convert digital access into local economic value.

Towse (2020) analysed the economic organization of streamed music and showed that digital service providers have fundamentally altered the relationship among creators, rights holders, collective management organizations and consumers. Streaming replaced a model based heavily on discrete sales with one based on access, subscription revenue and platform mediated royalty allocation. The study emphasized that the distribution of income depends on contracts and rights

ownership at several stages of the value chain, meaning that artists may receive only a fraction of revenue associated with their recordings. This framework is relevant to Jamaica because independent artists who control masters and publishing are positioned differently from performers whose rights are fragmented across labels, producers and publishers.

Morris (2020) investigated how streaming platforms shape cultural production through what he describes as platform effects. The study identified sonic, data and infrastructural optimization as strategies used by artists and industry actors to respond to recommendation systems, playlists and platform metrics. This perspective suggests that artists increasingly create and market music in an environment where visibility is mediated by technical systems as well as human gatekeepers. For dancehall and reggae, platform optimization can support discovery, but it can also place pressure on artists to adjust release patterns, promotional behavior or even creative decisions to suit platform conventions.

Watson et al. (2023) used longitudinal data from 255 artists signed to an independent music publisher to test relationships among social media following, streaming and royalty income. Their analysis found that growth in streaming related audiences was associated with streaming royalty income and that digital and live music activities could reinforce one another. The study is useful for understanding independent Jamaican careers because it demonstrates that social media visibility has greater economic value when connected to measurable listening and other revenue generating activities. It also cautions against assuming that follower numbers alone indicate financial sustainability.

Moreau, Wikström, Haampland and Johannessen (2024) compared alternative streaming payment models using a large dataset covering 154,505 users and approximately 890 million streams. Their analysis showed that changing from the dominant pro rata system to user centric or artist centric approaches would redistribute revenue in different ways across songs and rights holders. The findings challenge simplistic claims that one payment reform will necessarily produce a dramatic improvement for all professional artists. For Jamaican independent artists, this indicates that royalty reform matters but must be accompanied by ownership, scale, rights registration and audience development if it is to produce meaningful career gains.

Jensen (2024) examined alternative royalty systems and the debate surrounding the distribution of subscription revenue on streaming platforms. The study explained that pro rata systems reward artists according to their share of total platform streams, while user centric systems link a listener's subscription more directly to that listener's choices. Jensen showed that debates about fairness are inseparable from competing interests among platforms, labels, artists and consumers. This is relevant to Jamaica because reggae and dancehall often serve dedicated transnational audiences whose economic contribution may not be fully visible when analysis focuses only on aggregate stream volume.

Bergantiños and Moreno Ternero (2025) provided formal foundations for both pro rata and user centric revenue allocation methods and evaluated the incentives created by each approach. Their study demonstrated that revenue sharing rules influence strategic behavior and the distribution of platform income among creators. Although the research is theoretical, it reinforces the importance of understanding streaming as a market design issue rather than simply a technology of distribution. Jamaican creators and policymakers therefore need to engage with platform governance and royalty architecture in addition to promoting higher stream counts.

Ng and Gamble (2026) examined the labor of independent hip hop producers in the digital music economy and found that platformization intensifies self promotion, social media work and dependence on digital gatekeepers. Their findings show that independent cultural producers must perform significant non creative labor to professionalize and maintain visibility. The study has strong parallels with Jamaican dancehall and reggae because many independent artists operate as small businesses, managing content creation, release strategy, branding, fan communication and analytics without large institutional teams. Streaming may lower distribution barriers while simultaneously increasing the amount of entrepreneurial labor expected from creators.

Kaye (2025) explored the financialization of music copyrights and argued that the growing treatment of royalty streams as investment assets can deepen inequalities within the music economy. The study is relevant to Jamaican music because globally recognizable catalogs can attract outside investment while creators may have limited bargaining power or insufficient information about long term rights value. For artists considering catalog sales, advances or royalty share arrangements, short term liquidity needs must therefore be weighed against the future income and control embedded in copyright ownership.

Spence (2019) examined reggae, dancehall and cultural policy in Jamaica and identified a disconnect between the global cultural value of Jamaican music and the policy support historically available to the sector. The study argued that creative industries policy cannot be understood through economic value alone because social status, cultural history and institutional priorities shape which sectors receive support. Although conducted before the current expansion of streaming in Jamaica, the findings remain important because digital distribution does not by itself correct long standing weaknesses in financing, training, infrastructure or rights administration.

Balaji and Sigler (2018) analysed Caribbean music videos and demonstrated how digital circulation enables genres such as dancehall to move between local territorial identity and global cultural markets. Their work illustrates how visual representation, place and cultural branding become part of the international value of music. In the streaming era, this relationship has expanded because songs circulate alongside videos, short form clips, user generated content and algorithmic recommendations. Jamaican artists can therefore benefit from the strong geographic identity attached to reggae and dancehall, but commercial success depends on retaining enough control over the intellectual property and brand value generated by that identity.

IFPI (2025) reported that streaming represented 69 per cent of global recorded music revenue in 2024 and that paid subscription streaming remained the principal driver of industry growth. These data confirm that streaming is no longer an optional promotional channel but the dominant infrastructure of recorded music monetization. At the same time, industry wide growth does not indicate how revenue is distributed among countries, genres or individual artists. The strong performance of the global market therefore provides opportunity for Jamaican music while leaving unanswered the question of how much of the value associated with Jamaican cultural production is retained by local creators and enterprises.

Spotify (2025) reported that independent artists and labels collectively generated more than US\$5 billion from the platform in 2024 and that many artists earning royalties received most of their listening income from audiences outside their home countries. As a company generated source, these claims should be interpreted alongside independent scholarship on platform power and payment systems. Nevertheless, the data illustrate why streaming is strategically important for artists from small markets: export listening can become a central component of music income

without requiring physical distribution abroad. For Jamaican creators, this reinforces the importance of release strategy, metadata, rights ownership and international audience analytics.

UNESCO (2022) emphasized that Jamaica’s cultural and creative industries require stronger regulatory frameworks, coordinated support and resilience mechanisms, especially as digitalization changes the operating environment for creators. UNESCO’s later policy monitoring work also notes the continuing need for improved statistical information about the local creative sector (UNESCO, 2024). The lack of detailed, regularly updated music industry data remains a major research and policy problem because it limits evaluation of creator income, export performance, platform adoption and employment. This evidence gap makes it difficult to distinguish cultural visibility from domestic economic capture.

The reviewed literature therefore converges on four broad observations. First, streaming expands access and discovery but creates new forms of intermediation rather than eliminating intermediaries. Second, creator earnings depend heavily on ownership, contracts, rights registration and platform allocation rules. Third, digital visibility requires substantial promotional and analytical labor, which can disadvantage artists without professional teams. Fourth, small music markets need public and industry institutions capable of converting cultural distinctiveness into export income, data, bargaining power and durable creative enterprises. These observations provide the basis for assessing the Jamaican case.

3.0 Research Findings

The review indicates that digital streaming has materially improved the international accessibility of Jamaican music. Reggae and dancehall no longer depend to the same extent on foreign physical distributors, radio programmers or record shops to reach listeners abroad. A properly distributed release can be available simultaneously across major markets, enabling independent artists to build audiences in the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, Europe, Africa and the Caribbean diaspora. This reduces one historical barrier associated with Jamaica’s small domestic market and strengthens the export potential of music as a digital service. The opportunity is reinforced by the global familiarity of Jamaican genres and by reggae’s status as an internationally recognized element of intangible cultural heritage (UNESCO, 2018; Joseph, 2024).

The findings also show that streaming can strengthen long tail discovery and catalog value. Jamaican music possesses decades of recordings that continue to attract listeners after their original release periods, and digital services make older catalogs continuously searchable and recommendable. This matters for reggae, roots, dub and classic dancehall because historical recordings can generate recurring attention rather than disappearing when physical stock is exhausted. Streaming therefore extends the commercial life of music, but the associated income benefits the parties who own or administer the relevant master and publishing rights. Where catalog ownership has been transferred abroad or rights information is incomplete, Jamaica may receive cultural visibility without equivalent domestic revenue capture (Towse, 2020; Kaye, 2025).

A third finding is that streaming has lowered distribution barriers but has not removed gatekeeping. Traditional gatekeepers such as radio programmers, labels and distributors now coexist with playlist editors, algorithms, platform recommendation systems, social media creators and digital marketing networks. Artists can upload music independently, yet being available on a platform is very different from being discovered at scale. Morris (2020) shows that platform visibility is influenced by data and infrastructural optimization, while Ng and Gamble (2026) demonstrate that independent producers must devote significant labor to self promotion and platform management.

Jamaican artists therefore face a new gatekeeping environment in which technical literacy and promotional resources can be as important as access to distribution.

The review further indicates that the local adoption of streaming should be understood as part of a broader transformation in listening culture. Jamaica's high Internet penetration provides a favorable infrastructure, but subscription habits, payment methods, mobile data costs, free video platforms and informal sharing all influence how local audiences consume music. The arrival of major services expanded formal options, yet Caribbean streaming markets developed later than North American and European markets (Joseph, 2024). This delayed adoption may have reduced the period during which Jamaican labels, artists and consumers could accumulate platform specific knowledge, data and business routines. Strengthening local streaming culture therefore remains part of strengthening the commercial ecosystem around Jamaican music.

The findings show that stream counts alone are an inadequate measure of career sustainability. A song may receive high exposure while generating modest net income after revenue is divided among platforms, distributors, labels, publishers, producers and collaborators. The dominant payment system also rewards share of total platform activity, meaning that large catalogs and high volume global genres can capture substantial portions of the royalty pool. Research on alternative payment systems confirms that changing the allocation formula would redistribute income but would not eliminate underlying differences in audience scale, ownership and bargaining power (Jensen, 2024; Moreau et al., 2024; Bergantiños & Moreno Ternero, 2025). Sustainable careers therefore require attention to net creator income rather than headline stream totals.

Rights ownership emerged as one of the strongest determinants of economic outcome. An independent Jamaican artist who owns the sound recording, controls or shares the composition rights, registers works accurately and collects relevant royalties is positioned to retain more value than an artist who does not understand the rights attached to a release. JIPO identifies musical works, sound recordings and related rights within Jamaica's copyright framework, while JACAP licenses musical works and distributes royalties to rights holders (JIPO, n.d.; JACAP, n.d.). The practical implication is that music business administration is not separate from artistry; it is part of the infrastructure that converts creative work into recurring income.

Metadata quality is closely connected to this issue. Streaming royalties and publishing income depend on accurate identification of works, writers, performers, publishers, recording owners and identifiers such as International Standard Recording Codes. Missing or inconsistent data can delay matching and payment, especially when a song circulates internationally across multiple services and territories. For Jamaican music, collaborative production practices can make this challenge more complex because riddims, remixes, features and informal creative contributions may involve multiple rights claims. Standardized split documentation and early registration can reduce disputes and improve the probability that income reaches the correct parties.

The evidence also supports a diversified career model rather than dependence on streaming royalties alone. Watson et al. (2023) found that streaming and social media can contribute to other parts of an artist's income ecosystem, including live music. For Jamaican artists, a stream can therefore have value as a discovery event that leads to festival bookings, diaspora performances, brand partnerships, collaborations, synchronization uses, merchandise sales or direct fan support. Reggae and dancehall have strong live and cultural dimensions, making this complementary relationship commercially significant. Career sustainability is strongest when digital listening feeds multiple revenue channels rather than functioning as the sole source of income.

Touring and performance remain especially important because Jamaican music has historically developed through live events, sound systems, festivals and community performance. Streaming can provide promoters with audience evidence through listener locations, follower growth and track performance, helping artists identify cities where touring demand may exist. An independent artist can use platform analytics to distinguish between domestic popularity and international audience clusters and can target marketing or performance planning accordingly. This data driven approach does not replace artistic judgment, but it can reduce uncertainty in export development and help small teams allocate scarce promotional resources more strategically.

Social media is another critical layer of the streaming economy, but the findings caution against treating online attention as income in itself. Viral clips can trigger major increases in streams, especially for dancehall songs that fit dance, meme or short form video cultures. However, follower counts and engagement only become economically meaningful when they lead to repeat listening, direct fan relationships or other revenue generating activity. Watson et al. (2023) show that the relationship between social media and artist income is uneven, whereas Ng and Gamble (2026) highlight the substantial labor required to maintain online visibility. Jamaican artists therefore need integrated strategies that connect social media activity to identifiable business objectives.

The platform economy also changes the pace of release and promotion. Because recommendation systems respond to recent listener activity and because audiences encounter constant flows of new content, artists may feel pressure to release more frequently. This can suit dancehall's tradition of rapid singles and riddim based production, but it can also encourage quantity at the expense of long term catalog development. Morris (2020) warns that cultural production can become optimized around platform logics. A sustainable Jamaican strategy should therefore balance frequency with artistic identity, rights clarity, promotional capacity and the development of recordings that retain value beyond a short viral cycle.

The research further suggests that algorithmic visibility can influence aesthetic decisions. Songs with immediate hooks, short introductions and highly shareable sections may perform well in digital environments, while platform metrics can encourage artists to interpret creative choices through skip rates, completion rates and playlist performance. This does not mean that platforms determine Jamaican music, but they become part of the environment within which commercial decisions are made. The long term risk is that creators may over optimize for platform behavior and weaken the distinctiveness that makes reggae and dancehall culturally valuable. Maintaining creative autonomy while using platform intelligence is therefore an important strategic balance.

Another major finding concerns bargaining power. Global streaming platforms, large distributors and multinational rights companies operate at a scale far beyond individual Jamaican artists and most local labels. This asymmetry affects access to data, contractual negotiation, playlist relationships, advances and marketing resources. The 2025 Jamaican Green Paper recognizes the need to strengthen intellectual property protection, investment, infrastructure and institutional coordination within the creative economy (MCGES, 2025). Such policy support is important because individual entrepreneurship cannot fully solve structural imbalances between small market creators and globally dominant intermediaries.

At the same time, independent distribution creates new ownership opportunities. Artists who self release can retain control over masters and choose among distribution services, label service agreements or licensing arrangements rather than transferring ownership automatically. Spotify's

own industry reporting states that independent artists and labels generated about half of platform royalties in 2024, indicating that independent participation has become commercially significant within the wider streaming ecosystem (Spotify, 2025). Although platform supplied figures require cautious interpretation, the trend supports the argument that Jamaican artists can build viable international businesses without following one conventional label pathway.

The challenge is that independence requires business capability. Artists must understand distribution contracts, recoupment, royalty splits, neighboring rights, publishing, taxes, brand management, audience data and release planning. They also need access to legal and accounting support when negotiating with foreign partners. The Jamaican creative economy has strong artistic talent, but policy documents and sector discussions continue to identify capacity building and institutional support as priorities (UNESCO, 2022; MCGES, 2025). Music business education should therefore be treated as industry infrastructure rather than as an optional skill set for a small number of managers.

The findings also reveal a data deficit. Jamaica has policy level estimates of the creative economy's contribution to GDP and employment, but detailed public data on music exports, streaming revenue, creator earnings, rights ownership, catalog performance and occupational structure remain limited. UNESCO's policy monitoring work notes the continuing importance of mapping the cultural and creative industries to improve evidence for decision making (UNESCO, 2024). Without stronger data, policymakers cannot easily evaluate whether increased global streams of Jamaican music are producing higher domestic income, and creators cannot benchmark their business performance against reliable sector indicators.

The role of collective management remains important even as platform distribution expands. Streaming does not eliminate the need to license compositions, collect performance and mechanical royalties, or manage international reciprocal relationships. JACAP's role in licensing and distributing royalties demonstrates that the value chain includes rights beyond the payment made to a recording distributor (JACAP, n.d.). Education campaigns should therefore distinguish master royalties from publishing and other rights so that artists understand where income arises and which organizations or contracts are responsible for collecting it.

The analysis also suggests that Jamaican music policy should focus on export readiness rather than exposure alone. The world already recognizes Jamaican music; the central development problem is ensuring that creators and domestic firms are commercially equipped when global opportunities arise. Export readiness includes high quality recordings, clear ownership documentation, professional metadata, international distribution, market intelligence, legal support, tour planning, brand strategy and access to financing. The value of streaming is greatest when it feeds an organized export system rather than functioning as an isolated promotional channel.

Cultural branding provides Jamaica with an important advantage. Reggae and dancehall carry clear associations with place, language, style and history, and this identity can differentiate Jamaican music in crowded global catalogs. Balaji and Sigler (2018) demonstrate the connection between Caribbean music and territorial identity, while UNESCO (2018) recognizes reggae as a living cultural heritage. The commercial objective should not be to dilute this identity to imitate dominant global genres but to use digital platforms to circulate distinctive Jamaican cultural products while ensuring that creators retain rights and attribution.

Streaming can also strengthen connections between Jamaican artists and the diaspora. Diaspora listeners are important because they can support repeat consumption, live events, merchandise and

cultural circulation in major foreign cities. Platform analytics can identify where diaspora and non diaspora audiences overlap, enabling artists to plan collaborations, tours and marketing. This is especially relevant to emerging artists who may not have the resources for broad international promotion. Data can help transform a general idea of global popularity into specific market knowledge about where audiences are located and how they engage.

The findings raise a further issue concerning artificial intelligence and synthetic content. IFPI (2025) and WIPO discussions increasingly identify generative artificial intelligence, unauthorized training and streaming fraud as emerging threats to rights holders. Jamaican music is vulnerable because distinctive voices, rhythms, styles and catalogs can be imitated or exploited in digital environments where attribution is difficult to monitor. JACAP's current work registration process includes declarations concerning the use of artificial intelligence, illustrating that local rights institutions are already encountering these questions (JACAP, n.d.). Future career sustainability will therefore depend on both digital opportunity and stronger mechanisms for authenticity, attribution and rights enforcement.

Taken together, the findings suggest that streaming should be understood as infrastructure, not as a complete business model. It provides distribution, discovery, data and recurring royalty potential, but an artist's career depends on how those functions connect with ownership, publishing, performance, licensing, audience relationships and enterprise development. This distinction is crucial for Jamaica because the country already possesses global cultural recognition. The next stage of industry development requires mechanisms that convert that recognition into creator controlled assets and durable income.

A sustainable definition of success for independent reggae and dancehall artists should therefore include at least five dimensions. First is ownership, meaning the extent to which creators retain control over masters, compositions and brand assets. Second is recurring revenue across multiple rights and commercial channels. Third is audience depth, measured through repeat listening, direct fan relationships and geographic diversity rather than one viral moment. Fourth is professional capacity, including rights administration, analytics and business planning. Fifth is resilience, meaning the ability to continue creating and earning despite changes in platform rules, trends or market conditions. These dimensions provide a more meaningful framework than streams alone for evaluating whether digital transformation is strengthening Jamaica's music economy.

4.0 Conclusion

The study concluded that digital streaming has expanded the international reach of Jamaican music and created valuable opportunities for independent reggae and dancehall artists to distribute recordings, access audience data, build transnational fan bases and participate in the global recorded music market. Jamaica's strong cultural identity, high Internet penetration and globally recognized music traditions provide an important foundation for digital growth. However, the evidence also shows that streaming visibility does not automatically produce sustainable creator income. Platform based royalty systems, algorithmic and playlist gatekeeping, complex rights chains, weak metadata, unequal bargaining power and the growing burden of self promotion can limit the economic benefits available to independent artists. The central strategic issue is therefore not whether Jamaican artists should use streaming, but how they should integrate it into a broader business model. Artists who retain rights, register works accurately, understand royalty pathways, use analytics intelligently and connect streaming to live performance, publishing, synchronization, merchandise, brand partnerships and direct fan relationships are better positioned to build resilient

careers. Jamaica's policy challenge is similarly broader than expanding digital access. The country needs stronger industry data, music business education, rights administration, export support and institutional coordination so that the global circulation of Jamaican music generates greater domestic value. Success in the streaming era should consequently be measured through ownership, recurring income, audience development, rights capture and long term career sustainability rather than through stream counts alone.

5.0 Recommendations

The study recommends a coordinated approach among the Ministry of Culture, Gender, Entertainment and Sport, Jamaica Creative, JIPO, JACAP, music industry associations, universities, training institutions, distributors, labels and artist managers to strengthen Jamaica's capacity to capture value from digital music. First, music business education should be expanded so that artists and producers understand master ownership, publishing, neighboring rights, split documentation, metadata, royalty statements, distribution agreements and international licensing. Second, creators should be encouraged to register works promptly and maintain accurate identifiers and ownership information before releases are distributed. Third, export development programmes should combine streaming analytics with market intelligence, touring support, international showcases, diaspora engagement and synchronization opportunities. Fourth, public institutions should improve the collection and publication of music industry data so that platform activity, exports, employment and creator earnings can be monitored over time. Fifth, independent artists should adopt diversified income strategies that combine streaming with live performance, publishing, merchandise, brand partnerships, direct fan commerce and audiovisual licensing. Sixth, Jamaica should continue strengthening copyright enforcement and collective rights management while developing policy responses to artificial intelligence, synthetic music, streaming fraud and unauthorized exploitation of Jamaican cultural expressions. Finally, artists and their teams should use streaming platforms strategically rather than passively: data should inform release timing, audience targeting and market development, but creative decisions should preserve the distinctive cultural identity that gives reggae and dancehall their global value. These measures would help shift Jamaica from a model in which its music is globally influential to one in which Jamaican creators and enterprises capture a larger and more sustainable share of the economic value generated by that influence.

References

- Balaji, M., & Sigler, T. (2018). Glocal riddim: Cultural production and territorial identity in Caribbean music videos. *Visual Communication*, 17(1), 91–111. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1470357217727675>
- Bergantiños, G., & Moreno-Ternero, J. D. (2025). Revenue sharing at music streaming platforms. *Management Science*, 71(10), 8319–8335. <https://doi.org/10.1287/mnsc.2023.03830>
- International Federation of the Phonographic Industry. (2025). *Global music report 2025: State of the industry*. IFPI. [IFPI Global Music Report 2025](https://www.ifpi.org/global-music-report-2025)
- Jamaica Association of Composers, Authors and Publishers. (n.d.). *Frequently asked questions*. [JACAP frequently asked questions](https://www.jacap.org/frequently-asked-questions)
- Jamaica Gleaner. (2022, March 1). Spotify releases data for Jamaican artistes, songs. *The Gleaner*. [Spotify releases data for Jamaican artistes, songs](https://www.gleaner.com/story/2022-03-01/spotify-releases-data-for-jamaican-artistes-songs)

- Jamaica Information Service. (2025, October 7). *Green Paper on National Policy for Culture, Entertainment and the Creative Economy* tabled in House. [Green Paper announcement](#)
- Jamaica Intellectual Property Office. (n.d.). *About copyright and related rights*. [JIPO copyright and related rights](#)
- Jensen, F. J. (2024). Rethinking royalties: Alternative payment systems on music streaming platforms. *Journal of Cultural Economics*, 48(3), 439–462. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10824-024-09507-z>
- Joseph, F. J. (2024). Streaming forward: Adoption considerations for the major recorded music markets in CARICOM. *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies*, 30(3), 1236–1253. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13548565231203983>
- Kaye, D. B. V. (2025). Renting royalties: How the assetization of music copyrights contributes to inequality for musicians. *Media, Culture & Society*, 47(7), 1394–1412. <https://doi.org/10.1177/01634437251341715>
- Ministry of Culture, Gender, Entertainment and Sport. (2025). *Green paper: National policy for culture, entertainment and the creative economy 2025–2035*. Government of Jamaica. [National Policy for Culture, Entertainment and the Creative Economy](#)
- Moreau, F., Wikström, P., Haampland, O., & Johannessen, R. (2024). Alternative payment models in the music streaming market: A comparative approach based on stream-level data. *Information Economics and Policy*, 68, 101103. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.infoecopol.2024.101103>
- Morris, J. W. (2020). Music platforms and the optimization of culture. *Social Media + Society*, 6(3). <https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305120940690>
- Ng, J., & Gamble, S. (2026). Hip-hop music producers’ labour in the digital music economy: Self-promotion, social media and platform gatekeeping. *New Media & Society*, 28(2), 530–548. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14614448241295304>
- Spence, K. M. (2019). When money is not enough: Reggae, dancehall, and policy in Jamaica. *The Journal of Arts Management, Law, and Society*, 49(1), 45–60. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10632921.2018.1528191>
- Spotify. (2025, March 12). *How the music industry’s cultural and financial impact define its success in 2025: Spotify Loud & Clear report*. Spotify. [Spotify Loud & Clear 2025 coverage](#)
- Towse, R. (2020). Dealing with digital: The economic organisation of streamed music. *Media, Culture & Society*, 42(7–8), 1461–1478. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443720919376>
- UNESCO. (2018). *Reggae music of Jamaica*. Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. [UNESCO Reggae Music of Jamaica](#)
- UNESCO. (2022, February 1). *Jamaica is on track for a Creative Economy Act to protect and support its cultural and creative industries*. [UNESCO Creative Economy Act article](#)
- UNESCO. (2024). *Mapping of the cultural and creative industries in Jamaica*. Policy Monitoring Platform. [UNESCO Jamaica cultural and creative industries mapping](#)

Watson, A., Watson, J. B., & Tompkins, L. (2023). Does social media pay for music artists? Quantitative evidence on the co-evolution of social media, streaming and live music. *Journal of Cultural Economy*, 16(1), 32–46. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17530350.2022.2087720>

World Bank. (2025). *Individuals using the Internet (% of population): Jamaica*. World Development Indicators. [World Bank Jamaica data](#)

World Intellectual Property Organization. (2025, April 23). *IFPI looks at a decade of digital transformation in the music industry*. WIPO Magazine. [WIPO Magazine article](#)