THE DIGITALIZATION OF MUSIC CULTURE:
A CASE STUDY EXAMINING THE MUSICIAN/LISTENER RELATIONSHIP
WITH DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY

A Dissertation
Submitted
to the Temple University Graduate Board

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

By
Mary Elizabeth Ray
August, 2012

Examining Committee Members
Dr. Fabienne Darling-Wolf, Advisory Chair, Mass Media & Communication
Dr. Michael Maynard, Mass Media & Communication
Dr. Hector Postigo, Mass Media & Communication
Dr. Aram Sinnreich, External Member, Rutgers University
ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores how the rise of widely available digital technology impacts the way music is produced, distributed, promoted, and consumed, with a specific focus on the changing nature of the relationship between artists and audiences new technology has engendered. Through in-depth interviewing, focus group interviewing, and discourse analysis, this case study explores the contemporary artist-audience relationship. This study demonstrates that digital technology impacts the relationship by making it closer and more multidimensional. This is intensified by the fact that everyone is participating; the audience and artist actively engage each other. The omnipresence of music culture combined with the omnipresence of technology is particularly salient. Media consumers are simultaneously engaged with music through technology, and technology through music and this happens on many different levels. Taken as a whole, artist and audience’s musical lives are fragmented as they occur in multiple online and offline places, at multiple times, and are continuous. They create, download, stream, listen, share, burn, and build upon content while engaging in multiple personal and social practices. And, in the process, they experience rich meaning making attached to particular life events, people, places, and times. Engagement in a music community is not just listening to music, or consuming music, but participating in a culture. The nature of contemporary music culture is best characterized by community and as such, this dissertation argues we might better think of the audience as *accomplices* to the artist.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My sincere gratitude to the many people who supported me through my graduate experience, and especially through my dissertation. Thank you for believing in me.

To my advisor, Dr. Fabienne Darling-Wolf for her guidance, patience, empathy, support, and mentorship through the entire dissertation process. Thank you for sharing your love of qualitative methods and thank you for our many meaningful talks.

To my committee members: Dr. Michael Maynard, for his insightful feedback, sharp eye, practical suggestions, and steady support; Dr. Hector Postigo, for his strong theoretical guidance; Dr. Aram Sinnreich, for his thorough and thoughtful feedback and practical suggestions for future work.

To Denise Lannon and Nicole McKenna in the SCT graduate office at TU. Your assistance over the years was indispensable. Thank you.

To all my friends who stood by me, steadfast, as I took on this challenge. Jamesina Harrick, Ryan Boyd, Ben Schorr, and Chris Novak you are my family. I am so grateful to have you all in my life.

To Humphrey, for always staying by my side.

Finally, to my parents, Pat and Bob Ray, and my brother Jeff Ray. None of this would be possible without my family. Thank you for your unwavering support and kindness. I love you so very much.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT .................................................................................................................... iii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ................................................................................................. iv
CHAPTER 1 .................................................................................................................... 1
THE DIGITALIZATION OF MUSIC CULTURE .............................................................. 1

  Research Questions ................................................................................................... 6

CHAPTER 2 .................................................................................................................... 8
LITERATURE REVIEW: POPULAR MUSIC & SOCIETY ................................................. 8

CHAPTER 3 ................................................................................................................... 27
LITERATURE REVIEW: TECHNOLOGY & SOCIETY ..................................................... 27

CHAPTER 4 ................................................................................................................... 37
METHOD: INTERVIEWING & DISCOURSE ANALYSIS .................................................. 37

  In-depth & Focus Group Interviewing ......................................................................... 37
  Discourse Analysis ....................................................................................................... 42
  Concluding Methods Remarks ..................................................................................... 45

CHAPTER 5 .................................................................................................................... 47
KRISTIN HERSH: BACKGROUND & STRATEGY ........................................................... 47

  The CASH Music Philosophy ....................................................................................... 48
  Developing an Artist-Specific Strategy ....................................................................... 51
  Engaging the Active Listener: A Transparent Approach .............................................. 56
  Humanizing the Process .............................................................................................. 67
  Organic Community Building Through Interactivity ................................................. 73

CHAPTER 6 .................................................................................................................... 77
RECONCEPTUALIZING THE AUDIENCE: ONLINE COMMUNITY’S ROLE IN
THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MUSICIAN AND AUDIENCE .......................... 77

Kristin Hersh’s Online Forum ........................................................................... 79

Information Exchange: .................................................................................... 79

Nurturing Community ....................................................................................... 87

Quality and Availability .................................................................................... 95

Reception and Celebration ............................................................................... 99

Concluding Remarks ....................................................................................... 103

CHAPTER 7 ......................................................................................................... 106

THE LOGISTICS OF CONSUMPTION: WHO, WHAT, WHEN, WHERE, & HOW

DO PEOPLE CONSUME MUSIC? ..................................................................... 106

Social & Personal Everyday Listening ............................................................... 106

Meaning Making Through Medium .................................................................. 116

Learning About New Music ............................................................................. 128

Obtaining Music ............................................................................................... 132

CHAPTER 8 ......................................................................................................... 143

RECEPTION & NEGOTIATION: THE IMPACT OF TECHNOLOGY ............... 143

Audience Response .......................................................................................... 143

Technology’s Impact ......................................................................................... 162

CHAPTER 9 ......................................................................................................... 175

CONCLUDING REMARKS: ARTISTS AND ACCOMPLICES ..................... 175

Music Culture and Technology: A Review of Primary Findings ...................... 176

Experiencing Everyday Life Together: Analysis and Recommendations ........ 183

REFERENCES .................................................................................................. 191

APPENDIX A ..................................................................................................... 203
FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW QUESTIONS ................................................................. 203
APPENDIX B .............................................................................................................. 206
KRISTIN HERSH INTERVIEW QUESTIONS ........................................................... 206
APPENDIX C .............................................................................................................. 208
JESSE VON DOOM INTERVIEW QUESTIONS ......................................................... 208
APPENDIX D .............................................................................................................. 209
FORUM TOPICS ...................................................................................................... 209
APPENDIX E .............................................................................................................. 210
IRB CERTIFICATION ................................................................................................. 210
APPENDIX F .............................................................................................................. 211
IRB RECERTIFICATION ............................................................................................. 211
APPENDIX G .............................................................................................................. 212
IRB CONSENT FORM ................................................................................................. 212
APPENDIX H .............................................................................................................. 214
PERMISSION TO AUDIO RECORD ........................................................................... 214
CHAPTER 1
THE DIGITALIZATION OF MUSIC CULTURE

Music and communication technology have always played an important role in my life. Over the past decade I have seen the two drastically impact each other, providing motivation for my research. This dissertation explores how the rise of widely available digital technology is shaping the way music is produced, distributed, promoted, and consumed, with a specific focus on the changing nature of the relationship between producers and consumers this new technology has engendered. For the purpose of this inquiry, digital technology refers to “technologies of cognition, communication, and cooperation that are computerized (i.e., work with digital logic) and networked” (Fuchs, 2008, p. 2).

At the turn of the millennium, the music industry panicked as the proliferation of downloadable music contributed to notable profit loss (O’Conner 2001; Linton 2002; Heylin 2003; Burkart & McCourt, 2006; Fairchild, 2008; Knopper, 2009; Kot, 2009; Elborough, 2009). Considering technology’s influence on music consumption, Jones (2002) argued that it could create “new territorizations of space and of affect” as consumers download digital music rather than purchase physical media (p. 213). However, by 2005 music downloading had decreased from 32% to 22% (Madden & Rainie, 2005). Around this time, scholars started publishing work that revealed findings contrary to the industry’s original expectations. For example, La Rose, et al. (2005), considered downloading behavior through a social cognitive framework and found that file sharing frequently becomes a mindless habit “with files accumulating on college
students computers that they may never even open or listen to” (Discussion Section).
O’Hara and Brown’s (2006) examination of iPod use suggested that people do not possess the ability to process the sheer volume of music they carry around with them. The authors argued that this resulted in a change in listening behavior characterized by focus on a select few musical artists.

Tanaka (2006) describes how new “technological infrastructures for creating, rendering, and distributing music change the way that music can be consumed and appreciated” (p. 14). As some consumers mindlessly continue to download music, others consciously choose to purchase physical media. For example, Brown and Sellen (2006) found that “physical objects are more suitable for collecting and that current digital files do not support all the subtle activities involved in collecting” (p. 47). Similarly, Katz (2004) found that people prefer CD’s because of the physicality, performance, visual aspects, convenience, enhancement, and the fact that the purchase supports musicians. Indeed, digital technology has not only significantly influenced media audiences, but also the music industry, leading to major structural and promotional reconsiderations for record companies and their artists (Fairchild, 2008; Kot, 2009; Wikstrom, 2009).

Numerous scholars have demonstrated that digital technology influences both how people think, and the nature of cultural texts that are created (Wellman, 1996, 1999; Haythornwaite, 2001; Morley, 2007). However, when scholars examine the relationship between technology and society, their work tends to fall in to one of two categories: those that privilege the technology (McLuhan, 1964, 1967; Postman, 1993) and those that privilege the individual’s ability to influence the nature of cultural production (Pinch, Bijker, & Hughes, 1987; Feenberg, 1991; Jenkins, 1992, 2006). For example, Postman
(1993) argues that society “seeks its authorization in technology, finds its satisfactions in technology and takes its orders from technology” (Postman, 1992, p. 71). Contrarily, Jenkins (2006) explains that active media participation and the subsequent collective intelligence stemming from that participation has the power to structure digital media. In other words, media convergence can be characterized as “a bottom-up consumer driven process” (Jenkins, 2006, p. 18).

More recently, scholarship has pointed to the fact that the relationship between technology and the socio-cultural context in which it develops is much more multidimensional than these approaches suggest, and is better characterized as a complex web of interrelations (Castells, 2000; Livingstone, 2006; Fuchs, 2008). For instance, Fuchs (2008) proposes a framework that conceives of the relationship between communication technology and society as “consisting of (1) a process in which human actors design ICTs [Information and Communication Technologies] and in which it is analyzed how society shapes ICTs, and (2) of a process in which it is assessed how the usage of ICTs transform society” (p. 2). This conceptualization acknowledges the dynamic, give-and-take characteristics of the two deeply enmeshed concepts, and is consequently a useful framework for this research. It avoids privileging either technology or human action by embracing mutual influence. This framework recognizes that people “design and use communication technology” and “in the process technology conditions, that is, enables and constrains, human cognition, communication, and cooperation” (Fuchs, 2008, p. 4).

Fuchs’ (2008) theoretical framework is based in social theory of the dialectical tradition, which “conceives of the relationship of actors and structures as a mutual one”
Fuch’s approach, based on Gidden’s (1984) and Bourdieu’s (1977) sociological work, attempts to reconcile symbolic interactionism/action theory and functionalism/structuralism. From Gidden’s (1984), Fuchs takes the idea of system reproduction, the concept that through activities people reproduce conditions that make future activities possible. Subsequently, Gidden’s (1984) structuration theory “holds that the rules and resources drawn upon in the production and reproduction of social action are at the same time a means of system reproduction” (p. 51). From Bourdieu (1977), Fuchs takes the concept of habitus, which describes the enabling and constraining power of social structures. As Bourdieu (1977) explains, “The habitus provides conditioned and conditional freedom; that is, it is a condition for freedom, but it also conditions and limits full freedom of action” (p. 95). Fuchs uses these two concepts, structuration and habitus, to address the relationship between social structure and human practice (Fuchs, 2008).

This dissertation uses Fuch’s theoretical framework for the purpose of engaging with the relationship between society and technology. The concept of habitus allows us to address how digital technology structures human action relating to consumers’ musical lives, while the concept of structuration encourages us to acknowledge that those structures are simultaneously a means to and a result of peoples’ actions.

New conceptualizations of media consumption also inform this research. For example, Bauman (2003) characterizes contemporary society as functioning under a new cultural paradigm in which all aspects of our contemporary lives are increasingly “liquid.” The liquid state is differentiated from modernity by a breakdown of normative societal guidelines, and the concept of consumption is central to its characterization. Most important to this research is Bauman’s contention that our contemporary condition is
characterized by a shift in how consumption is conceptualized, signaled by a blurring of the traditional separation between consumption, production, and distribution. Arguing that people are simultaneously “promoters of commodities and the commodities they promote,” this liquid cultural paradigm highlights the vast implications of ever evolving communication technology on our society (Bauman, 2007, p. 9).

The way individuals consume, and, more generally, experience music in their daily lives is one area in which the implications of technological change are strongly felt in our contemporary environment. If, in a digital environment, our lives are tied to consumption, one might think of our music consumption as defining our “musical lives.” For the purpose of this research, musical life is defined as the broad set of practices that constitute and shape consumers’ and artists’ engagement with popular music. These practices include, but are not limited to, 1) actual music creation in the form of playing live, recording, and disseminating music; 2) music consumption in the form of obtaining and listening to recorded music, or attending concerts and/or other music performances; and 3) interaction with fellow listeners stemming from the aforementioned practices.

Shuker (2008) explains that each time a new technology is introduced to the public, it changes the way we experience music and, therefore, changes how we relate to and consume music. O’Hara & Brown (2006) similarly argue that the way people consume music is influenced by the technologies that mediate the experience and conclude that communication technology has “disrupted existing music practices and created new social phenomena around music” (p. 4). Tanaka (2006) describes how new “technological infrastructures for creating, rendering, and distributing music change the way that music can be consumed and appreciated” (p. 14). As a result, new music
listening practices emerge from new social spaces and change the way people interact with music.

Research Questions

This research examines how digital technology shapes the relationship between music producers and consumers by posing the following research questions:

RQ1: How do artists and audiences employ and negotiate the online environment created by digital technology?
   a. How do artists/audiences choose to represent themselves online?
   b. How do artists/audiences use digital technology in their musical lives?
   c. What elements of artists online presence do audiences most frequently employ in their musical choices and/or when developing a relationship with a musician/artist?

RQ2: How does the use of digital technology impact artists’ relationship with their audience, and, conversely, audiences’ relationships with their favorite artists?
   a. How do musicians/artists conceptualize their relationships with their audience and vice versa?
   b. In what specific ways might the use of digital technology influence this conceptualization?
   c. What issues does the use of emerging, digital technology introduce into these relationships?

As Lievrouw & Livingstone (2006) explain, communication technology research is particularly important for a number of reasons: “(1) new media technology plays a
central role in changing global political economic configurations; (2) new media
technology contributes to defining a new organization of knowledge, the information age;
and (3) new media technology plays a conspicuous role in popular culture” (p. 143).
Accordingly, the significance and contribution of this research to the field occurs on
various levels. First, while the fact that technology is changing music culture has been
amply noted, this work primarily concentrates on digital downloading practices (Burkart
& McCourt, 2006; O’Hara and Brown, 2006). Technology’s effect on the various
dimensions of the relationship between music producers and consumers has yet to be
fully addressed, indicating a gap in the research. Also, the significance of Information,
Communication, and Technologies & Society (ICT&S) research rests on the fact that
cultural expressions inherent in digital communication impact social development,
progression, and structure. Traditional means of communicating must either adapt to, or
reinvent themselves to function efficiently within the digital landscape. As digital
technology continues to evolve, the ways in which we experience reality shift. This
research aims to develop a better understanding of the nature of the relationship between
musicians and listeners. It also proposes to offer practical strategies and
recommendations to contemporary music industry and culture professionals. As Shuker
(2008) explains, “The recording industry is now entering a new post-industrial phase,
characterized by the impact of digital music, and the decentralizing of the means of
recording, reproduction and distribution” (p. 31). A more multidimensional approach
seems particularly timely considering that many in the music industry feel their future is
uncertain (Future of Music Coalition, 2009; Knopper, 2009).
In the simplest terms, music is vocal or instrumental sound created live or recorded for future listening. However, music is much more than sound. Adorno has suggested that music is a “force in social life, a building material of consciousness and social structure” (cited in DeNora, 2000, p. 2). Music indeed plays a significant role in individuals’ lives. As DeNora (2000) explains:

Music does much more than depict emotions. It is a condition of affective experience. Music works in real time, as it is heard and overheard, produced, remembered, and imagined. Music is part of the basis of our social experience; it is a resource in actual formation of social reality (p. 19).

Accordingly, Shepard and Wicke (1997) explain that to truly understand what music is, we must situate it within our larger culture. In other words, music helps us better understand our culture, as much as our culture helps us understand our music. Hennion (1993, 1995) agrees, suggesting that to understand music one must examine both the musical text, and the surrounding discourse.

Instead of attempting to define music on its own terms we can look to the various uses to which people put it. Sloboda (1992) has posited six ways in which people use music: memory, spiritual matters, sensorial matters, mood change, mood enhancement, and for activities. These different categories highlight how people use music in the construction and maintenance of their personal and social selves (Sloboda, 1992). Simply
put, people use music to structure multiple aspects of their everyday lives. As DeNora (2000) explains, this is an ongoing process:

Unlike material objects, music that is associated with past experiences was, within that experience, heard over time. And when it is music that is associated with a particular moment and a particular space…music reheard and recalled provides a device for unfolding, for replaying, the temporal structure of that moment, its dynamism as emerging experience. (p. 67)

Music is thus a framework for social relations. As Frith and Street (1992) explain, the choices individuals make in their musical lives “become the means to a shared experience and identity” (p. 80). Indeed, how listeners incorporate music into their daily lives impacts how they experience their larger musical community. Frith (1996) argues that popular music has value because it confirms identity and community membership. For Frith (1996), how people listen and generally engage with music is the focus. He explains, “The meaning of music describes not just an interpretive but a social process: musical meaning is not inherent in the text” (Frith, 1996, p. 250). As DeNora (2000) further argues, “actors can be seen to have used music so as to call out or call ahead manners of conduct, style, and mutual orientation. Music in this sense…is a perspective cue for social agency” (p. 129). In this sense, the priority is not so much on the music itself, but on what the music does for the listener. Overall, as explained by Adorno and Eisler (2006), “music is supposed to bring out the spontaneous, essentially human element in its listeners and in virtually all human relations” (p. 74).

Popular music plays a significant role in shared experiences due to its accessible nature. The phrase popular music has been defined in a number of ways, each
emphasizing a different aspect. Some definitions highlight the popular aspect by suggesting that popular music is music enjoyed by the majority of the general public or populace. While historically the term popular referred to “the ordinary people”, Shuker (2008) points out that it is important to note that “the criteria for what counts as popular…are open to considerable debate” (p. 6). Other definitions of popular music put greater emphasis on its commercial nature. In this case the term commercial connotes an appeal, which “can be quantified through sales, charts, radio airplay, and so forth” (Shuker, 2008, p. 6). Definitions that emphasize the commercial aspect focus on numbers to establish popular appeal.

Riesman (1990) argues that defining popular music involves taking into account the ability to mold the taste or preferences of the music consumer, which, he further argues, eliminates choice by limiting diversity. Similarly, Hirsch (1990) explains how the industry establishes popular music: “Feedback from consumers in the form of sales figures… cues producers and disseminators of cultural innovations as to which experiments may be imitated profitably and which should be dropped” (p. 133). Hirsch continues this argument by comparing the limitation of choices offered by the music industry to the pre-selection of electoral candidates by political parties. In support, Negus (1996) argues that characterization of the audience as a homogeneous mass disregards differences such as race, gender, and age, while Ayers (2006) concurrently noted scholarly work must account for “changes in public taste or for the volatility of the popular music market” (p. 164). According to Ayers (2006) the audience is rightly characterized as people at the “center of the creation, mediation, and transformation of popular music meaning” (p. 164).
The term popular music locates musical recording within a broader social field. It encompasses making, disseminating, and consuming music, along with the economic and technological practices associated with these processes, as well as the discourse created by these practices (Shuker, 2008). Cohen (1993) similarly suggests prioritizing practices as opposed to the media text in order to better understand the role music plays in everyday life. Regardless of their specific focus, these concepts are key because popular music has a dynamic relationship with social life, in which it helps to stabilize and change both collective and individual agency.

When considering popular music culture, Cox and Warner (2006) argue that a new “audio culture” has emerged over the past few decades involving “musicians, composers, sound artists, scholars, and listeners attentive to sonic substance, the act of listening, and the creative possibilities of sound recording, playback, and transmission” (p. xiii). To explore this new audio culture, they argue, we must address the relationships between the social element (the people who consume), the textual element (the actual piece of music) and the underlying economic and technological processes attached (Cox & Warner, 2006). Wikstrom (2009) addresses each of these elements and points out the disconnect that marks contemporary music culture. In other words, Wikstrom (2009) juxtaposes the decentralized audience and media content with the traditional industry’s attempts at centralized power and control.

Music’s popularity is heavily dependent on its distribution. Music distribution refers, most generally, to the act of sharing or disseminating music. Music distribution happens through a variety of channels. First, distribution occurs at the retail level. In this case, a store or other business is in charge of the sale of sound recordings to the general
public. Radio is another level of distribution. While historically there has been no direct financial exchange between the radio listener and the distributor—as it is an indirect exchange in which audiences are sold to advertisers—with the advent of satellite radio this dynamic has changed. Consumers now have the option to subscribe to satellite services, such as XM Radio, essentially establishing a more direct form of financial exchange between the distributor and the consumer. Next, music is often distributed through television in the form of music television channels, such as MTV and VH1, and music television programs like American Bandstand, Soul Train, VH1’s Storytellers and MTV’s Total Request Live. Music is also distributed via film, not only through the actual films, but also through the accompanying soundtracks. Finally, there is the online or digital level of distribution. This is the newest level, as well as the one most riddled with controversy. The IFPI Digital Music Report found in 2006 that “A new wave of digital commerce, from mobile to broadband is rolling out across the world. It is generating billions of dollars in revenue and it is being driven to a large extent by music - by the people who create music, who produce it, and who invest in it “(Shuker, 2008, p. 24). To further expand on the issue of digital distribution, in particular the related issue of copyright and digital piracy, Theberge (1993) explains that while digital technology results in new forms of creativity, it also results in new issues related to authorship and copyright law. Jones (2002) also addresses distribution, specifically issues of power and places and their importance concerning the distribution of musical media. He explains:

To control the distribution of music is as much an effort to control audience and place as it is to control technology. The movement of people, however, is not in the music industry’s control, and so at the very least the industry needs to be
immediately responsive to audience and place. Network technologies can permit it to be so by separating the two…and allowing for aggregations of audiences across space (Jones, 2002, p. 329).

Digital distribution and digital production are both catalysts of the future of the music industry in that they give the audience freedom of time and space. The audience’s freedom from time and space is indicative of audience decentralization. The change in the nature of the listening audience brings with it a shift in the music industry as a whole which is reflected in industry statistics. Globally, digital music revenue increased 8% in 2011 representing an increase in growth from the previous year’s 5% (IFPI, 2012).

In a general sense, the music industry refers to the business of music. Hence, the music industry encompasses multiple actors, including musicians, managers, promoters, sound engineers, record label executives, entertainment lawyers, record distributors and sellers, among many others. This list could be considered a collection of gatekeepers, or those who stand between the consumer and the final musical product. The gatekeepers are not only intermediaries between the audience and the many forms of musical products, they also control access both in terms of what is accessed and who may access it. Accordingly, the role of the industry from a cultural critical point of view has always been to commodify performers and performances and to maximize profits (Frith, 1981; Frith & Goodwin, 1990; Shuker, 2008).

Currently, four companies, often referred to as the Big Four, dominate the music industry. The Big Four consist of Universal Music Group, Sony Music Entertainment, Warner Music Group and EMI Group (Campbell, Martin, & Fabos, 2008). These companies control more than 72% of the music industry, with independent business
accounting for the remaining percentage (Wikstrom, 2009). These corporate statistics inspire music scholars to conclude that “the industry today is characterized by a tendency toward oligopoly and extreme volatility, and is engaged in a constant struggle to control an uncertain market place” (Shuker, 2008, p. 13). While some scholars recognize the importance of the profit motive, they still contest corporate practices. As Frith (2006) argues, “The industrialization of music means a shift from active musical production to passive pop consumption, the decline of folk or community or subcultural tradition, and a general loss of musical skill” (p. 231). A number of issues accompany passive pop consumption. For instance, instead of catering to public taste, companies began manipulating demand to create a specific popular taste. Similar to the aforementioned arguments of Riesman (1990) and Hirsch (1990), Frith (2006) explains, “For the record industry the audience was essentially anonymous; popularity meant by definition something that crossed class and regional boundaries; the secret of success was to offend nobody” and in turn, the industry aims to appeal to everybody in an attempt to maximize profits (p. 236). However, it is critical to note that over the past decade U.S. music profits have steeply declined to $6.3 billion in 2009 from a high of $14.6 in 1999 (Goldman, 2010).

Consumption is a critical component of the cultural experiences associated with popular music. But what exactly does consumption entail? Numerous scholars have attempted to define consumption. For example, Williams (1974) distinguishes between use and consumption, or instrumental versus terminal materialism, arguing that while consumption is “concerned with imaginary or ideological desires,” use is supposed to be a “matter of actual, concrete needs” (Cohen and Rutsky, 2005, p. 4). In a similar vein,
Baudrillard (1998) sees consumption as the spread of images, signs, and simulation. Noting that “When looked at from a structural perspective what we consume is signs (messages, images) rather than commodities” (1998, p. 7), Baudrillard argues that consumptive practices are constraining on two levels: 1) the level of structural analysis “where consumption is constrained by the constraint of signification” and 2) “the level of socio-economic-political analysis in which the constraint of production is operant” (1998, p. 7). Thus, according to this view, consumption is not something people do in their everyday lives to achieve contentment, but a societal structure forcibly imposed on individuals. Consumption is, in other words, not “something that individuals do and through which they find enjoyment, satisfaction and fulfillment. Rather, consumption is a structure that is external to and coercive over individuals…The ideology associated with the system leads people to believe falsely… that they are affluent, fulfilled, happy and liberated” (Baudrillard, 1998, p. 15).

Baudrillard’s (1998) argument is somewhat similar to the work of Theodore Adorno and Max Horkheimer (1972). In The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception, Adorno and Horkheimer (1972) state that “The fusion of culture and entertainment that is taking place today leads not only to a depravation of culture, but inevitably to an intellectualization of amusement” (p. 143). In other words, these Frankfurt School theorists believe that popular media serve to reinforce the system of consumer capitalism by facilitating domination by those in power over the mass media audience. Producing standardized cultural goods is seen as a way for those in positions of power to pacify the masses who are content with easily digested pieces of culture: “The result is the circle of manipulation and retroactive need in which the unity of the system
grows ever stronger. No mention is made of the fact that the basis on which technology acquires power over society is the power of those whose economic hold over society is the greatest” (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1972, p. 121). However, Frankfurt school scholarship is often criticized for its overly pessimistic nature as it largely discounts human agency, while concurrently giving too much power to the mass-produced media products society regularly consumes (Lewis, 2002; Baran and Davis, 2003).

Taking these critiques into account, scholars have more recently attempted to develop more nuanced examinations of the role of consumption in contemporary culture. Dunn (2008), for instance, notes that “Broadly understood, consumption defies simple definition, encompassing a vast range of human practices and mental and feeling states all of which involve complex relations and attachments to an infinite variety of objects and experiences” (Dunn, 2008, p. 1). Dunn argues, in other words, that consumption is a complex process tangled up in myriad social factors. Therefore, we must define consumption “as a complex, multivalent phenomenon, a manifestation of economic, social, cultural, historical and psychological processes and effects” (Dunn, 2008, p. 4). Finally, Dunn (2008) argues that discussions of contemporary consumption must take into account a number of specifics. These include:

(1) The underlying structural conditions facilitating and constraining consumption practices and (2) the desires, practicality and creativity shaping the actions and meanings of social subjects in their positions as consumers. In other words, consumers will be read as social and individual subjects who are (1) agents acting out of largely unconscious forces shaped by the productive and reproductive
needs of capitalism and (2) as actors consciously seeking to satisfy needs and desires in meaningful ways (Dunn, 2008, p. 5).

Bauman similarly explores the multifaceted nature of consumption—a concept prevalent in the development of his “Liquid” framework. As he puts it, “Liquid life is consuming life” (Bauman, 2007, p. 9). Bauman (2007) notes that people are simultaneously “promoters of commodities and the commodities they promote” (p. 6) and that this “consuming life” is thus characterized by the blurring of traditional conceptions of consumption. In other words, today it is not the purchase of the object or commodity that is satisfying, but the desire for the thing that is desirable. Echoing Baudrillard’s (1998) conceptualization of consumption, Bauman (2003) explains that in liquid times what we often perceive as freedom is actually constraining. For instance, he explains that while rigid societies produced normative guidelines for people to live by, liquid, more fluid societies generate a breakdown of those norms and hence more options. According to Bauman, this breakdown may seem to represent autonomy to the media consumer, but in reality it is merely an illusion (Bauman, 2003; 2007).

In a liquid society, things are characterized as disposable, and as Bauman (2003) argues, not allowed to outstay their welcome. Those who are able to embrace “creative destruction,” or those who adapt readily to changing conditions, will hold the most power and in turn be the most successful (Bauman, 2003). As he (2003) explains, “The greatest chances of winning belong to the people who circulate close to the top of the global power pyramid…they are light, sprightly and volatile…and sustain their nomadic existence” (p. 3). Essentially, in a liquid society, if one wants to succeed one simply must keep innovating. Bauman’s Liquid framework embodies precariousness or uncertainty,
which exists in opposition to the reductionist view of deterministic perspectives by providing a means to assess contemporary cultural connections for the increasingly complex state of new media in our globalized world. As Urry (2003) explains, “New technologies are producing global times in which the distances between places and peoples again seem to be dramatically reducing…time and space are de-materializing” (p. 2). Just as advances in communication technology prompted the evolution of theoretical paradigms in the past, recent technological advancements have moved us from a deterministic perspective to a more complex framework.

Various scholars have explored consumption as an aspect of our contemporary and increasingly digital society. In this case, consumption is often characterized by and conceptualized in reference to the proliferation of available information. Cohen and Rutsky (2005) explain that “in an increasingly information oriented world, our conceptions and practices of consumptions have – in ways that we are not always fully aware of – begun to change” (p. 4). This view is distinguished by the idea that what is being consumed can be used again and again, in contrast to a more material definition of consumption in which the consumable is used up, as in the case of food or fuel.

The body of literature on this topic also addresses consuming the technology itself. Commenting on Mackay and Gillespie’s (1992) stance on the consumption of technologies Bakardjeva (2005) explains that “rather than media messages, technological artifacts came to be perceived as polysemic texts encoded by designers, developers, and advertisers and calling for active decoding on the part of the users. Here too striking a balance between freedom and constraint was believed to be critical to the analysis” (p.
Mackay and Gillespie’s (1992) take on the consumption of technologies echoes the cyclical, enabling, and constraining nature of mutually shaping theory.

On the other hand, Silverstone’s (1992; 1994) domestication of media and communication technologies model highlights the user end of the relationship between technology and society by examining strategies employed in the consumer’s everyday life. In other words, the model examines how people incorporate technologies into routine activities. In relation to the user-centered model Silverstone offers, Bakardjeva (2005) explains that the interaction between people and technology, which occurs whenever people use technology, involves “an array of creative activities constituting the reproduction of the social actor with her relationship’s knowledge and emotional well-being” (p. 25). Further, she states, “Use subsumes consumption of both technology and context, but it also encompasses a wide set of significant productive practices that remain invisible from the perspective of the standard production – consumption dualism” (Bakardjeva, 2005, p. 25). Certainly, the relationship between technology and consumption is multi-faceted considering the many associated social practices. Accordingly, Shuker (2008) argues that we need to think in terms of actual practice by considering the uses to which people put technology, in this case compact disc, mp3, etc., and the devices that play back those recordings. In that vein, the following pages address the uses to which music audiences have put technology.

There are various levels of audience activity. As Jenson (2002) states, “Media audience groups are defined not just by their formal social roles and demographic characteristics, but as importantly by the interpretive frames or repertories by which they engage mass media content and other cultural forms” (p. 42) When the audience shares
an affinity for specific media content they are often referred to as fans. Over the years the concept of fan has been defined by what it is not. For instance, Fiske (1989) defines fans and their enjoyment of popular culture in juxtaposition to high culture. Jenkins (2006) similarly defines fan culture as “an alternative to commercial culture” enacted “through the appropriation and transformation of materials borrowed from mass culture” (p. 246). Jenkins’ (1992) Textual Poaching examines fan relation to media texts and how they integrate those texts into their everyday lives. In it he argues that fans are active producers of cultural meaning, in other words, they assert themselves through their interactions with the text (Jenkins, 1992). The practice of poaching, or the appropriation of texts to serve fan interests, is a social process involving individual interpretations, which are shaped and reinforced by fellow fans through the ongoing practice of fandom (Jenkins, 1992). Accordingly, meaning making is not a solitary activity, but a public and social one. More recently, with the broad adoption of digital technologies Jenkins (2006) explains that media audiences are increasingly participatory.

As time goes on, we have seen technological advances in the form of multiple formats that impact the nature of consumption. These formats include the wax cylinder; the 78, 45, and 33 1/3 record; cassette tapes; compact discs; and digital mp3 files. These changes in format are not without effect on popular music culture. As Shuker (2008) has explained, “New markets are created as older consumers upgrade both their hardware and their record collections” (p. 38). O’Hara and Brown (2006) concur, suggesting that communication technology has “disrupted existing music practices and created new social phenomena around music” (p. 4).

Disruptions of musical practices stem from the evolution of recording technology
(Taylor, 2001). As Katz (2004) states, “Our very notions of musical beauty and of what constitutes a musical life have changed with the presence of recording” (p. 189). Recording technology allows people to hear and experience music that not only extends beyond their own cultural constraints, but also beyond generational constraints.

Recording technology has also had a powerful effect on traditional industry practices (Taylor, 2001). From the earliest days of recording, a specialized intermediary has been needed to oversee the recording process. This person, the music producer or engineer, was in charge of interacting not only with the recording technology, but also with the artist and the record company. By the 1950s producers were seen as integral to the creative process (Campbell, Martin, and Fabos, 2008). In contemporary times, affordable and widely available recording technology has allowed artists to bypass the traditional scrutiny and editing of producers. Today it is not uncommon for an artist with no recording contract to have one or more recorded albums thanks to the various easily accessible technological means of recording music. These industrial and cultural shifts are a result of the evolution of recording technology. Therefore, new music listening practices emerge from new social spaces and change the ways in which people interact with music (O’Hara and Brown, 2006).

Similarly, Peterson and Ryan (2004) summarize the impact of the combination of music and digital technology into four main areas: the democratization of the recording process; new ways to manipulate sound; new and more affordable ways to manufacture sound; and an overall democratization of music production. Born (1995) acknowledges these changes but explains that it is essential to examine how people actually use technologies as they are often characterized in “idealized, unproblematic and normative
ways” (p. 15). As showcased in the preceding pages, digital technology has significantly influenced the current state of the music industry. It has influenced all of the elements listed above because each time technology evolves these things change (Warner, 2003; Power & Hallencreutz, 2006; Kot, 2009). A look back at the historical evolution of music technology highlights how technology intersects with these concepts.

De Martinville first recorded sound in the 1850s. However, it was not until Edison invented the phonograph in the 1870s that sound could be played back. In the 1880s, inspired by Edison’s work, Berliner invented the gramophone, which was in essence the first turntable. The gramophone played flat shellac discs called 78s, in reference to the speed at which the discs rotated, i.e.: 78 rounds per minute. By the 1920s electric record players called Victrolas were available to the public. It was not until the 1960s and 1970s that audiotapes, formats using magnetic tape, became popular. By the 1980s, with the advent of the compact disc, audiotapes were on their way out. Today digital music files represent a rapidly expanding segment of the market (Burkart & McCourt, 2006; Kot, 2009). According to the Pew Internet and American Life study, 36 million Americans downloaded music from the Internet in 2005, a number that underlines the pervasiveness of digital music media (Madden & Rainie, 2005).

New business strategies as well as new ways of consuming are emerging as part of the evolving technology, which is sometimes referred to as the digitalization process (Beer, 2005). The traditional music-marketing environment has changed with the rise of the online marketplace, presenting new challenges to those in the industry (Thomson, 2009). Consequently:
The impact of the peer-to-peer (P2P) networks on record distributors is a combination of the technical ease with which files can be copied and shared + [sic] the sheer size of the global network which makes it possible to identify a large group of enthusiasts wishing to access a particular digital work of art without paying royalties to the copyright holder(s) (Krueger & Swatman, 2005, p. 8).

As previously mentioned, these changes in the music industry represent “a new post-industrial”—perhaps even “liquid”—phase “characterized by the impact of digital music, and the decentralizing of the means of recording, reproduction and distribution” (Shuker, 2008, p. 31). The Future of Music Coalition’s Artist Review Streams Project found that 69% of musicians use social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and Tumblr to connect with their audience, and also noted that these digital resources increase competition between artists (Thomson, 2012). At the same time, there is increasing consolidation of the music industry as a whole, as part of the global music industry. International conglomerates not only compete with each other, but are also increasingly interconnected in a complex matrix of ownership and business practices (Shuker, 2008). Thornton (1995) explains how the enabling and constraining nature of technology impacts music culture on various levels. These levels include the corporate industry, the distribution process, authorship and ownership, and creativity (Thornton, 1995).

Economic and bureaucratic corporate forces within the music industry favor a shift toward proficient practices of music production, inspired by assembly line efficiency. This is driven primarily by economic, profit-based considerations. In other words, the need to bring order and cost-effectiveness to musical production has
overridden concerns with the creative act of performing music (Shuker, 2008). Similarly, Wikstrom (2009) argues that the “old music economy was all about control – a music firm’s top priority was to maximize the revenues from each individual piece of intellectual property and to minimize unauthorized use” (5). This “control” exists in juxtaposition the new music economy where the priority is “connectivity” or “how well the members of a network are connected” (Wikstrom, 2009, 5). In the old music economy, audience connectivity was fairly low, especially when compared with the recording industry network. This translated into a high degree of control for industry executives. Currently, as digital technologies increase audience connectivity traditional industry control is diminished (Wikstrom, 2009).

Corporate involvement with music performers also has an impact on popular music. The music industry consistently reinforces a hierarchy among musicians. The scale ranges from “those starting out, to session musicians, to performers with varying levels of critical and commercial success, to those making a living from music” (Shuker, 2008, p. 61). Each has a different degree of power and control over their career situation that varies from those with the most control, or those making a living from music, to those with the least control, or those just starting out. The highest degree of power comes in the form of the auteur or star—for example, someone like Madonna, who has established herself over the years as both a powerful creative and economic force in the music industry (Gallo, 2007).

Throughout history, each time technology has impacted music production and distribution it has influenced consumption. Taylor (2001) has argued that technology’s influence exerts a push and pull on production and consumption, as it functions as “a
structure that both makes agents and is made by them” (p. 204). Currently, the public has the ability to download, burn, create, remix, redistribute and reinvent sound. This leaves us uncertain about the future of the music industry. Wallis and Malm (1990) offer one possible outcome: a “single global type of popular music culture which incorporates elements of every subculture the international music industry has penetrated” (p. 180). However, due to the enormous numbers of factors in the complex matrix that is music culture, we cannot be sure of what specifically will happen. As Urry (2003) explains, “Global ordering is so immensely complicated that it cannot be known through a single concept or set of processes” (p. 15).

The relationship between music producers and consumers is no longer a traditional, linear relationship, but is better represented as a complex matrix. Simon Frith (1981) argues that successful musical technologies are the ones that lead to more flexible ways of listening. I believe this concept is key when considering the future of music culture, as it allows this complex matrix of culture to flourish. Accordingly, the best course of action is to heed to words of Bauman (2003) who states:

In a world in which deliberately unstable things are the raw building materials of identities that are by necessity unstable, one needs to be constantly on the alert; but above all one needs to guard one’s own flexibility and speed of readjustment to follow swiftly changing patterns of the world out there. (p. 85)

In other words, those who are flexible will thrive while those who fight technological evolution will fail. These tensions in contemporary popular music culture concern how individual actors in the industry will react to the evolution of digital technology. The
following chapter explores the literature on technology and society to locate this evolution in its proper theoretical context.
CHAPTER 3

LITERATURE REVIEW: TECHNOLOGY & SOCIETY

Scholarship that examines the relationship between technology and society tends to fall into one of three areas: technological determinism, social construction of technology, or mutually constituted. Technological determinists believe that technology defines society, whereas social constructivists believe society shapes technology. Those who believe the relationship is mutually constituted acknowledge that while humans create and use technologies, they simultaneously enable and constrain our actions. The following section provides an overview of each category of these three categories.

Technological determinism postulates that “changes in communication technology inevitably produce profound change in both culture and social order” (Baran & Davis, 2003, p. 298). In other words, each time a new technology is introduced to society, things change. While the theory may seem particularly relevant to the study of contemporary media, culture, and society, for centuries scholars have been contemplating technology’s effect on culture. Slack and Wise note, for instance, that “Plato expressed concern that writing might cause people to lose their memories” (Slack & Wise, 2007, p. 43). As they remind us, “[Plato] wrote, ‘If men learn this [writing technology], it will implant forgetfulness in their souls: they will cease to exercise memory because they rely on that which is written, calling things to remembrance no longer from within themselves, but by means of external marks’ (p. 43). With the advent of a new technology—in this case writing—Plato worried that people would no longer rely on themselves, but instead on the technology. From that point on, technologies have tended to be understood in terms of their effects.
Technological determinists see technology’s effects as being the “principle determinant of cultural change” (Slack & Wise, 2007, p. 43). This belief is based on two key inherent assumptions:

1. The technical base of society is the fundamental condition affecting all patterns of social existence.

2. Technological change is the single most important source of change in our society (Slack & Wise, 2007, p. 43).

The first assumption privileges technology as “central to defining what culture is” (Slack & Wise, 2007, p. 43). The second assumption stresses technology as agency that “causes effects and that these effects are the primary cause of cultural change” (Slack & Wise, 2007, p. 43). From a pure technological deterministic point of view, technologies define culture and have the power to change it completely. As Slack and Wise (2007) explain, “Conceiving of the relationship between culture and technology in causal terms plays such a powerful cultural role that it deserves careful scrutiny” (p. 42). Let us then turn to specific technological determinism media scholars.

In the 1960’s Marshall McLuhan became known for his ideas on media and their impact on culture. He was an especially relevant scholar at that time because his work directly challenged the then-popular notion of limited effects. Much of his work is inspired by the work of Harold Innis. Innis’ *The Bias of Communication* examined how communication media encouraged the establishment of empires (1951). Innis posited that “the development of media technology has gradually given centralized elites increased power over space and time…the people and the resources of outlying regions, the periphery, are inevitably exploited to serve the interest of the elites at the center” (Baran...
& Davis, 2003, p. 299). Innis (1951) argued that communication technology makes the concentration of power unavoidable. The titular bias of communication refers to how new technology usually ends up benefiting the elite and propagating their rule over the people.

McLuhan was specifically interested in the transformative power Innis ascribed to media technology. Whereas Innis focused more on issues of exploitation and control, McLuhan concentrated on how communication technology could transform our life experience. He famously declared that the medium is the message. Accordingly, McLuhan (1995) explained “the personal and social consequences of any medium…result from the new scale that is introduced into our affairs by each extension of ourselves, or by any new technology” (p. 7). In other words, McLuhan believes that new media transform us on both a personal and societal level. That transformation, which is due to the medium or technology, is in essence more important here than the actual content of the message.

Another aspect of McLuhan’s work related to the effects of communication technology is the idea that media are extensions of humanity. As he explained, “We are moving out of the age of the visual into the age of the aural and tactile…We are the television screen” (McLuhan, 1995, p. x). Stated in a less esoteric fashion, McLuhan argues that media extend our senses: our sight, touch, and hearing, and do so through time and space. His suggestion that “technology inevitably causes specific changes in how people think, in how society is structured and in forms of culture that are created,” has earned him the label of technological determinist (Baran & Davis, 2003, p. 298).

Building on this set of ideas, Postman (1992) more recently argued that we are living in a technopoly. In the deterministic tradition, a technopoly is a culture that “seeks
its authorization in technology, finds its satisfactions in technology and takes its orders from technology” (Postman, 1992, p. 71). Postman argues that we are living in a culture where every technology is “a product of a particular economic and political context and carries with it a program, an agenda, and a philosophy that may or may not be life-enhancing and that therefore requires scrutiny, criticism, and control” (Postman, 1992, p. 185). According to Postman (1992), “Technological change is neither additive or subtractive. It is ecological…in the same sense as the word is used by environmental scientists” (p. 18). In other words, new technologies affect our lives on multiple levels, from the things we think about, to the way we think about them.

Postman (1992) also postulates how new technologies often reconfigure culture without us being fully aware of what is happening. He believes this is dangerous, and invokes Harold Innis’ (1951) idea of knowledge monopolies, which stem from technology. In a knowledge monopoly, those who control the technology hold social power over those who do not have access to it and, in turn, over the knowledge available from it. In essence and practice the benefits of technology are not distributed evenly throughout society, leaving us with a great digital divide of haves and have-nots (Postman, 1992).

Along with the technological-societal divide, a technopoly also leads to the loss of faith in humanity as trust is placed entirely in the technology at hand. As Postman (1992) explains, “We have devalued the singular human capacity to see things whole in their psychic, emotional and moral dimensions, and we have replaced this faith in the powers of technical calculation” (p. 118). This leads us to favor information and equations, which Postman argues is a dangerous tendency when applied “indiscriminately to human
affairs” (1992, p. 119). Consequently, he explains, neither our personal nor our public problems will be solved through faster access to information. Postman concludes by wondering—as did Plato—what skills we are losing by living in a technopoly.

Living in our contemporary new media-saturated world can at times make us feel like technology constructs our lives—encouraging us to embrace a deterministic perspective. Thomas Hughes labeled this feeling technological momentum:

It is a powerful sense of inertia when technologies are developed and deployed that shapes, guides, or even pushes the further development and use of technology. The sense of technological momentum is real: Technologies…do seem to encourage the alignment of all sorts of possibilities. But this feeling of and tendency toward momentum falls far short of the belief in a hard-and-fast technological determinism (Slack & Wise, 2007, p. 45).

This quote introduces the concept of “hard” versus “soft” technological determinism. Indeed, many media scholars hold the belief that technology is a cause—among many others—of societal change, not necessarily the cause. Accordingly, “Soft determinists recognize that the history of technology is a history of human actions, implying that every technology has an origin in human action” (Slack & Wise, 2007, p. 108). Soft determinists aim to designate the “critical factor that gives rise to a technology” (Slack & Wise, 2007, p. 108). Soft determinists attempt to highlight the importance of the technology’s original cultural context in hope of shedding light on the current cultural state.

However, soft determinism has unresolved issues. For instance, Slack and Wise (2007) argue that a soft deterministic framework “ends up describing a complex matrix
within which the technologies originate. It becomes difficult to identify a single critical factor…We need to know more about the matrix within which technologies are developed and used” (Slack & Wise, 2007, p. 108). Overall, technological determinism, hard and soft, is criticized for its disregard for human agency and social factors, as well as for oversimplifying the relationship between technology and society.

While a number of scholars embrace the technological determinist perspective, others embrace a more socially deterministic perspective, referred to as the social construction of technology or SCT. As early as 1969 Walter Benjamin (1969) argued in The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction that media usage leads to more critical thinking by media consumers. In a similar vein, Raymond Williams (1974) conducted some of the earliest work specifically focused on the relationship between technology and society, concentrating primarily on television and using the term ‘cultural materialism.’ Williams (1974) examined how technology develops in response to certain practices, or known social needs, to which the technology plays a central role. Williams (1974) criticized the likes of McLuhan (1967) for being reductionist, and emphasized the importance of social, economic, and cultural factors in technological development and evolution.

Social construction of technology similarly centers on the fact that social actors construct meanings for technologies, which, in turn, highlights technology’s inherent flexibility. Indeed, technology becomes the product of social action, which exists in sharp juxtaposition to technological determinist thought (Pinch & Bijker, 1987; Feenberg, 1991). For example, Pinch and Bijker (1987) posit that technologies embody “interpretive flexibility” (p. 27). Concurrently, MacKenzie and Wajcman (1988) argue
that the dominant characteristics of society determine how and what technologies are used.

The SCT line of thought has been criticized on a number of levels. First, according to Winner (1993), the SCT framework presupposes that all social groups have equal levels of influence and activity in reference to the actions that shape technology. Second, SCT disregards the different dimensions that make up our social system, such as gender and race, along with the differences in power and resources between social groups. Finally, Winner (1993) explains that SCT rests on the creation of shared meaning. Society is comprised of individuals who harbor vast and differing experiences, thus, Winner (1993) argues, the likelihood of agreement on a common technological shape, use, or frame is slim.

I agree with Winner that celebratory accounts of human agency in the face of technological change can be problematic. I believe we need to look at this relationship critically and realize that technology is simultaneously enabling and constraining. To consider one side without the other is a glaring oversight that ignores the complexity of the relationship. As Slack and Wise (2007) explain, technology does not exist outside of culture, but is a part of culture. The binary breakdown of technology determining society or society shaping technology does not adequately account for the complexity of the issue at hand. This is in part due to the fact that this way of looking at things presupposes that technology and culture are two different entities, when in reality they are not. As Slack and Wise (2007) explain, “The theoretical problem is rather, to find a way to understand the role of technology, acknowledging that technology is always already a part of culture, not the cause or effect of it” (p. 144).
A number of scholars have begun to more fully theorize the relationship between technology and society as mutually constitutive (Slack and Wise, 2006; Lievrouw and Livingstone, 2006; Castells, 2000, 2001; Fuchs, 2008). For example, according to Castells (2000) “Technology does not determine society: it embodies it. But nor does society determine technological innovation: it uses it” (p. 5). Castell’s approach to the relationship between technology and society can be characterized as a continual loop, as opposed to a more linear, cause-and-effect characterization. As he explains, “What characterizes the current technological revolution is not the centrality of knowledge and information, but the application of such knowledge and information to knowledge generation and information processing/communication devices, in a cumulative feedback loop between innovation and uses of innovation” (Castells, 2000, p. 31).

Fuchs (2008) ICT&S (Information and Communication Technologies & Society) theoretical framework is similarly represented as a feedback loop. He conceives of the relationship between technology and society as: “(1) a process in which human actors design ICTs and in which it is analyzed how society shapes ICTs, and (2) of a process in which it is assessed how the usage of ICTs transform society” (p. 2). Otherwise stated, enabling and constraining social structures in relationship with human agency is a sustaining cyclical process. Fuch (2008) connects this relationship with traditional dialectical thought: “If the concept of self-organization is closely connected to dialectical thinking, and to the conception of systems as dynamic entities in which new structures emerge from interacting agents, then applying self-organization to society implies that one should conceive social systems as a dialectic of social structures and social actions” (Fuch, 2008, p. 49). His interpretation responds to the question of how to reconcile the
relationship between social structures and human actions. Fuchs (2008) explains that “practices produce and reproduce structures that enable and constrain further practices. This is a double process of agency and conditioning. Agency produces and reproduces social structures that enable and constrain human thinking, behavior, and social actions” (p. 336).

As noted in the introduction, Fuch’s (2008) theoretical framework is inspired by both Anthony Giddens (1984, 1990) and Pierre Bourdieu (1990, 1993). He uses their work to resolve the tension between human agency’s relationship to structure and to address that relationship’s reproductive characteristics. From Giddens (1984), Fuchs takes the idea of system reproduction, the concept that through activities people reproduce conditions that make future activities possible. This line of thinking frames actions and systems as interdependent. Gidden’s (1984) terms this line of thought structuration theory, which “holds that the rules and resources drawn upon in the production and reproduction of social action are at the same time a means of system reproduction” (p. 51). As Scott (2000) explains:

According to this view, culture consists of the underlying rules employed in social interactions and through which social systems are reproduced. These ‘rules’ are not the norms and values stressed by structural functionalists, they are the deeply embedded and embodied generative dispositions that organize social practices. What Giddens terms ‘structure’ then, is actually what structuralists and other writers have seen as the cultural codes of life (p. 83).

For Giddens, social structures have certain rules, and actors within those social structures have to look to the rules as the impetus for their actions. As Scott (2000) continues:
The apparent opposition of ‘dualism’ between action and system can be overcome only if it is seen as reflecting a duality in the social structure that mediates them. Individual actions are shaped by a social structure and the patterned features of social systems are the outcomes of socially structured human actions. Patterns in social action and social systems are the results of a process of structuring, which Giddens refers to as structuration (p. 87).

Indeed, actions shape and are shaped by social structures. Fuchs utilizes the persistent, reproductive nature this process embodies to theorize the relationship between technology and society.

From Bourdieu (1977), Fuchs takes the concept of habitus, which addresses the enabling and constraining power of social structures. The habitus is “a system of socially learned cultural predispositions” or “activities that differentiate people by their lifestyles” (Lull, 2000, p. 157). Habitus is learned through ongoing social experiences and, as Bourdieu (1977) explains, “The habitus provides conditioned and conditional freedom; that is, it is a condition for freedom, but it also conditions and limits full freedom of action” (p. 95). In essence, the habitus is continually formed, maintained and reformed throughout our life experiences. It is the continual, enabling and constraining nature inherent in the conceptualization of habitus that Fuchs finds particularly useful as a descriptor for the relationship between technology and society. With my theoretical framework established, allowing me to explore the enabling and constraining facets of society’s relationship with digital technology, I move forward to address my research methodology in the following chapter.
CHAPTER 4

METHOD: INTERVIEWING & DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

The selection of a particular research method is closely linked to the research problem. Some methods are more effective in getting at certain types of questions and at specific dimensions of those questions. Generally speaking, qualitative methods are useful at getting at the “lived experiences of the individuals” (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2006, p. 49). In this particular instance, my goal is to develop a better understanding of the experiences of individuals as they engage with technology in their consumption of contemporary popular music. The concept of lived experience is similar to what Berg (2004) describes as “life worlds,” which include “emotions, motivations, symbols and their meanings, empathy, and other subjective aspects associated with naturally evolving lives of individuals and groups” (p. 11). Inspired by this concept, my goal in this qualitative inquiry is to provide a thick description of the ways in which music cultural and digital technology intersect in individuals’ lives. As Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2006) explain, the practice of qualitative research is “reflexive and process driven, which ultimately produces culturally situated and theory enmeshed knowledge through an ongoing interplay between the theory and the method, as well as the researcher and the research topic” (p. 5).

In-depth & Focus Group Interviewing

To understand and interpret the lived experiences of those currently negotiating their musical lives in the digitally enmeshed environment, I turned to in-depth and focus group interviewing. Focus group interviews are normally semi-structured conversations
guided by a moderator with roughly seven to ten participants selected because they possess certain traits common to the topic in question. The moderator guides the conversation to cover specific questions, while staying flexible to accommodate the unique experience of each group. This allows the moderator to probe new conversational threads and follow up by asking for more information when the situation warrants.

By choosing to use interviews, I chose to place importance on what those who listen to and make music have to say about this topic. This method allowed for a multifaceted exploration of music consumers’ experiences taking into account the broader context in which this consumption took place. As Rubin and Rubin (2005) explain, “Depth is achieved by going after context; dealing with the complexity of multiple, overlapping, and conflicting themes; and paying attention to the specifics of meanings, situations, and history” (p. 35). Interviewing allowed me to subtly illuminate concepts and uncover new levels of understanding that may be unique to the interviewees. In-depth interviewing also allows researchers to develop a better understanding of interviewees’ worldview—of what they see as important—to re/construct related events, and describe related social processes. As Berg (2004) explains, interviews aid in “understanding the perceptions of participants or learning how participants attach certain meanings to phenomena or events” (p. 83).

The interviewees included musician Kristin Hersh, Hersh’s manager Jesse von Doom, and U.S. university students. Kristin Hersh is internationally recognized for her innovative use of digital media, as well as her for her music (Hankinson, 2006; Harris, 2011). Chapter 5 further expands on Kristin’s appropriateness as a case study. The interviews were conducted via phone, email, and in person. Kristin Hersh’s email
interview exchange was conducted during August 2010. Hersh’s manager, Jesse von
Doom’s interview took place over the telephone and was recorded with a digital voice
recorder. The phone interview was conducted July 16, 2010 and lasted one hour and
thirteen minutes. There were also post interview emails with von Doom in the ensuing
months for clarification and follow up questions.

The bulk of the data on consumers’ interactions with technology in their music
use came from 15 focus group interviews with a total of 53 individuals conducted
between October 2010 and May 2011. All interviewees were students from a large public
northeastern university in the United States and ranged in age from 18 to 30. The
interview sample included women and men of varying race (black, white, Latino, Asian)
and socio-economic status. While I did not explicitly inquire about socio-economic
status, the university population as a whole is very diverse, both in terms of race and
socio economics. Interviewees included a mix of freshman, transfer, upperclassmen, and
non-traditional students. The students were recruited through instructors at the university
and offered extra credit points for participation in the project. I am an instructor myself
and, as the research topic was clearly tied into our classroom discussions, I offered my
students the opportunity to participate. I made it abundantly clear that non-participation
would not result in a penalty of any kind.

The focus group interviews took place on campus, during the school week, in the
early or late afternoon in a small conference room. Focus group interview attendance at
its lowest included 2 students and at its highest included 8. The interviews lasted from
forty minutes to an hour and forty minutes, though they most often lasted a little more
than an hour. Following the rules set forth by the Institutional Review Board (IRB),
which had previously approved the study, informants were orally informed about the nature of the study and asked to sign consent forms giving me permission to interview, record, and quote them. Confidentiality was taken into careful consideration—pseudonyms are used to identify interviewees in the following chapters—and every effort was made to respect informants’ privacy. In short, I strove to “deal ethically with [my] conversational partners, respect interviewees, and honor any promises made” (Rubin and Rubin, 2005, p. 97).

Interviews were recorded with a digital voice recorder. Throughout the interviews I wrote down thoughts on the method process, the study itself, the conversations, and the interview questions. I tweaked the interviewing process as I moved forward, changing the order of some questions and rephrasing others. For instance, in the beginning of the focus group interview process I started by asking the group when they listened to music. Over time, I realized it made much more sense to ask the group when they did not listen to music. In this way, the interviews laid the foundation for the subsequent analysis and the importance of the pervasive nature of music media that digital technology enables.

The interview questions generally focused on producers’ and consumers’ online practices relating to music production, distribution, and/or consumption. Examples of such practices include—but are not limited to—the use of specific digital technology to produce/consume music, the process of finding and using information about music online, and the decision-making process surrounding online representation. Examples of interview questions can be found in Appendix B.

Once conducted, the interviews were transcribed in Microsoft Word with the assistance of Express Scribe software. The transcriptions were then printed, and
examined as texts for patterns and themes. Relevant quotations illustrating these patterns and themes were chosen for inclusion in the study. As Berg (2004) explains, “multiple comments, stories, and descriptions that converge in shared experience during the focus group allow the phenomenon to be confronted, as much as possible, on its own terms” (p. 128). To ensure the reliability of my analysis I approached it methodically, inspired by Berg’s (2004) framework for systematic analysis, which includes three parts: data reduction, data display, and conclusion and verification. Data reduction occurs throughout the research process and involves reducing the qualitative data through “written summaries, coding, development of grounded themes, identification of analytic themes, consideration of relevant theoretical explanations” (Berg, 2004, p. 39.) Data display involves organizing the data in a fashion allowing the researcher to highlight the emerging patterns for further synthesis (Berg, 2004). Finally, conclusions and verifications involve both making sure the conclusions are logically drawn from the patterns in the data and also documenting the research procedure used to arrive at the conclusion (Berg, 2004).

After transcribing and printing the interviews I began analysis through close readings and use of the aforementioned guidelines. In my first set of readings I identified themes. In my second set of readings I began to organize the data according to those themes. In a third set of readings I identified specific cases and quotations that showcased those themes. Overall, my goal was to connect information conveyed within the transcriptions to the broader digital environment through use of theory and “thick description” (Geertz, 1973). As Berg (2004) explains, “This type of analysis is directed toward drawing out a complete picture of the observed events, the actors involved, the
rules associated with certain activities, and the social contexts in which these elements arise” (p. 181).

In qualitative interviewing it is important to recognize any biases we might hold that may color our interview process. We may, at times, find that we do not understand how we feel on an issue until we have interviewed our informants, finished analysis, and completed the research process. Correspondingly, the project’s reliability, or consistency, is another important issue. Neuman explains, “Reliability in field research depends on a researcher’s insight, awareness, suspicions, and questions. He or she looks at members and events from different angles and mentally asks questions” (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006, p. 67). Throughout data gathering, I asked myself a number of questions concerning this project’s consistency to address the issue of reliability. For example, “Is the data you gathered reasonable? Does it fit together? Is there consistency in your observations over time and in different social contexts?” (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006, p. 67). Simply stated, does my research add up? No research method is free and clear of all issues and criticism. If conducted with care and awareness of potential issues, what in-depth, qualitative interviewing has to offer can outweigh its limitations.

Discourse Analysis

Interviewing, as with any method, is not without flaws. For example, interviewees may not remember events or experiences accurately, things may be misrepresented, or one instance may be confused with another. To address this limitation, I incorporated some redundancy by posing questions from a number of different angles. To further reinforce the strength of the data, discourse analysis served as a check on the information
obtained from the interviews. A discourse analysis of Hersh’s digital presence, including her website (www.kristinhersh.com), Twitter account (@kristinhersh), and online forum (www.kristinhersh.com/forum), was conducted along with the interviews with producers and consumers to provide greater depth, context, and accuracy to the data collected. While talking to people illuminates how they strategize, make sense of, and deal with the digital landscape, discourse analysis shows how people talk about dealing with the digital landscape by focusing on the meanings conveyed by the texts. The public discourse can provide further insight into how people experience and negotiate the digital landscape, as well as material for comparison with the interview data. Juxtaposing the themes present in the interviews with the narratives present in the discourse is crucial to better understand how all the elements fit together and how what people voice publicly relates to what they say in the interviews.

Discourse analysis is concerned with social meanings that derive from the text, in this instance the online forum. As Casey et al. (200) explain, “Discourses are able to shape the attitudes, beliefs, behaviors and power relations of the people involved in a given ‘communication event’. This recognizes that language is a mode of action that is both socially and historically shaped and shaping” (p. 64). Similarly, Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2006) point out that discourses are “integral to the construction of social reality” and useful in conveying information, as “the structure of society is embedded in language” (p. 293). In essence, a discourse analysis allows us to see not only how listeners talk about their relationship with Hersh, but also how they negotiate the digitally enmeshed music landscape.
Topics appear in the forum in reverse chronological order and include the number of posts within the topic, the last user to post, and the “freshness” or time of last post. Tags down the left side of the page let the user see the most popular topics of discussion. A search function is offered as a means to locate particular information. The site is monitored by user BillyO, Hersh’s co-manager and husband. For the purpose of this study, I examined topics from October 2010-March 2011. Only topics with at least fifteen posts were included in the analysis in an attempt to weed out topics of lesser interest and importance. For a list of forum topics please see Appendix A. The six-month timeline not only allowed me to reach a degree of redundancy, but also encapsulated Hersh’s most recent release, the music-infused memoir, Rat Girl.

Forums are appropriate study grounds because they are ongoing cultural archives, which can offer insight into cultural digitalization (Beer, 2006). They provide documentation of consumer behavior and attitudes and show promotion of musical artists by online word-of-mouth (Beer, 2006; Sun, Youn, Wu, & Kuntaraporn, 2006). The analysis was modeled on the work of Miles and Huberman (1984), who presented avenues for qualitative analysis including noting patterns and themes, evaluating plausibility, clustering, noting relations between variables, finding intervening variables, building a logical chain of evidence, and making conceptual/theoretical coherence. Accordingly, this research sought to identify, describe, and understand patterns and themes from the perspective of the informants.

To accomplish this goal a number of steps were taken. First, I observed the forum by lurking, which allowed observation of the collective discourse and behaviors within the groups and led me to develop a picture of online involvement. Once thoroughly
familiar with the online space, I printed the previously mentioned six months of forum posts, which I then read and reread. The printed data were reviewed repeatedly and organized according to themes with consideration given to thematic relationships, and specific attention given to how forum members talked about related issues.

Concluding Methods Remarks

Overall, the goal of this research is to contribute an in-depth, critical examination of the complex relationship between popular music, society, and technology. As Christians and Carey (1989) explain, “Qualitative studies are a self-conscious attempt to restore the critical and liberating function to intellectual investigation. They do not view the social sciences as a natural science of society, but as a distinctive science of the human “(p. 358). Because qualitative methods can help us learn how human beings negotiate and make meaning in our everyday lives, it allows us to highlight the complexity inherent in the aforementioned relationship. As Christians and Carey (1989) put it:

Qualitative studies start from the assumption that in studying humans we are examining a creative process whereby people produce and maintain forms of life and society and systems of meaning and value. This creative activity is grounded in the ability to build cultural forms from symbols that express this will to live and assert meaning. To study this creative process is our first obligation and our methodology must not reduce and dehumanize it in the very act of studying it. Such creativity is unique to the human species and to this distinctive aspect we must pay circumspect attention. Humans live by interpretations. They do not
merely react or respond but rather live by interpreting experience through the agency of culture. (p. 359)

Qualitative methods are particularly well adapted to dealing with emerging technology and are able to provide us with new knowledge that can accompany us through future stages of technological development. As Fuchs (2008) explains, pointing to the mutually constitutive nature of technology and social practices, “The internet is conceived as a dynamic dialectical system in which technological structures and society structures/human practices produce each other” (p. 341). This work’s aim is to identify the meanings that exist in, emerge from, and are consequential to the intersection of popular music culture and digital technology, while simultaneously contributing social and practical strategies for those involved both directly and indirectly with that culture.
CHAPTER 5

KRISTIN HERSH: BACKGROUND & STRATEGY

“Some of us need to play music and some of us need to listen to it.

It's a simple math problem.” -Kristin Hersh

Kristin Hersh is a critically acclaimed American singer-songwriter. Kristin is a working musician with a firmly established audience, as evidenced by coverage in the popular music press, album sales, touring, and her notable online presence. Over the past decade Kristin Hersh has been called “One of alternative rock's most influential women” (Hankinson, 2006); “a fearless rock innovator” (-NYT; on kristinhersh.com); a “US alternative rock icon who paved the way for Courtney Love, Nirvana and the Pixies” (Staff Writer, 2011); a “…wayward icon who captured the heart of a generation's alternative scene” (Pollock, 2011); “Inspiring indie-rock pioneer” (O’Regan, 2011); and “one of rock's most dynamic female talents” (Morley, 2007). Hersh was also touted as the iconic predecessor of Nirvana singer and guitarist Kurt Cobain, “Before Kurt Cobain took the mantle of the tortured alt-rock artist and went global with it, there was Kristin Hersh” (Hunter-Tilney, 2007); and finally, in reference to her innovative approach to distribution, Hersh was titled “the vanguard of a new musical movement” (Harris, 2011).

Over the past thirty years, Kristin Hersh has released music as an integral member of the bands Throwing Muses (1980-present), 50 Foot Wave (2003-present) and as a solo artist (1994-present) for the record label 4AD. Her band Throwing Muses, founded in 1980 with her step-sister—Grammy nominated singer songwriter Tanya Donelly—has also received many accolades. For instance the Muses, as they are often referred to by
their audience, have been called “…one of alternative rocks most influential but
underappreciated groups” by Rolling Stone (Strauss, 1995); “American grunge icons” by
the Sunday Business Post (O'Regan, 2011); and “alt-rock trailblazers” by the
Philadelphia Daily News (Sherr, 2007). Throwing Muses international acclaim is also
noteworthy:

Throwing Muses were the first American band signed to England's prestigious
4AD record label, the company that released some of America's quirkiest and
most quixotic musicians - most notably Hersh's friends the Pixies. By featuring
three female members, Throwing Muses also served as an augur of the "women in
rock" même that emerged in the 1990s. (Bemis, 2010)

On top of her musical accomplishment’s Hersh is a co-founder of the non-profit, open-
source software project CASH Music, which provides digital tools to enhance the
connection between musicians and audiences. In other words, as one press outlet
comments, “In an era of downloading and disposability, Kristin Hersh is bringing
tangibility and aesthetics back to recorded music” (Gleeson, 2010). Currently, she is
touring the United States and Europe with her band Throwing Muses. The following
pages address the main themes in Hersh’s approach to her career in order to provide the
groundwork for the examination of artist portion of the artist/audience relationship.

The CASH Music Philosophy

The goal of CASH Music, explained CASH co-executive director Jesse von
Doom, is to “provide musicians with some way of finding sustainability.” What
differentiates CASH from more traditional labels is the spirit of openness that characterizes its approach to taking part in music culture. While some musicians, labels, or groups may look for one solution to replace the old music industry’s way of conducting business, which brought a notably high level of profit and power to recording industry professionals throughout past decades, CASH aims to empower musicians to support themselves and work toward the future. As von Doom explained, it is “Not one new model or one new gimmicky website. We are building tools that let them create their own strategy. We’re not talking about business models. We are talking about giving artists the tools to build business models that make sense for them.” While the agency and ability afforded by technology gives the audience the capacity to participate to an unprecedented degree, it also provides musicians with an unprecedented level of autonomy over their careers. With CASH Music, a creator’s autonomy and community participation work together to support each other. Relating this model to other cultural community models, von Doom described how this approach was integral to Hersh’s career strategy:

We started with the idea that Kristin had about not wanting to be a rock star in the traditional sense, but the idea was very much that she just wanted to have a job, just like any other farmer or person who would have a job…So her whole idea was similar to the public radio model, the community shared agriculture model, things like that, the idea of listener funded radio or farmers funding their crops by people who want to eat it, getting stuff like that going. To have a true salary and allow her to do recording, that’s the sort of thing we did with CASH.
In 2007, after a long-term relationship with 4AD, Hersh moved on and, in partnership with CASH Music, began releasing her music through a subscriber-based, direct-to-consumer model. The subscriptions are offered through a group called Strange Angels. Strange Angles, whose members are often referred to as Strangels, financially support Hersh in return for free downloads, extra content, concert tickets, and physical media. As von Doom, who is also Kristin’s co-manager, explained, “Kristin has her Strange Angels subscribers who pay a quarterly fee and that fee goes to recording and helps produce demos.” Strange Angel subscriptions utilize a tiered model of financial support, with pricing options ranging from the Strange Angels level at $30.00 per quarter, to Executive Producer level at $5,000.00.

Hersh’s CASH website succinctly describes the situation by stating, “Subscribe to the Music: Music may grow on trees, but money doesn’t, so Kristin is asking for your financial support. Take the music and run with it — but please, consider supporting her work.” Hersh is providing something of value with the hopes that people give in return. The philosophy behind the offering is that when given valuable content we do not take freely without offering something valuable in return. And many people give back to Hersh. The website goes on to state, “Kristin now has subscribers in each of the following categories, they come from 12 countries on 5 continents. Her work is entirely funded by these amazing and generous people, making her completely independent - and accountable only to her audience.” Thus, in contrast to the more “traditional” situation in which a recording artist is held accountable to record labels and executives, in a direct to consumer model the artist is accountable to the audience. However, it is also essential to note that the accountability goes two ways; both artist and audience must give what the
other needs. As the website concludes, “We've had countless submissions of your work to Kristin's remix page too, and look forward to many, many more. This is truly humbling. Thank you sincerely.” Here, the artist acknowledges the give and take that drives the relationship forward.

In many ways this model simplifies the complex relationship that serves as the foundation for the musical community. As Hersh explained, “Some of us need to play music and some of us need to listen to it. It's a simple math problem.” For Hersh, the direct to audience model works very well. She provides material, while they provide the funding, and, as she explains, this successfully allows for her continuing cultural contribution:

People used to buy 10 cd's at a show, just to know that we had gas money to get to the next show; they're very giving when they know their money isn't going to a record executive. We made it easier for them to support my work by creating this program where their money goes directly toward recording costs.

In addition, to exposing her music to non-subscribers, Hersh began her partnership with CASH by releasing one song per month for free. As she put it, “I give everything I possibly can and hope that subscribers help cover costs while I do so. They make it so that people who don't have enough money to buy it can still enjoy music."

Developing an Artist-Specific Strategy

While keeping in mind that the strategy must be audience appropriate, Jesse offered specific thoughts on what media to use, both in general and specifically as it relates to Hersh’s career. However, before choosing a platform, von Doom explained that
you must be aware of where your content is and how much control you have over it, as that can have drastic ramifications for your community. As he explained:

The trend that you are starting to see is essentially centralization versus decentralization. You are seeing people put their eggs in one basket. Take Bandcamp for example. People are using it for all their digital media sales, for all their sort of music… when you start centralizing your stuff too much you put all of the control in someone else’s hands and so all your stuff is in someone else’s system. I think that that’s going to be huge going forward, this idea of ok, did I put everything in this one places.com and it’s gone if they go out of business or gets sold?

Indeed, where you put your digital content truly has implications for the execution of your strategy. As he added:

When you start going on someone else’s service you are on their servers with their code, and it’s closed code and what happens is … you don’t have that same guarantee that no matter what happens, your strategy stays at the level it’s at. There is something really scary about saying well I’m just going to throw everything else somewhere and not worry about it and why would MySpace ever shut down MySpace free music etc. You know, it’s pretty naïve.

A large part of the impetus for CASH Music was to give artists the ability to control their work and avoid some of the problems associated with working with media companies or platforms, such as being bought or sold, or changing policy and/or terms of agreement. For instance, von Doom contrasted CASH’s open source approach to that of other platform options:
We can’t be bought and sold so you know for a fact that at least with the open source side of it that you can go at the level you are at right now. Say we never get our funding, it all falls apart, and I end up making sandwiches for a living. Your website will still, at the very least, work the way it works right now. Keep it at the same host or bring it to a new host, whatever you want it will still work because the software was open source and it was available to you.

Once artists understand the degree of control each company and tool offers, they need to choose where and when to post information to connect with audiences. Each piece of social software offers certain opportunities to artists. The artist needs to be aware of what type of content is appropriate for which platform. von Doom noted the importance of taking into account the differences between sites such as Facebook and Twitter by stating:

I’m not a fan of saying I’m going to stick everything to this one tool and sort of put every little quip on Facebook, on Twitter. I don’t like the cross posting thing all that much. … I think they are a different medium, in a sense, so I think you should treat them as such.

Facebook, as it offers more space for content, is much more constructed and less spontaneous when compared to the much more conversational platform, Twitter that works with 140 characters maximum. In particular, the idea of putting content everywhere is also problematic, or as von Doom put it, silly: “I think the most important thing is not to try to cover every single base, like getting on every new social network, or hitting every single gear that you can possibly hit because it’s a little bit silly.” In other
words, Jesse hinted at the pitfalls of using social software blindly, as opposed to strategically

Once artists consider what they are using to connect with their audience and where they put their content, it comes down to what content to offer and how to go about offering it. Hersh makes an unprecedented amount of work available for free from rough demo track recordings to final song mixes. The content is posted on her website and personal CASH site. She uses Twitter to inform her community about content availability and it is not uncommon to come across a tweet similar to the following examples: “More free music - "grey", from the new Ep "with love from the men's room" - here: http://bit.ly/eBe4cL - please share xo 4 Apr” and ““Free Fall” -- brand new, 50FOOTWAVE: http://50footwave.cashmusic.org/ 6 May” (kristinhersh, 2011). Hersh’s approach of freely sharing content is reinforced on the forum through Billy O’Connell’s posts and responses. For instance, one of his posts reads, “A couple of TM fragments are coming soon to the CASH site. Kristin’s getting ready to post two pieces of the album – of-pieces…” In many ways, O’Connell echoes Hersh’s attitude in terms of what to offer and how much control to wield over content. As von Doom previously noted, they desire control over Hersh’s content in order to be sure they can seamlessly execute their strategy without interruptions.

However, this also involves making sure the audience has some degree of control over the content. For example, the following exchange between O’Connell and a forum participant portrays this attitude when dealing with Strange Angels access to certain streaming content:
Forum Participant: if i was one of those very poor dime-a-day people from back in the day who had to cancel his subscription many moons ago (still poor), yet was able to login and hear the stream, is that something you'd want to know about? i feel like a salahi at the white house.

Billy: We've made the decision to never disallow anyone who ever supported Kristin. For now, that's practical and sustainable. But thank you for the scrupulous honesty. You're a prince. x,B

This reinforces the process-based nature of Hersh’s community. If at any point during the process a listener supported her, that audience member’s contribution is continually valued. Everyone has their part in the process; everyone has their part in the community. However, at the same time, everything shared is shared, as von Doom explained, “situationally” because you do not want to attempt to overly control your community, as that is counter to the idea that every community participant is equal. It is important to remember that certain actions set the foundation for certain outcomes. An open approach to sharing downloads supports the possibility of honest feedback. As von Doom further explained:

I’m a big fan of that situationally. I share the concerns I’ve heard, where you use it where you are forcing people to follow you back or forcing a person to tweet a specific phrase, and really, really heavily controlling it. I think if artists use it as a fall back where it’s optional, allowing people to customize the message and just allow people to acquire a link. All you should do is require that people tweet back the link and they can change the message if they want, all they want. If they do
that, what you see is people occasionally start to talk about it and give an honest review of it; an honest like, this is great, and that goes a long way.

As word of mouth is an incredibly strong factor in taste making, and as sharing music, feelings, and ideas related to music is at the heart of music communities, it is very important to give people the space to engage in that activity, because honest participation can strongly drive communities forward, and as such, is important for the community’s sustainability.

Engaging the Active Listener: A Transparent Approach

CASH Music, along with Hersh, celebrates the active listener. They not only acknowledge it, but also enthusiastically invite active participation. For example, the 50FT Wave section of the CASH website encourages users to widely spread the music they get from the site: “Share This Music. Please repost, podcast, burn it for friends, burn it for your enemies, USE it. Thank you in advance for your time, energy and enthusiasm.” This posting is a call to action—a call for involvement in the music that reinforces the fact that the listeners who enjoy the music are just as important as the artist her/himself, and expected to be just as active in the musical community. This kind of message, found throughout CASH artists’ websites, reinforces the acknowledgement that the audience is not there just to listen, but to take an active role in the community. This stance is solidified from multiple digital angles: postings on Facebook, Twitter, Hersh’s online forum. For example, Hersh recognizes the active listeners in a tweet: “It isn't only the faker "artists" who blow, it's lazy consumers...i have to thank you for being active listeners...you finish the music. 16 Mar” (kristinhersh, 2011).
Finishing the music—as Hersh puts it—conveys just how important the audience is to the community, her career, and her musical life. As she explained, “I do know that real listeners don't want the music to stop and seem willing to make sure that doesn't happen.” Indeed, as von Doom noted, Hersh has “a solid stream of income... She can still go and play a headline spot at Primavera Music Festival for 80,000 people.” This suggests a very real, dynamic, and successful musical community dovetailing with the goal of CASH Music. von Doom expanded on this ideological mission by placing it in a broader historical perspective.

The whole idea behind CASH is the philosophy that music is an artist endeavor. It’s something that predates many forms of commerce that we understand now. It’s something that will exist until the sun does the big boom and we are gone… Right now it’s important to figure out how to keep supporting artists and how to keep them alive and keep them making money… So the CASH thing really comes down to potentially a new digital world that doesn’t fit in a straight commercial plane and not an altruistic thing… I think it’s a hybrid model between straight about making money, but it needs to have support of the nonprofit arts community.

The merger of commercial and altruistic motivations sets the foundation for Hersh’s Strange Angels. “They know that they are supplying themselves essentially,” explained von Doom. As such, throughout the process, the impact of the audience’s support is clearly communicated. For instance, as each demo is produced Hersh and her team convey that the recording is happening, and links to the work are provided so the community can hear the progress being made. As von Doom stated, “Those fans
understand that’s where the output is. That’s where their dollars went to, and they also got special privileges, perks as members.” Each part of the recording process is shared all the way through to the finished product: from communicating that money is needed for x, y, or z, to raising it, to sharing the processes of recording, editing and production.

The community is consistently informed about each part of the process by both Hersh, on Facebook and Twitter, and co-manager O’Connell on the website forum. For instance, O’Connell will post information pertaining to Hersh’s live performances, such as: “Monday night after the signing at Fopp… Kristin will be playing a free live show at Round Midnight in Islington at 8pm!” Further, O’Connell’s posts on the forum do not merely promote Hersh-related events, but also deal with issues related to those events. In the following post O’Connell addresses problems forum participants had securing tickets to a live show, and explains why things worked out the way they did:

I’ve contacted most of you…but yes, if you were at the Barbican and missed your chance to reserve, then please drop me an email. … For the record, we were prohibited by the Barbican from saying anything about the event until after the doors opened last night. Not our choice…Thank you for your patience.

As the example above illustrates, O’Connell is available to fix logistical problems and also lets the community know the back end information related to why things occurred in the manner they did. O’Connell similarly shared background situation information related to the release of Hersh’s memoir Rat Girl. In a forum thread addressing the book that begins with O’Connell providing the release information, a discussion about the logistics of the release unfolds. The conversation deals with issues of the release’s format,
timeline, and location in a very transparent fashion. For instance, O’Connell comments on an editing issue for the forum participants by explaining:

    During the final stages of the copy-editing process Penguin did a merge between two working documents and resulted in all kinds of typos, double words and crazy, multiple punctuation marks. That was hell to deal with. We think we've finally got 'em all...at least in the reprints.

In the spirit of engaging the active listener, every element of Hersh’s career is shared fully with her musical community.

    While working on recording Throwing Muses in January of 2011, Hersh used Twitter to keep her community informed on the process, share her excitement, and provide links to what the band had accomplished for the day. For instance, the following collection of Hersh’s tweets takes the community through several days of recording with Throwing Muses. They begin as a teaser that shares the excitement of the process, “holy shit, i wish you could hear Sunray Venus 3 Jan” (kristinhersh, 2011). The following days Hersh shares what Throwing Muses has completed and what they are moving on to tackle:

    Finished "Milan" before midnight last night, now vocals on "Sunray"...my juice bottle says this: "old wisdom is refreshingly crisp" 4 Jan  (kristinhersh, 2011)

    Worked on Cherry Candy and Blurry today...if you haven't heard these Throwing Muses demos yet, they're here: http://bit.ly/5tSNcS 4 Jan  (kristinhersh, 2011)

Hersh also provides explicit documentation of the work process with links to the demos recorded and videos of the recording process as in the previous tweet and in the following, “tons of bernie video from today, including sunray venus...so happy:
http://vimeo.com/groups/muses/videos 6 Jan” (kristinhersh, 2011). The mark of Hersh’s approach, always thankful for community support, is seen in a tweet the following day, “dave and bernie are busting their asses...can't believe we're pulling off a muses record...thank you, strange angels 7 Jan” (kristinhersh, 2011). Hersh’s tweets are notably consistent. When she begins to address a topic, she continues until it is truly finished. For example, this is seen in this recording-related tweet, which takes her audience through to the end, “loose ends tied up in the studio, everybody's going home...sad but, a year and a half in the making, the record sounds exactly as it should 8 Jan.” (kristinhersh, 2011).

While Hersh tweets about the recording process, O’Connell simultaneously talks about it on the forum as a teaser to generate anticipation and excitement about the upcoming release. For instance, in the following post O’Connell shares his reaction to what the Throwing Muses have been working on in the studio.

Holy hell! I just heard 4 new Muses songs! Damn. Rizzo sent them to me instead of to Dave (I'm not supposed to hear 'em yet, since they're only K on guitar) but hey all's fair in love of Muses, right? I got 'em around midnight last night and sat listening over and over...I am blown away. Even the titles were cool: Sunray Venus, Terra Nova, Milan, Swollen. I wish I could share ‘em with you...really, I do. Kristin's killing it right now.

O’Connell’s forum posts complement Hersh’s tweets, as the audience gets information tailored for each platform and a perspective from someone closely involved in the community.

What is particularly striking about O’Connell’s forum presence is that he often has conversations with the participants about Hersh’s strategy. For instance, with the
most recent Throwing Muses album, the desire for more subscribers was addressed as a community issue. O’Connell quite bluntly asked for ideas and feedback in terms of expanding the Strange Angels:

Billy: More to the point, I've been considering the Strange situation and have been interested in discussing some of my thoughts, questions and ideas with those of you in this forum - as it IS a forum after all.

The Muses record should be able to be made...and I'd hate for Strangels to pay any extra, as we feel that you do enough already...the question is, how do we cast a wider net and get more people involved as subscribers? There are many, many people who still have no idea what Kristin is doing on this front. We hear from folks via Facebook and Twitter all the time, who say, "I'd love to help out, just tell me how!" For Kristin's part, she feel like she's hitting people over the head with this info already. But maybe not...LOTS more to discuss...soon.

As the post above illustrates, O’Connell’s interaction on the forum is open and requests community interaction. The community’s thoughts on the community, Hersh’s release strategies, and the degree of transparency within the community are all thoughtfully discussed. O’Connell takes a very active role on the forum, by consistently informing the community of Hersh-related news, especially release-related information. What O’Connell shares is often beyond the logistics. For instance, O’Connell not only discusses when, and in what format, something will be released, but also addresses the reasoning behind the release. For instance, in reference to The Season Sessions, O’Connell posted on the forum:
Yes... The Season Sessions will be four-mini albums of songs from the book Paradoxical Undressing/Rat Girl, the first one being released around the book’s publication and each subsequent one being released on the first day of the new season (winter, spring, and summer). This timing of the releases reflects the manner in which the book is divided into sections – each section for a season of the year of the story. The planned 8 song mini-albums will be available for free, digital downloads for Strange Angels – and via download codes to anyone in possession of the book. And each one will be available on CD individually or as a special hand-bundled package of four.

Most noteworthy is the fact that O’Connell does not let information sit—in other words, he is not just putting information out onto the forum, but updating, following up, reminding, and checking in for feedback. For instance, also in reference to the Season Sessions, O’Connell has an exchange with a forum participant that highlights the community process between producer and consumer:

Billy: Physical Cds will, in all likelihood be released as a set. That sound ok?
Forum Participant: Cds released as a set is exactly what I “wanted” you to say

Billy 😊

The Box is another of Hersh’s offerings and particularly interesting as it showcases the close nature of the community. With The Box, they humanize Hersh through media content. As O’Connell explains, this is accomplished by the uniquely personal offerings The Box includes:

“The Collaborative art project”; Includes “a fraction of the original painting… the portrait print, vinyl and CD editions of Speedbath and some special charged items
inserted by Kristin. Used guitar picks and strings, pieces of lyric sheets and notes from her notebook, things she’s carried around in her pockets for days… elements of the actual human being who made the music.”

The strategy reduces the real and perceived distance between audience and creator. Technology often serves to drive people’s interests apart while it creating multiple niche markets that deviate from mass popular culture. In this case, Hersh’s strategy results in a forced localization, as Hersh joins people together from all over the world. The artist’s actions nurture a sort of family circle connected through the minutia of the community experience.

10-4 You is another notable release. It is Hersh’s version of a mix-tape, but instead of being created for a friend, it is offered to individual members of her audience. While many regarded it as an awesome concept and offering, it was not realistic in execution, as it was and remains an incredibly large, burdensome undertaking. As O’Connell explains on the forum:

This project weighs heavily on Kristin -- she thinks about it all the time. But she is making progress, slow and incremental progress, but progress nonetheless. There have been positives to come out of it too. She now knows WAY more of her songs than she ever has before. It's uncanny though. In every single order, there is at least one song that makes it so she has to stop everything, go away, learn and practice. Really. Uncanny.

However, 10-4 You dovetails with the open strategy that characterizes Hersh’s approach. On the forum participants are encouraged to share their copies with other users, with the caveat of giving to the virtual tip jar. Even content created at the specific request of an
individual community member is meant to be enjoyed by all. The offering was enthusiastically received, as the community always embodies the spirit of sharing. One forum participant expands on the 10-4 You release in the following post:

Not to presume to speak for them, but given the enormous strain put on Kristin from the "10-4 You"s, I wouldn't expect them to be back, at least not anytime in the next couple years. She is still trying to work on the last batch (I don't think she is at the halfway point even?) in between all the other stuff she has to do, and it's safe to say that there's no way that it was worth it for them money-wise. This isn't quite the same, but I know most people made their 10-4 You available for download to others. I think K&B gave this their blessing. You might be able to get more tracks you want this way, even though it isn't really "for you."

The 10-4You release is a great example of the creative ways in which Hersh attempts to reach out to her audience and personalize their interactions. It is reminiscent of a relationship marked by bonding capital (Putnam, 2000); something closer in similarity to a present you would get a friend for a holiday than a traditional mass offering. 10-4 You is something made with specific community members personally kept in mind. In the 10-4 You thread, O'Connell often notes when Hersh records a forum participant’s order, reinforcing that that person is an important part of the community: “That's about the size of it...thanks ****. Hey, by the way, Kristin recorded yours tonight(!)"

The most recent and notable release by Hersh is Crooked, a project with digital, physical, literary and musical components. Crooked was released digitally, on CD and vinyl, and as a hardback book. Purchase of the book includes a link to download the Crooked studio album, full recording stems for each track (so that her audience can remix
them), track by track audio commentary by Hersh, exclusive video content, out-takes from the recording sessions and a special forum enabling the audience to interact with Hersh. As Hersh explained, “"Crooked was released as a book in the UK a few weeks ago: a collection of lyrics and essays and photographs. I didn't want to release another little plastic disk and the Friday Project was interested in a new idea, so they helped make it happen.” Putting out a book is decidedly in line with Hersh’s flexible approach to releasing media content and one, as von Doom shared, quite appropriate for her audience:

It’s all on that one audience. Like Kristin’s thing with the book out, an art book or an album that’s an art book, breaks it for her. She’s been doing really well with it, but that would not work as well for another artist, the idea of doing a book, because that’s very much Kristin’s audience. They tend to be sort of artier, smarter, supporting of broad concepts.

Throughout the production and distribution of the book, both O’Connell and the publisher were very active on the forum, always providing release information and even posting the cheapest place to buy it online. In the following posts O’Connell clarifies what will be released and specifically what Strange Angels will receive:

Strangels will receive a gorgeous, 6 panel digipak CD of "Crooked". We manufacture and distribute the CDs on our own, sponsored by all you Angels.

We don't have a ton of control over the book - other people pay for, print and distribute the book, so we're not in a position to provide it to Strangels.

His posts show attention to follow up as he attempts to clarify information for participants to which details were unclear. For example:
Billy: I should clarify...I can't have you baffled! There's a Crooked CD in a digipak - Strange Angels get that first. In June, it'll become available for everyone else. No "regular" CD vs. digi or anything like that. There will be a Crooked book which will definitely be available here in the US - through one source or another (maybe only in our online store, but probably elsewhere too.) There is a Crooked box which is a collaborative art project limited to 100 units maximum. See? Not that bad...x B

p.s. to "ghostlife"...that should explain it, right? One CD release, in a digipak and available to Strangels very soon, then available to everyone else in June.

Finally, as the release date approached O’Connell continued to keep the forum participants up to date by explaining the back end of production. He posts: “we’ve been awaiting final clearances from the publishers… there was a last-minute misunderstanding about the number of pages we could share… so we wait… hopefully soon. Sorry for the delay.” Once the content is released, O’Connell had a new set of issues to deal with, specifically the digital component of Crooked. To share the accompanying digital content freely or not was a decision made in the spirit of Hersh’s community. Crooked, the book comes with a code to download Crooked the album. What is significant is that, in the spirit of open sharing, O’Connell supported freely posting the code to the forum and wrote: “Here on the forum, you guys are certainly welcome to say that.”

O’Connell is also available and willing to help anyone with issues with any Hersh release. For example, one forum participant was having trouble accessing the music of Crooked and O’Connell responded: “email me…I’ll take care of you.” O’Connell was very hands-on, working up to the release of the book and continued through the release of
the physical *Crooked* album. O’Connell kept everyone informed of when the release could be expected and tried to explain the issues that accompanied the release. The following post highlights how O’Connell explains the back end process related to production:

So, now the real, commercial *Crooked* record will not come out until June...we're looking at the 10th, to be precise. There's been a somewhat intricate dance between this recording project and the book project - with many necessary maneuvers to ensure one doesn't too seriously cannibalize the other in terms of press and promotional coverage (one of the pitfalls of a prolific artist)...even more tricky, making sure one in fact, promotes the other. Bottom line: the manufacturer rang us yesterday with a status report and told us the CDs are in process and are 2-3 weeks from delivery to us. They are going to be beautiful...Soon, Strangels, soon...

**Humanizing the Process**

Hersh does not merely share what she is working on, but also information that helps the community better understand how she herself experiences the process. These pieces of information include daily happenings that humanize her life. This can be as simple as a mention of making lunch while at work: “i blew up soup in the studio yesterday (really--it exploded) and now nobody'll let me near the stove. 5 Jan.” While Hersh provides an ongoing commentary on the process through her Twitter feed, complementary content that also humanizes Hersh is shared across multiple platforms. Both manager and artist are coming from many angles—Twitter, Facebook, her forum—
and the follow up is consistent. The community knows not only how the recordings are progressing, but also where they stand. Once the material has been demoed, Hersh tweets to inform her community that she is booking time in the studio to mix the rough recordings—"booking studio time to mix the new Throwing Muses record...thank you, Strange Angels 28 Feb." Always present is the fact that the Strange Angels’ support provides her with the ability to work, as illustrated in this New Year greeting: “happy end of the decade...and an even happier new one...thank you all for being here, without you i couldn't live my work...love, K 1 Jan.” The process continues after recording, as the group moves towards touring and playing specific live events. Hersh tweeted her thanks for a show selling out—Rat Girl live at the Getty is sold out...thank you for helping to make the U.S. debut of the multi-media show a success. 25 Mar—discusses part of the process of putting the show on—“loading 4,000 lbs of gear into the Getty for a spoken word show...i miss amps...and kick drums. 9 Apr”—and, finally, a follow up “thank you” to everyone involved in the show—“amazing crew at the Getty, beautiful audience and Molly Cliff Hilts' perfect, intense paintings backing me up...a really nice show 10 Apr.”

Hersh not only follows up with her community and Strange Angels specifically, but also with the press that covers her work—“A very kind article on Spinner today - thank you DJ! http://aol.it/mwbGJ3. 29 Apr” and “Someone just sent this play-by-play of Power+Light and i love it - http://is.gd/jPNRZ - the record's free - and here: http://bit.ly/cL4o8 31 Dec.” Remaining community-minded when sharing general information, not just musical content, is a large part of Hersh’s strategy. As von Doom explained, “The biggest thing going forward for both artists and fans is to understand the people playing music aren’t particularly different than people listening to music.” And
that approach is seen in how Hersh communicates with her fans. While maintaining a strong Facebook presence, she has found that Twitter works particularly well for sharing her life and updating her audience on her career’s process. There is a distinct blurring of personal and professional life in her use. Hersh’s tweet reinforce her humanity; the fact that she is not different from her audience. She sometimes feels stress (“the sound of my phone ringing used to make me so tense that I changed my ringtone to birds...now I get stressed out whenever birds sing 14 May”), she misses her family (“inching along an icy alabama highway...really wanted to get home and see the kids before they went to bed 9 Jan”), she feels deeply as a parent (“my son wyatt's first musical performance is tonight...he's cool as a cucumber, i can hardly breathe 24 Feb”), she feels as if she sometimes does not think clearly (“staying with a chef here in LA...brought some of my homemade muffins as a gift...it's like there's something wrong with my brain 16 Apr”). As her tweets illustrate, Hersh and von Doom’s approach to Twitter is similar. von Doom’s stance on Twitter reflects a casual, everyday openness. He places importance on relating to the audience on a human level about things such as eating and sleeping, working and playing, sadness and happiness:

It’s like, I’m going to sleep somewhere that’s not my house tonight; I would like to get some food after I’m here and I would probably like to have a beer. And, I’m very tired. My work day ends at 4am. I just want to get to sleep and get back to traveling. But, I think that level of honesty is what’s great about social media. von Doom believes that touching on human, relatable experiences can strengthen the community. This type of sharing helps community participants make meaning together and build relationships through continuous “relatable” exchanges. For example, Hersh’s
following tweets focus on working away from home: “In my LA hotel room, trying to make tea in a coffee maker...stupid robots 9 Apr” and “Damn straight...no robot's gonna tell ME what to drink 9 Apr.” Posts of this nature diminish the distance between artist and audience and help reinforce the idea that everyone is an equal participant in the musical community. von Doom expanded on the approach by further describing the content of such communiqués:

I don’t think it’s so much about posting photos because after a while you get to feel almost awkward and self-aggrandizing and most artists don’t want that. If anything they want kind of the opposite thing. They want to feel more approachable or more real and to get people talking.

Hersh uses this approach for multiple types of communication—following up with the press, media outlets, her audience, peers—while simultaneously using it for personal reasons as well. The execution is extremely fluid. Her personal and professional lives are not distinct entities, yet one in the same. One minute the topic is about her work, the next about her family, and the next something that occurred in her daily life. It this way, her Twitter account echoes her community approach—everything is extremely integrated and open. She might tweet something she said that day ("NZ interview...said this: "i don't WANT to expand my audience, i want to REFINE my audience 'til it's only people i like" (what a go-getter)27 Mar"), something her children said ("my son, wyatt: ‘there's a big wad of grey stuff in my head controlling everything i do!’ 25 Apr” ; “flying to LA for the Getty show (Bo: ‘you're playing a spaghetti show?’)8 Apr”), or even something she heard someone around her say ("lady watching Dr. Quinn Medicine Woman on the plane: ‘I can't wait to get really drunk’ 13 May” ; “hotel desk clerk in south carolina: "it's a bad
hair day...the whole morning's been frizzy"4 Mar. Overall, her tweets tend to be humorous and express her personality. In a similar vein, web site forum moderator, co-manager, and husband Billy O’Connell often relays Hersh’s thoughts or reactions to community participants on the web forum—“So good to hear from you guys…Kristin just smiles ear to ear as we’re reading through these comments. Thank you”—further adding to the humanizing process.

Flexibility is a key part of Hersh’s strategy and involves not pigeon-holing her into one approach or platform. Instead, Hersh, O’Connell, and von Doom, aim to do what works best for her unique community. As Hersh explained, “I use internet/digital technology because I want to build a "scene" based not on demographics or regionalism but on like-mindedness.” By considering the nature of the audience, and the characteristics and values they prioritize, Hersh’s team considers what the audience places importance on and what they may most likely respond to and engage with. In other words, they ask: what can we do to inspire action, engagement and participation? Or, as von Doom put it, “really what we’re talking about is getting people really excited about music itself.” Every artist and audience is different and the musician’s goal is to create a community with her specific niche. As von Doom added, “I think artists have to focus. First you have to figure out where you audience is, and where the potential new audiences is, and focus on those places primarily.” He further breaks down the strategy by explaining the importance of artist-audience fit:

As an artist manager the most important thing is not to say we are going to do this one model, or this one model. It’s about saying, I understand the artist who I’m trying to manage, and I understand their audience as well as I can, so where it fits,
where is the artist comfortable taking money and having money come in and where is the audience going to want to give their money for this experience for this, to support this artist.

von Doom is keenly aware of the dramatic changes in the music industry, and how those charges have impacted his job as manager on a daily basis. The changes signal a shift in logistical priorities, in terms of what areas take precedence and what needs to be addressed when. He explained that when considering the job of artist management on a grand scale, the main concern includes constructing a community that can sustain your artist:

As a manager, it used to be more, make sure the contracts are in order, make sure you talk to places, make sure you talk to the tour agent, make sure you do this, and that whatever, and now there’s strategizing. How do we make this release happen? I guess the point is that your idea of embracing the audience and figuring out a way to speak to them, to craft that community that really is more and more the essential role that they are playing now. I mean, build that community, and then turn that into a living for your artist.

Community is built by getting people excited about the music and this is often accomplished through digital and, increasingly, social means. Online spaces are not only for sending out information, but also for conversational participation. As Hersh put it, “We keep conversations going at Twitter and Facebook, as well as the forum at my website.” These conversations are multidimensional and take place multiple platforms.
Organic Community Building Through Interactivity

With so much material offered through each phase of the music-making process, Hersh’s community has ample opportunity to remix her material and do so in many different ways. In other words, interactivity is a key characteristic of the community. As Hersh explained, “The CASH site is interactive in that people can download free music as well as my recording stems, so they’re free to re-mix material and upload their re-mixes. People also put up films and time-lapse paintings done to my songs.” Her team encourages use of Hersh’s work. Creativity and activity in the community is encouraged, celebrated and actively shared. For example, Hersh shared in a tweet: “this is a cool time-lapse video using my song, "Sand" made by our friend Laurent in France: http://vimeo.com/23438483 8 May.” People also interact with the music by posting songs and videos of Hersh’s performances, which she then shares via Twitter: “a nice person posted video of me playing on "The Review Show" on BBC2...looks like a lip-sync, i swear it's not: http://youtu.be/fQNW_HrPJzM 2 Feb.”

Hersh believes that the artist and audience naturally grow together over time as a result of audience fragmentation. As she explained:

Personally, I like the idea of "small." I see no reason for us all to be listening to the same music, just to create more rock stars and to pile up more money for a few people. Listeners, all listeners, have idiosyncratic taste in songs when left to their own devices. This is reflected in local scenes when musicians play for the people around them in garages, in clubs, in basements and warehouses...if scenes grow bigger and bands appeal to more listeners, then they can move up and out
and grow and tour, but I don't think that this should be the goal anymore now that there is no radio to turn into record sales. Playing music is an end in itself.

This quote reflects on prior decades when musician’s careers evolved somewhat naturally as they wrote, established audiences, toured, and grew as artists honing their craft. Then, particularly throughout the hypercommercialization and record industry boom of the 1990s, we saw the construction of many mass-marketed, generic popular musical acts churned out almost overnight (Riesman, 1990; Frith & Goodwim, 1990; Negus & Hesmondhalgh, 2002; Frith, 2006).

Hersh’s strategy is indeed small scale in terms of the close-knit community it embodies. This is more sustainable over time, as opposed to sensationalized spectacular musical celebrity or pop stardom, a category reserved for fewer and fewer as time goes on. In a period when digital media has greatly fragmented audiences, Kristin looks to find her unique audience by doing what works for her and finding who responds to her work. As von Doom further elaborates:

Kristin basically is alive today because of her community, there’s no doubt about it. She could not do something else and she could not be doing music if it weren’t for the people that realize that she is different, she was not a pop star, she was not vapid, and she was writing music that was true art. And people supported her over the years and she would talk to people for hours after shows because she appreciated it. And it wasn’t always easy and sometimes it’s tricky when you are tired, but she always managed to find the best in people who found the best in her, and today she is supported so well by those people it’s crazy. They hold her up and it really does make a huge difference.
What this comes down to is using digital tools to create meaningful connections with like-minded people. Some community participants are more active than others; some give more and some give less. However, everyone is active to some degree. It is impossible to just listen to the music because you have to stream it, download it, or burn it. Listening is an active not passive activity. Those who are more active make it possible for those with lower degrees of activity to enjoy the breadth of musical offerings.

The more active members of the community are, in essence, taking on the function of taste making. Something once left to major media outlets now falls into the hands of everyday people, and often the web sites they run. As von Doom explained, “In terms of Kristin, yeah there's a real community there. It makes a real difference...sort of a tangible presence always willing to spread the word and feed energy back into the process. It's sort of amazing.” Hersh further elaborated on the crucial role of the audience’s activity in community sustainability:

I think the listeners themselves, who are willing to talk up the music and share it. They have a handle on who needs a particular sound that no tastemaker can grasp. If burning a cd results in a lifetime commitment of loyalty, you've earned yourself something far more valuable than the few dollars you could have made by selling that cd. Especially since they wouldn't have bought it!

von Doom similarly noted how the connections that form between artist and audience are advantageous as it takes some of the burden of promotion off the artist. The audience, in a sense, works for Hersh, but more importantly works for their shared community:

In the end, for an artist to succeed in this day and age it’s about finding a dedicated and engaged audience so the idea, if you can inspire twenty people to
go out and go to whatever other social network.com and to start talking about it there, it’s maybe just as effective as if you had done it yourself.

The industry is redefining what constitutes value. It has changed from a roughly $18.00 compact disc to social network interaction, which is something marketing managers have been paying people to do for the past decade. Currently, building good will and positive word-of-mouth can be much more beneficial than an $18.00 CD, and are in turn more valuable.

Hersh and her managers have grown a community that it is very process based, as it is in a constant state of building. It is conversational, dynamic and transparent, as is represented in the handling of the Crooked release. O’Connell follows up with the community until the very end: “Happy you're enjoying the record. I feel like K made some really tough calls in order to create a really cohesive piece of work. You've all been privy to much more of the process than usual. Hope that's been part of the fun.”
CHAPTER 6
RECONCEPTUALIZING THE AUDIENCE: ONLINE COMMUNITY’S ROLE IN THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MUSICIAN AND AUDIENCE

With the ubiquity of digital media, online communities have become a key constitutive element of music culture. Online communities connect people in various forums concerned with subjects ranging from politics to popular culture (Rheingold, 1993; Rainie & Horrigan, 2005). Through online communities, people with no prior acquaintance, who live nowhere near each other, are provided with a setting conducive to social interaction (Rheingold, 1993; Baym, 2000, Turkle, 2005). Online forums are open to anyone who has access. Once connected, participants can send a message to other users in the system through computer-mediated communication. Communications within virtual space often gratify participants’ personal and social motivations. For instance, Rice and Love (1987) spoke of the social aspect of computer-mediated communication, arguing that online social communities provide fundamental support to social groups. Since then, many have explored online communities and found that they provide their members with an ample amount of social support (Rheingold, 1993; DiMaggio, Hargittai, Neuman, Robinson, 2001). Thus, online involvement can create communities that hold a level of importance comparable to, and at times greater than, real-time communities, with users reporting more social resources and connections than non-users (Rheingold, 1993; Rainie & Horrigan, 2005). Fernback (2007) characterizes community as an “evolving process” which is “determined by social actors who create meaning” (p. 66). Overall, the specific role that online community plays in relationships continue to expand and change.
as emerging technology is adopted and grows. To better understand how digital technology impacts contemporary popular music and, more specifically, the online communities that support the relationship between musician and listener, this chapter examines Kristin Hersh’s online forum through discourse analysis.

Contemporary musicians have tried a host of strategies to adapt their culture and industry in our digitally saturated environment. For instance, one option is to follow the lead of Radiohead and Nine Inch Nails and give content away freely (Knopper, 2009). While freely sharing content may seem like a way to dramatically decrease profit, sharing music can be a strength, particularly for musicians that make up the growing musical middle class (Houghton, 2007, 2010). As Kristin Hersh demonstrates, it is possible if this particular strategy is framed in terms of establishing a community as opposed to a loss of capital. It is through the community process—the communal effort between musician and audience—that music culture has the potential to thrive. Hersh’s online forum provides the digital space where her community has the opportunity to do just that and, in turn, continually support Hersh’s career. As chapter 5 demonstrates, Hersh and her team work vigorously to foster a sense of community among those who enjoy her work—a community in which they not only actively participate, but that they also view as an essential element of Hersh’s success. As stated on her website, “This forum is our direct connection with you. A place where we can hear and respond to your questions, thoughts and ideas regarding Kristin and her projects …The community we hope to foster is participatory, supportive, and beneficial to you and Kristin, both” (Hersh, 2011). Within Hersh’s community, the interaction online has a real impact on the structure of the industry and serves to reinforce the cooperation that drives the continued production of
this particular cultural text. Furthermore, as digital technology continues to evolve so does the way we experience everyday life. Thus, we need to acclimatize ourselves, as the cultural expressions inherent in digital communication impact social development, progression, and structure.

Kristin Hersh’s Online Forum

“We can't wait to hear from "Your Name Here"!”

The forum can be broken down into a number of themes. These include: 1) The exchange of practical information (regarding, for instance releases, concerns, or technical issues); 2) Nurturing community involvement; 3) Quality, format and availability of songs and 4) reception and overall celebration of Hersh’s work. As previously mentioned, throughout the work Hersh and her team are referred to by their first names. Not only is this how they refer to themselves on the forum, but this choice also serves to remind the reader of the level of informality and familiarity on the forum. This reflects a level of intimacy between the producer and consumer and is indicative of their approach to the relationship.

Information Exchange:

“It is (as I suspect) pure bullshit.”

Structurally, the information exchange that takes place on the forum is not linear, but better characterized as a complex web of connectivity. The communications occur in multiple permutations, including Hersh and O’Connell to the participants, participants to Hersh and/or O’Connell and between participants. The exchange of information is
conversational and highly participatory in structure. The exchange does not fit the top-down model traditionally associated with the mass media, in which communication flows in a linear fashion from producers to consumers. In this case, it is much more multidimensional in nature, not merely in terms of who is speaking to whom, but also in terms of what they are speaking about. For example, a participant might ask for clarification about information learned elsewhere, as in this exchange concerning an album release:

Forum participant: Billy, French music mag Noise Magazine announced that the new album would be released on 4AD, is it (as I suspect) pure speculation on their part or did I miss something?

Billy: It is (as I suspect) pure bullshit. There might be an anthology they’re thinking about…but not this record.

Adopting a characteristic traditionally associated with the producer, participants also reach out to O’Connell with information to provide:

Forum participant: Don't know if this has already been brought up, or if there's anything that can be done about it at this point, but in Rat Girl one of the song excerpts is "if you can, you see it home" and the book says that the line comes from "Night Driving" when in fact it is from "Hook In Her Head".

Billy: Whoa. Good catch! I wonder if it's in the corrections that K just submitted, I'll check...

Information is also traded between participants who frequently turn to each other to share information about anything related to Hersh. The type of information exchanged concerns a host of topics. Some examples include release dates, where to find Hersh’s music,
where recordings took place, what instruments were used, what version of songs are available and differences between them, when songs were first recorded, what Hersh’s plan for x, y, and z entails, etc. The analysis quickly revealed that participants serve as each other’s resources. For example, a participant might request assistance finding specific albums from Hersh’s back catalog, or how to get to a venue, download a song or album, and more. Overall, the information exchange can be broken down into four, often overlapping, topics: shows, releases, debate, and technical issues.

Popular topics of discussion include exchange of show information and working out specific show details. The online space is used to plan meet ups between participants before shows, and hence continue the conversation and interaction that begins online. The forum is also used to discuss the show once it is over with talk about set lists, sound quality and overall tone or feeling of the event. The conversational nature of the community seems to easily float back and forth between digital and real space. Forum participants sometimes request songs for certain shows (e.g. “BillyO: Snakeface? K says, ‘Sure!’”), logistical information concerning shows, and in some cases participants know concert information before O’Connell —as when fans informed each other of a venue change before O’Connell knew about it: As O’Connell noted in a post titled Kristin at Liverpool University, “I just received a new contract for the date(!) Always the last to know...Seriously though, these days, information travels faster than paper, so often times I actually am the last to know.” Whether announcing a show, planning the details of pre-concert get togethers, offering travel information, reviewing and sharing set lists, concert pictures, or links to audio files, this is a process-based conversational community in which consumers and producers are constantly interacting, building the community, and
making meaning together. Many times this information exchange is hinged on a specific
release and hence the related activity is tied to specific media content, which brings us to
releases.

Participants often check in on the forum when they have obtained a physical or
digital version of a release. For example:

I received an e-mail from Amazon UK this morning that my copy has been
dispatched! Yay!

Mine is actually in transit in Brussels…

Crooked in hand. CleveOH

Amsterdam here, still crooked-less

Small town Wisconsin here, and Crooked has arrived!

Arrived in Central Valley, California!

I’m pleased to report that a copy of Crooked found its way to the North of France.

These posts highlight the wide geographic diversity of forum participants and illustrate
the importance placed on coming together and sharing information. Shared experience
and shared enjoyment are key components of the community. In addition, this voluntary
sharing of product information is highly valuable to the producers. O’Connell and Hersh
know almost instantly if their product has arrived, where their product is, if there are any
issues with release/distribution, and the release’s reception. If the release is a live show,
participants often talk about the show: Where was it? What was the venue like? How was
the sound? How did Kristin seem that evening? Was she enjoying the show and happy to
be there? Is it worth having a digital copy of this show? For example:
For what it’s worth, Kelly was in attendance at Yoshi’s that night that this was recorded, and she remembers it as a very special night – Kristin relaxed, an appreciative and adoring crowd, and amazing sound. I, for one, can’t wait to hear it…

Though there are practical, logistical components to information exchange concerning specific releases, it would be a mistake to assume that it is purely about information. Rather, it is about the process of nurturing the community through sharing the experience of the release.

As forum participants share experiences of the release, debate naturally emerges as a component of their conversations. As such, debate constitutes a portion of forum discussion. Participants debate lyrics, meaning, and where and when media content originated. For example, in the following exchange participants debate the wording of a specific phrase in a song on Hersh’s latest album:

Oh yeah, I swear she said 'stone cold bitch of a girlfriend' is it really true that it's picture instead of bitch? In the song 'Bug'

I always heard "picture". You might have some issues on the topic ;)

I always thought it was "You have a stone cold bitch for a girlfriend" too. "Picture" doesn't seem right.

As for the discrepancy over the "Bug" lyric, "stone cold bitch for a girlfriend" would be a good line. I gave it a thorough listening, though, and it definitely still sounds to me as though she's saying "picture".

O’Connell often contributes to the conversation by corroborating facts raised in debate and more generally to thank participants for their interest and to respond to questions.
Each participant, including moderators, works to continue the conversation. O’Connell acknowledges that what the participants offer is important and recognizes the consequence of giving the community space to do its work and thrive. Many times debate is used to clarify information, as is the case with this request from a participant for help editing his fan site, to which O’Connell responds:

I want to ask a favor of you guys (the fans), which is that I would like for you to look through my site and find ANYTHING I may have missed. I’ve tried to make everything as complete and consistent as possible, but I know there must be some errors, and you guys are the ones who will find them. So please send me an email if you do so I can make corrections ASAP. Here’s a list of songs on the site with "disputed lyrics" or lyrics that haven't been added yet, if any of you want to take a crack at deciphering them: …

Billy: Dan, that photo was Throwing Muses live at Little Radio in Los Angeles...August 2006...? Is it possible that it was almost 4 years ago?

This is an example of what Jenkins (2006) would call collective intelligence. Participants often pool their Hersh related experience and resources to figure out the answers to various questions.

The community also comes together to trouble-shoot technical problems that get in the way of content distribution and consumption. Participants make sure Hersh’s music is shared, even going as far as offering to email music files that are not downloadable. It is community maintenance performed by the community itself. This is a culture and industry deeply meshed in the digital realm and technical troubleshooting is something the participants deal with on a fairly regular basis. Each time there is a digital component
to the release, it is inevitable that someone will have technical challenges. The issues may be on their end, with their personal computer or technology, or there may be issues on the back-end, production/distribution side. If the problem is on the audience side, the forum participants and O’Connell are extremely available and helpful at working with people to fix the technical problem.

Forum participant: Having only recently acquired a computer that wasn't powered by hamsters, I've just started archiving with FLAC files. I had no problem downloading all of the "Crooked" folders, the "50FOOTWAVE" folder, or the "Series 2" tracks individually, but when I try the "Speedbath" folder, I end up with a tiny .zip file with nothing in it? Thanks for any help. One grateful Strangel,

Billy: Hi Dan, I've just tried the link and there's something very amiss. I get the following message from Firefox and it doesn't even try to download it.

This XML file does not appear to have any style information associated with it.
The document tree is shown below.

```xml
<Error>
  <Message>Access Denied</Message>
  <RequestId>3D1E1D2066F21866</RequestId>
  <HostId>
    JC0pHBmYHVapBCHBKl6EY82w4cFHxKsMn6eHk0Y0rv0FVsKYWZUOF4I88OVFbb2B
  </HostId>
</Error>
```

85
I’ve googled the first bit and from what i can make out it seems to think its a web page (instead of a file folder), with no display information included in its coding. Hope that makes sense to you. I’ve got the Speedbath flacs, but at 352MB it would take 4 Emails to send them to you using YouSendIt (I can only send 100MB at a time). The mp3 link is fine. Iain

If the issue falls on the production side, participants quickly inform O’Connell, who then keeps them abreast of the problem’s fix.

I got the book yesterday. The book itself is beautiful and the music is too! Only one small glitch, when I downloaded all the music there was cover art and artist and album details for Crooked the album and Crooked Beginnings (EP) but when I tried to put the Crooked Remainders (EP) on my ipod only the song titles showed. Does anyone know if this will be fixed as I can’t see to be able to manually insert the details?

Was just going to tell you there was a glitch…but that it was repaired yesterday afternoon. Thank you for being persistant! Xo

Exchanges related to technical troubleshooting are worth citing at length as they illustrate the extent to which participants get involved with these issues, and how far they will go to solve problems together. Participants do not need to call a computer services help desk, nor is there one available. The community functions as technical support by providing those services. They do so even if it stems from a problem on the production side. This
exchange showcases how forum participants go to great lengths to make sure the community can experience Hersh’s work together.

Nurturing Community

“With goodies like this, I don't see how any fan of Kristin's could NOT be a Strange Angel!”

We have already observed the community develop through the simple exchange of basic information. Yet, some exchanges are even more clearly intended as ways to further nurture this community. Specific themes include involving people in the community, working for Hersh, financial considerations and investment, practical suggestions on release logistics, and socio-emotional support. The main theme, nurturing community, and sub-themes are directly influenced by how the community characterizes itself.

The community is marked by a strong desire for sustainability. Forum participants often expressed their aspiration to get more people involved in the community and see it grow. To this end, they work actively to get more people involved.

I feel fortunate to be able to afford the subscription but hope that in the future many many more will be able to sign up as and when they can afford and so make the whole thing an organic living growing entity.

I'm also trying to get the word out about Cash Music. It just seems crazy to me that all these great songs are out there for free and they're not getting anywhere near the attention they deserve.
They specifically address how to draw them in and how to keep them involved, often with practical suggestions.

Maybe folks who aren’t members of those communities [FB, Twitter, KH forum, SA] would “become” members just to win a shot at the box? Sounds like a good way to get K more followers to me!

The CASH page exists, K tweets about it, some of us retweet, there's links on the facebook page.. I know all that is out there already, but people need an incentive straight up - the incentive IS there but you have to click on the CASH and Strangels pages to find out what it is (apart from the obvious of just supporting an artist you love). Basically, a bit of overt marketing is needed. Become a strange angel subscriber and straight away you get access to unreleased demo material, live tracks, blah blah. STRAIGHT AWAY! Also - it's cheap as chips for direct access to your favourite artist!!!! It should be plastered on K's facebook, and plastered on the CASH fb page.

In the following exchange a fan of Hersh’s work turns to the forum for help in deciding whether or not to subscribe to Strange Angels.

Hello gang. Long time lurker, first time poster! Over the last few months I've been (slowly) working my way through the Throwing Muses back-cat. There were a few songs on 10-4 All (whilst waiting for my own :P) that I wanted to hear the studios of, like Pearl (my new fave), Walking in the Dark and a few others. I feel addicted to Kristin! Just got Red Heaven & House Tornado/Fat Skier in the mail. I'm thinking of doing a Strange Angels sub, and was wondering if new subs
will also get early access to Crooked, which would definitely convince me to hand over the funds without a second thought.

The question is fielded by both participants and O'Connell, and their responses communicate excitement and desire to share Hersh’s work.

I'm so sure the answer is "yes" that if it isn't, I will send you my own copy. You will likely never feel more directly helpful to a great artist than you will as a Strange Angel, IMHO

Aw P, you're so great. And hey PP! Thanks for becoming a "poster"...I'll make sure you get the CD...I mean, really, it's the least we can do… x

As we see, community participants are willing to go out of their way, to the point of taking the traditional role of the producer—“I will send you my own copy [of the release]”—in order to make sure people get involved and stay involved. Indeed, this is a community characterized by the sharing of information. This relates back to the previously explored enjoyment through sharing within the community, which has become a strategy for continued community involvement.

As there are different levels of involvement within the audience, participants work for Hersh in different ways. The following quote demonstrates a number of ways in which the audience works for Hersh, including building her community, creating merchandise to promote her work, figuring out and providing guitar tablature, as well as creating social media for greater connectivity.

…fans who have done really special things for the TMO community – like A, who totally pulled his shit together to make t-shirts for the ATP fest, or T – if it
wasn’t for him, there would be pretty much zero Kristin guitar tabs available, or S who runs the Ning.

One forum participant has even created a blog that archives all the album art from Hersh’s physical releases.

If you get a chance check out RJ Battles, maybe you'll see some pictures you haven't seen before. I've tried to make the kind of site that I'd like to spend time looking at and reading. Thanks.

Forum members also pitch in to provide information, which lessens some of O’Connell’s burden. Participants provide details to other members in O’Connell’s absence, particularly in times when travel and touring leads to technical difficulties with internet connectivity:

Thank you for supplying info in my absence…dang, internet is still not ubiquitous and cheap around here

Again, we see forum participants going out of their way and usurping the traditional role of producers to ensure the community runs smoothly. Considering the previous pages of forum analysis, we learn that the group is not only a technical help desk, but also a merchandise provider, promoter, and all around community wiki.

While forum participants work for Hersh in the aforementioned ways, participation also often takes the form of a financial investment and, hence, the concerns associated with financial investments apply. Community members seek assurance their money goes to the proper source, Hersh, so they receive a continued return on their investment. Financial compensation for anything related to Hersh must go directly back to Hersh. In this dynamic, the audience has a heightened awareness of the give and take
associated with revenue flow. The money needs to go where it belongs, to the creator, in order for the process to continue, and as such, differs from the traditional, mediated industry model.

Billy, Could you be good enough to give us some guidance as to which site is most beneficial to you and Kristin. Would it be better to wait for the link on this website? I know you don't get the payback from Amazon.co.uk that you do from the US version. I'm keen to order this, but want to do the best for you guys.

Maybe it's time for a 'record that love built'. if this community is strong enough to raise funds for a new guitar (within a few hours!), i'm sure we could raise funds for a record, too.

In many cases discussion focuses on what type of production strategy may be the most feasible for upcoming releases, as well as re-releases of the back catalogue. The conversation often reflects an interest in keeping the music in production, and hence the community moving forward. In other words, sustainable cultural production is a primary concern for many community participants. Community members often brainstorm about how to release the catalogue in a financially viable and realistic manner. For instance:

Is it worth looking into using original cover art from existing copies and doing limited runs of it? I have no idea on the costs involved, but perhaps, with a new album in the pipeline and the momentum from Crooked/Paradoxical, it would be viable. 4AD seems one of the more reasonable labels and might release the rights? Possibly a completely ridiculous idea but I am willing to take the humiliation :)

The community responded with a similar, proactive approach concerning the release of the 10-4 You albums. As explained in Chapter 5, this release involved Hersh
recording 10 tracks, from a list of 200, personally chosen by whoever made the purchase. The project turned out to be an incredibly involved undertaking and, in the end, became an overwhelming burden to Hersh. Concerning the 10-4 releases, one participant reflects:

Hey, B&K definitely swung for the fences on this. I guess sometimes you get a little mussed when you do that. But you also sometimes get home runs. All I can say is that one's own 10-4 is an insanely cool, highly treasured piece (and has never gone a week without listening since delivery). Hopefully this will all work out in some combination of everyone getting theirs, and Kristin surviving.

As noted, such a generous offering became a challenge and production moves along slowly to this day. Besides general words of encouragement, and letting Hersh and O'Connell know they do not mind waiting for something so meaningful, participants also offered ideas that might help production move along in an easier manner.

Idea -- give people the option of switching to selections from the "easy" 50-song list, to get bumped ahead in line? (perhaps keeping 1 song which isn't on the 50-song list?) I got my 10-4 already, but personally I may have actually liked that option, not just to get it faster but actually since my original plan was to order one Kristin-only CD, and then one TM-only CD. But it soon became apparent that the 2nd CD would never happen because the process was so ridiculously hard on Kristin.

Alternately, to avoid having non-participants slip further back in line, maybe keep the placements, but instead offer people a 12-song CD if they switch all songs to the easy list? I don't know whether that would then be easier for Kristin or not. It
would still hold to the "4U" aspect while maybe providing an option, which both
parties would like better? Just an idea. (Of course if someone already happened to
have pulled all songs from the easy list... ehh. You'll have to figure it out since I
don't know what the lists are.)

The only negative coming out of 10-4 You were people worrying about getting their
orders delivered to the appropriate residence. O’Connell handled this through forum
discussion and email. Overall, the project has many positive attributes and is an example
of providing the audience with a treasured artifact; a “scarce good” that serves to solidify
the connection to the artist. Also, the high level of communication throughout the process
served to strengthen the relationship between Hersh and her community, as well as make
the object even more revered. The process made the artifact more important and helped to
make it more powerful. What we can learn from this instance is that challenges to the
community can serve as opportunities for community building, as members rally around
and use the incident to deepen relationships. Overall, knowledge of Hersh’s feelings and
opinions about things makes for a more powerful experience, which in turn creates a
stronger bond.

The strength of the community is apparent in the socio-emotional support it
provides. On the forum, participants frequently give thanks for the emotional support
Hersh’s music offers. That discussion inevitably leads to social support as the participants
band together to support one another.

Going through a dark time right now. It lifted my spirits more than you know.

Hang in there S. As Albert Alyer was fond of saying, music is the healing force in
the universe. Let’s hope it’s at least partly true.
In late 2009 the death of musician Vic Chestnutt, a close friend of Hersh’s, brought the entire community together. His passing brought about a flurry of support on the forum, taking the form of words, but also media. Sharing is a large part of the socio-emotional support process. Videos, songs, mp3s, interviews and memories were shared in celebration of Chestnutt’s work, particularly his collaboration’s with Hersh:

Ugh. In many ways, this has been a dreadful few days. Vic is in a deep coma and we're not sure if he'll come through it. This is a complicated and sad thing. Vic means so much to this world and yet, if someone doesn't want to be here, how can we insist they stay? Say your kind of a prayer. This has hit K really hard...she and Vic have a special understanding. Love.

Here's a live duet of Panic Pure... the definitive version...

http://www.mediafire.com/?jhmyyeuuxmq

I just played that for K...thank you so much for posting it.

Since people are sharing recordings here... I have been a huge fan of Vic's music for over 10 years now and have collected and recorded loads of his concerts over time. I also have a few of the shows he did with Kristin in 2000…They aren't available online at least at the moment as far as I am aware and of varying quality (partly even on tapes), but if anyone is interested, drop me a line: ekphantos at yahoo dot com. I am still too devastated about Vic's passing to listen to his music at the moment, but if someone finds comfort in them, I can see what I can do to get them out.
From the numerous posts on Chestnutt’s death, it was clear that everyone was very concerned with not only Hersh’s well-being, but also each other’s emotional well-being. They supported each other with words of encouragement and care, but also by sharing media content they dearly cherished. Again, we see the process of sharing as a key part of this community.

Quality and Availability

“My heart just melted when I discovered this.”

Detailed discussions concerning the nature of Hersh’s recordings, their characteristics and quality, and when content is released in what format often occur on the forum. Through each release, excitement and enthusiasm permeates the discussion. For example, one participant states, “My heart just melted when I discovered this. The video quality is amazing; the colors are so warm and bright.” Similarly, another participant responds, “The sound engineering is amazing… Fortune especially just seems to have amazing layers under the crunch of the chorus.” At times there is debate on the forum about the nature of the release’s type of production style, which ranges from highly produced studio work to raw, rough tracks:

An excellent sounding, w-a-r-m album me thinks. The guitar particularly resonates and sounds great (when played on a “proper” hi-fi system with decent speakers, not those ‘orrible tinny iPod thingies people walk around with these days!) Well done, for issuing this and putting it in a well-designed package!
Wow i completely disagree. i feel like when Kristin's songs are presented in an overproduced environment, the flawless transitions end up sounding forced and trite. but upon hearing the same songs in a rawer, more stripped down context (solo-acoustic for example) the listener is allowed to hear the songs transpire in the way they were meant to - the real essence of the song, existing as its very own entity rather than being smothered by any glossy production… but of course it's not a decision for any person to make - as Kristin says, "the songs tell you what to do."

With the plethora of material Hersh releases, her audience’s preferences are almost always met. There is almost always a version of the song to fit everyone’s preference, which might explain why multiple versions of tracks are not a negative, but in fact always welcomed.

Other discussions turn from specific Hersh releases to more general talk concerning the pros and cons of digital and physical format. For instance, this exchange focuses on the implications of the switch from physical to digital consumption and draws a parallel between Hersh’s digital release strategy and the intimacy inherent in traditional, physical consumption.

This is incredible news from 4AD about the CDs. It really bothers me that generations are going to listen to music via mp3 downloads, with the low-quality sound reproduction that that system entails. FLAC seems to be the only music download I can listen to, sound-quality wise.

I also can't stand overly compressed music. I can't stand the sound "quality" of XM/Sirius. I do prefer to receive my music content digitally, even though it's not
the same as holding the CD / Record. Easier to manage. The Crooked app is very interesting as a new form. Gives a space to explore the album, similar to looking thru a CD's printed material but on electronic steroids. I should get the printed book just to compare the experience.

While the format of the release is important, the interplay between physical and digital and the implications of the release are critical to understanding the consumption patterns. Participants desire both types of content, and varied format releases have value in the community. Generally, releasing high quality FLAC files increases the value of the digital work, and, more importantly, releasing physical content to accompany digital work reinforces the value of the musical work—at a time when the overarching questions is, How can this content be valuable to the community? Acknowledging the relationship between different types of content is of the upmost importance because this is where value is found.

It is striking how different versions are so well received. None of the participants ever seemed bored by reworked, older content, and in fact welcome the addition to the catalog.

Something wonderfully strange about hearing songs I love but in new glorious form.

My head is swimming. So many versions of "Crooked" to drool over ....mmmm....objects to fetishize...

While I was lamenting that my iPod is woefully inadequate to accommodate everything I want to put on there, I’ll always find room for anything K gives us!
I have to say I’m really digging the “real” album. I’m hearing it all as new, even though we’ve had this music for years now. There’s just something about a Kristin-approved finished product that the demos can’t really match.

The importance of physical artifacts is a recurring theme on the forum, as physicality is a meaningful part of the community process.

Thanks so much for making the download available! While I appreciated and listened to the stream, downloading lossless files, burning a CD and then playing the whole “album” on my stereo was like hearing it for the first time! Gorgeous! So glad I waited for it to physically arrive, nothing beats popping the cellophane packaging on your CD and pressing play for the first time.

I am really excited to hear this on vinyl, I have to say. I think there are some subtle differences/textures to various tracks (the ones that changed most have been noted)

darn that 4AD and their beautifully packaged stuff!

I am so anxious to have the book in my hands!

At the same time, the digital component is just as crucial to the musical experience.

Ooh, I just imported the Apple lossless files to a folder on my iPhone and they’ve got beautiful artwork too!

I can't wait to have this in my iPod and to have that gorgeous artwork in my hands!

Now I finally have Crooked on my iPod!

As discussed in chapter 5, Hersh’s release of the album Crooked took an innovative approach to album releases with a combination of physical and digital content.
While first released streaming on her website, the album itself was eventually released in book format, detailing song lyrics, writing processes, thoughts on recording, as well as with a digital download of the entire album included. Reception of the book release over time played out on the forum and shows how the rollout strategy, first the stream leading up to the actual book, built excitement in the community.

Here I go being obvious again, but I'm more eager for the book that to receive my own (very special) copy of Crooked. We already have access to the music, but the book is a first!

So... When can we expect to get the CD of Crooked? After spending almost two years with the CASH music tracks, I'm dying to hear how it translates into a complete album. The streamed version has only whet my appetite.

The physicality increases in importance when it is part of something larger. Physicality is also contextual and cannot be separated from the online experience. Merely releasing a CD does not hold as much value in the community as releasing an album in a multifaceted, multilayered way—involving the build up from streaming, to releasing rough, demo tracks, to CD and vinyl production, culminating in the release of the book. The physical artifact gains importance when it is a part of the entire album process: an important part of the album’s release. Here, content release should not be thought of in a linear fashion—producers send to receiver. Rather, it is a process-based conversation built within the community.

Reception and Celebration

“Banner days for us here at KH.com, no?”
Participants often use the space to celebrate Hersh’s artistry and revel in their enjoyment of her work. As one participant writes, “I am just grateful to have this music in my life.” Another likewise explains, “I’m generally a pretty laid back person, but this band brings out so much emotion in me and I just can’t keep my mouth shut about it ;).” Similarly, other exchanges are peppered with excitement over Hersh’s work.

UMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMM... can we please talk about how excited I am to see Quick making its appearance in the studio???! Always thought a couple of the tracks in the second CASH series would make great Muses songs. I am so excited to hear this record already!

'Quick' was definitely one of my favorites from the second batch, and one of the songs that I listened to the most, I'm really happy to see it there, what a treat!

The celebration expands beyond specific releases to the community level in many of the topics and posts. For instance:

I’m in a state of meta-surprise: surprised over how consistently Kristin is able to surprise me with her great talent and high standards. Excellent recordings to accompany a fantastic work of writing. Thank you!

Enjoyment stemming from sharing Hersh’s work is dearly important to the community.

Here, one participant responds to another’s excitement about Hersh’s tweets by stating:

Yes!! I really feel this album is for ‘me’. I don’t mean that in a selfish way, because I think this album is for ‘you’ too – in the sense that everyone in this community who’s opened up themselves to the music makes it their own. It’s so great that we all love this but we all get such different things from these songs.
Transparency is a key concept in the reception of Hersh’s work and often drives the celebration observed throughout the community. It not only supports community involvement, it also advances the subsequent celebration throughout the site. Transparency exists to such a high degree that one participant, states, “I feel like I’m intruding!” The high degree of connection and closeness on the forum sets the stage for a high degree of transparency within the community. Another participant explains, “Being able to see Kristin, Dave and Bernie work on the studio on the new songs is just a dream come true. A dream that today’s technology allows for.” Hersh uses the technologies available to let the community in on every level of the creative process. She accomplishes this level of transparency by releasing works in progress, rough tracks, outtakes and communicating throughout the entire process via Twitter, Facebook and her website.

Her digital communication’s reception is well documented on the forum. For example, as stated by one participant, “I'm ELATED. K's studio tweets are the greatest.” Similarly, another states, “You guys are always a fans-first operation – we all know that – and you provide plenty for subscribes and non-subscribes alike.” Hersh’s actions set the tone of the community. The audience expects Hersh to share most everything relevant to the community. If something related to the music and community is going to happen, or has happened, Hersh will readily share.

It’s really amazing to me just how much Kristin takes her fans into account during all these projects, and it says a lot about the quality of her artistry (and her audience!) that the music doesn’t suffer from that. Not that most of us would try to suggest/ dictate how she performs or creates, but I really don’t think most musicians/artists/writers/whatever would be able to create under the same
microscopic level that K seems to operate under. It’s a lot of pressure and she always handles it beautifully.

While some artists might be hesitant to release demos, outtakes and rough versions, Hersh and her community have embraced this back-and-fourth and each release is received as an entirely new musical experience.

Many of you may have seen this, but just in case...from a K tweet just moments ago: kristinhersh a special prize for my Strange Angel subscribers, full stream of the new record; login here: http://bit.ly/67f85l - more new stuff tomorrow. How cool is that? With goodies like this, I don't see how any fan of Kristin's could NOT be a Strange Angel!

The highly involved, multilayered release of Crooked, though of course debated, was warmly received on the forum.

Surely Slippershell must be on the final CD release. It's one of the most powerful individual pieces of music anybody has made in the last two or three years!

Wow, i just had to blink twice and open my eyes cause -i don't know why- all these weeks i believed that i had seen 'quick' in the final tracklisting, and now i realize it's not! it's one of my absolute favourites. i understand how special it is when a song makes it to an album, but these songs that are being part of CASH are great studio recordings and have a very special life of their own in a different way.

I feel like I’m saying this about every single thing you guys have been up to lately, but… that is the coolest thing I’ve ever heard.

Banner days for us here at KH.com, no?
The celebratory talk extends to the community as a whole, specifically when the topic focuses on how Strangle Angels functions. The conversation echoes the theme of nurturing the community and highlights the concern for its sustainability.

One thing I love about the Strange Angels system is that it demonstrates, with beautiful simplicity and humility, that an artist does not need "most people" - who, as we all know, have shit tastes anyway ;) - they just need "enough people". With CASH and "Crooked" and 50FootWave, this is such an exciting and rewarding time to be following Kristin and I'm glad to be able to contribute. I've gone through phases of cheap infatuation with other artists, but at this point I'm sure that as long as I can hear, I'll be listening to whatever Kristin has to say.

Concluding Remarks

“i feel so PROUD to be a fan of K”

All the information exchanged sets the foundation for community participation. Nurturing community, dealing with issues of quality and availability, and reception and celebration all stem from the process of information exchange. The information exchange process begins with Hersh. She takes an open stance on communication, as do her managers. The information released is detailed and transparent in nature. In essence, Hersh is family, friend, confidant, support and songwriter. These characterizations are conveyed by tone and voice—through what participants say and how they say it. For instance:

I've gone through phases of cheap infatuation with other artists, but at this point I'm sure that as long as I can hear, I'll be listening to whatever Kristin has to say.
i feel so PROUD to be a fan of K (sounds corny, i know).

Hersh’s approach enables a degree of closeness or perceived degree of closeness that can strengthen the relationship between producer and consumer. It also sets the stage for the demand and expectation of information, which at times translates to a burden on the artist unless they have set strategies for relationship and community patience. The impact is constraining in terms of format specifications. Listening, just as the relationship between artists and consumers itself, is structured by the technology through which it is experienced (O’Hara and Brown, 2006). As Baym (2010) notes, online spaces provide both opportunities and challenges to musicians. On the positive side, there is a large potential, even international, audience available at little to no cost. Online interaction can build interest and, in turn, build your audience. What follows is greater opportunity for direct fan funding of work. On the negative side, musicians must learn to use an overwhelming number of social media sites, as well as find the time and resources needed to establish a presence on the site.

This analysis of Kristin Hersh’s online presence suggests that the concept of “audience”—just as the traditional linear model of mass communication—is a dated construct. Hersh’s fans are better conceptualized as forming a community closer in line with a more (post)modern participatory model of mass communication. From its inception, music has been social in nature, and in contemporary times digital technology emphasizes music’s sociality. The flexible nature of online community affords fluidity to musical consumption as purchases come from multiple, and at times global, spaces. Consumption becomes decentralized as participants gather together in online spaces.
This chapter demonstrates that the community on the online forum plays a key role in providing a financially viable, sustainable option for the continued production of music culture. As Fernback (2007) argues, community is best defined as a process because the relationships that constitute the community are process based. As I hope to have illustrated, the process occurs on multiple levels of community interaction, which is conceived as a complex web of interrelations between participants. Everyone participating in the process is equal. As one participant explains, “She obviously loves being in this band, sharing the creativity, and it feels like we are all a collective fan base, Kristin included.” Or, as O’Connell explains, “Quite simply, you are her patrons, her sponsors, her label, her co-conspirators - as well as her audience.” Hersh’s online presence plays a large role in her approach to her audience. Having a clear, dedicated space is crucial in terms of community building. Hersh offers herself and her life, in addition to the music she creates, and in return receives much needed support. As she puts it in a post expressing her feelings toward the community: “A special note of extra thanks for another unbelievable year of support and build-it-together-ness. I’m so moved by – and grateful beyond words for – what we can accomplish as a community. xo K”.

The “built together” process-based community has helped establish critically acclaimed artistry.
CHAPTER 7

THE LOGISTICS OF CONSUMPTION:
WHO, WHAT, WHEN, WHERE, & HOW DO PEOPLE CONSUME MUSIC?

The case study provided so far of one artist’s strategy and the online community surrounding her work suggests a shift in the way artists and consumers relate to each other as digital communication becomes increasingly pervasive. While Hersh’s forum participants relate, interact, and respond with Hersh and her community in specific ways, the following chapter addresses whether these patterns and themes are applicable beyond this specific case. In order to provide a fuller picture of the contemporary artist/audience experience and to further explore the changing nature of this relationship, this chapter more broadly examines the logistics of consumption among young adult music consumers. By exploring how, when, where, and with whom individuals consume music—as well as what kind of music they consume—it investigates the multiple dimensions of media consumer’s musical lives. Perhaps the most striking element of the focus group interviews conducted for this study is the extent to which music is a pervasive experience in everyday life. The interviews revealed that whether or not informants chose to put it on, music permeated every aspect of their lives.

Social & Personal Everyday Listening

“We listen to music together all the time.”

My conversations with media consumers revealed that they considered music to be for “alone time” as well as for social times with friends and family. The sociality
attached to music consumption was palpable throughout the interviews. For instance, 21-year-old Roxy noted that music brings her household together:

I listen to it out loud at my house, if we are cooking, or when I have friends over. We have it throughout our house. I live with a bunch of people. We have speakers in the house and you can plug it in, it’s not an iHome, it doesn’t charge it or anything and we have that in our garage, it’s our second living room.

As this quote illustrates, music sets the stage for social interaction and everyday sociality. 22-year old Hillary similarly explained, “If I’m at dinner or at social things I’ll listen to music when I’m with other people.” Listening is a key part of home life and often involves sharing songs and social activities. It becomes the soundtrack to home-based interactions. These relational characteristics of music consumption are thematically reminiscent of Attali’s (2006) reading of the interplay between music and culture. As he notes, "Music runs parallel to human society; is structured like it, and changes when it does" (Attali, 2006, p. 10). The pace of life and daily activities are tempered by music, which is structured by the technology that drives the experience, for instance an iHome or similar device. Indeed, Roxy’s comment also demonstrates how technology enables the music to be more fully integrated into the home and hence become an integral part of the everyday American experience. In essence, music not only serves to structure personal experience, it also acts as a framework for social relations. As Frith and Street (1992) explain, musical choice “becomes the means to a shared experience and identity” (p. 80).

As Adorno (1976) explains, music provides structure to society. DeNora (2000) similarly argues that “music is part of the basis of our social experience; it is a resource in actual formation of social reality” (DeNora, 2000, p. 19). Indeed, music mirrors personal
and social structures in the everyday home. For instance, 19-year-old Pam explained how her housemates’ listening practices are shaped by daily activities:

Well the house I live in now, I live there with my two best friends, so we listen to music together all the time, like if we first come in from school or once we’re all in the house, we’ll all go to one bedroom and listen to music, like, my one best friend she has the home dock, iHome in her room so when we are in her room we will listen to the iPod and if we are in my room we will listen to the TV or if we are in my other friend’s room we will listen on the computer so even if we are not listening to it to sing it, it will just be on in the background, or like we all cook together a lot so we will have the radio on in the kitchen or if we are cleaning we will have the radio on, when we are going out we definitely have it on all the time. And that’s a playlist that will have all those songs, for going out.

Music, in addition to the informant’s mood, sets the stage for everyday interaction. The two are intrinsically connected. As DeNora (2000) explains, this is an ongoing process:

Unlike material objects, music that is associated with past experiences was, within that experience, heard over time. And when it is music that is associated with a particular moment and a particular space…music reheard and recalled provides a device for unfolding, for replaying, the temporal structure of that moment, its dynamism as emerging experience. (p. 67)

There is a certain amount of back and forth in this dynamic. Music sets the tone and mood of the environment, but is also chosen because it fits the mood of the listeners at any given point in time. As this exchange between 21-year-old Roxy and 21-year-old
Jordan, provided in response to my query as to how they select music to listen to illustrates:

ROXY: It’s always by mood.

JORDAN: Yeah, it really is about mood.

23-year-old Shirley similarly explained that her music choices are dictated by her mood, “I like music as like, if I’m in a bad mood, I wanna listen to sad music, if I ‘m in a good mood I wanna listen to happy music if I wanna... if I’m getting pumped up for something I wanna listen to pump up music.” Or, as 22-year-old Marta put it, “It depends on the mood, there’s always those weekend nights where you’re like, oh my god, I have to listen to that one song by Kanye West, but when normally I’m walking to class I don’t listen to that kinda music.” According to my informants, the only time music was definitely not on was in the classroom. It also might not be on when other media demanded attention. For instance, a movie or television program might take precedence over music. However, it is worth noting that music sometimes trumped video game audio. Informants mentioned turning down video game audio and choosing music to play along.

Informants did not strongly connect with specific musical genres and often characterized their tastes as eclectic. Sub-cultural groups—such as punks, goths, or ravers—traditionally attached to specific genres were absent from the conversation. Even informants who recognized enjoying specific genres, including punk or hip hop, would also list an array of other musical styles when describing their listening habits. Thus, informants’ identity did not seem to be strongly tied to their engagement with specific musical genres. In fact, interests extended not only through multiple styles, but also spanned several decades—most informants were just as likely to listen to artists
throughout, roughly, the past five decades as they were to engage with more contemporary music. 21-year-old Roxy attributed these diverse listening habits to iTunes. As she explained:

I think just like, the whole having an entire iTunes library has kinda enabled people to not have one or two favorites unless they are super fans, just that you can shuffle all of your music it enables you to have so many bands that you love… not one band.

There were nevertheless recurring favorite styles and artists among informants. Some examples include pop, hip hop, electric, alternative, mixtape, classic rock, jazz, indie, dub step, punk, metal, rock, folk, reggae, funk, R & B, country, psychedelic, bossanova, Brazilian, classical, rap, Beyonce, Kanye, Wiz Kalifa, the Beatles, Led Zeppelin, Red Hot Chili Peppers, Eminem, Taylor Swift. However, informants never had just one answer to the question of what they enjoyed listening to. “I listen to everything” was the most common response. As 28-year-old Grant explained:

GRANT: For me, my scope has gradually expanded over the years. When I was younger, in high school, it was very narrow and now it’s a lot wider. I can’t even break it down into genres. It depends on my mood. If I’m reading or doing something that requires a lot of thought it’s going to be jazz… yeah. I can’t even get into genres. I listen to everything.

MB: Who are some of your favorite artists?

GRANT: I’m gonna pass. Haha.
As the previous exchange demonstrates, the change in musical preference over time reflects a relationship between genre, identity, and technology. As access to and offerings of music have shifted, mood has become a crucial aspect when deciding what one wants to listen to. The next exchange between Charles (29-years-old), George (25-years-old), and Joseph (27-years-old) is worth citing at length as it further highlights how identity construction, aging, and technology impact listening.

CHARLES: No, no this is good… you were saying something about it earlier, but especially with playing in bands, and not just seeing bands, but playing in bands, playing with other bands, when we were in a band and we played with Lorraine Drive and that’s how I found out about them and I was like, I like these guys, they are pretty cool, so that’s how I found out about that band. So I listened to them. Yeah like, as bad as those bands were, whenever we would play with bands that’s how I would find out about stuff, like Tokyo Rose, all bands that never really went far, but were just like, it’s nostalgia still, like growing up with them and playing shows with them, they kinda became part of who I was…. Nostalgia to music is pretty awesome and I’ll still listen to stuff I listened to back in high school like Saves the Day and New Found Glory…

GEORGE: NoFX!

CHARLES: The Movielife, whatever it is. It comes on the iPod and it just kinda brings you back. That music, it pumps you up. You connect that music with a part of your life that was such a good time, you
know, and being so far removed from that. I’ll listen to that and it’s fun… but the style I listen to has changed. It’s impossible to put a genre on it because it’s such a great range. Everything from Karate to I’ll listen to metal now. I mean, Geoff Farina, Minus the Bear, whatever you know. It’s just such a big list of bands.

JOSEPH: Nostalgia plays such an important role.

GEORGE: Absolutely. To the point where when stuff came out like Saves the Day in high school, who I love so much and love all of their songs, but if a similar band came out today, came out now, I probably wouldn’t listen to it. It’s not my genre anymore.

JOSEPH: Yeah, it would be terrible.

GEORGE: It’s amazing I will rock out, but it could be the same exact style song, same genre. I won’t touch it anymore.

This conversation suggests an important distinction between teenage identity construction and established adult listening practices. Technology, particularly in terms of access, is important to relatively early listening practices—as teenagers, these informants’ identity was shaped by the music available to them, particularly in terms of time and place. At that time, informants interacted with friends in a decidedly physical space (i.e. playing shows together). Now, as the weight of time and place has diminished through digital capabilities, informants suggested they were no longer tied to individuals one physically interacts with on a regular or semi-regular basis. Furthermore, while music consumption and identity are in many ways entertained, being more established as adults they were more open to actual, personal preferences without feeling tied to what actively
communicates their adolescent identity. They could be themselves and listen to what they wanted, instead of being caught up in this manner of adolescent identity construction.

Informants often reported using music as an aid to accomplish a task. Going to the gym was a popular example. As 19-year-old Gisela explained, “I literally cannot work out without music.” In the same vein, music was often used for getting excited to work or play, for helping to fall asleep, or for keeping occupied while traveling and providing distance and space from other people/passengers. In these ways, music ran parallel to the rhythm of informants’ everyday life. It mirrored the ebb and flow of their everyday interaction. Further, many informants mentioned how songs, lyrics, and musicians were strongly associated with specific people, places, and events in their lives. 20-year-old Frederick shared the meaningful way music connects with his life:

Music gets that inner feeling. Music is like everything to me because I can equate a song with a different mood I’m in, or I think of different people. I’ll think of a song that reminds me of that person, or different experiences, and places I’ve been, I’ve had. I love music so much. I have a song to connect to every part of my life almost, sad songs, you have your pumped and go out songs…it’s just everything music. If music was no longer in existence I would not want to be here. … That includes dance and everything! And all that, everything, just instruments, dance, everything, singing... it’s a collaborative thing!

Other informants also related music to other things in their lives. As 22-year-old Marta similarly explained, “Certain songs will remind me of a certain friend, like oh this friend knows all the words to that Sean Kingston song or something like that …whenever it comes on it ignites that sort of flashback to me.” Thus, music was clearly connected to
moments and those moments and their reliving were structured by the music, which technology enabled and constrained.

The aforementioned connections were made through sharing. As 22-year-old Hillary explained her relationship with music, “I just get it and share.” Music was, first and foremost, traded through friends. It served as social currency used between friends for social grooming, maintenance, and upkeep, more so than a financial based good exchanged from artist to audience. As 19-year-old Morgan shared, music’s value stems from discovering and sharing:

I feel like music is so much cooler sometimes when you discover it yourself, sometimes songs you find and you’re like, oh this is awesome! I mean it’s like a treasure or the golden egg on Easter, when you find a really rad song and whenever you play it everyone loves it. It’s a good feeling. You’re not even the one who made it but it’s like, that’s my song!

The ability to educate friends about new music was particularly meaningful for informants. As informants gained power by leading people to music they were building social capital. The connection to the music is a connection to an opportunity—a connection to a positive life experience (Bourdieu, 1977). Many informants spoke of the meaning and power that stems from sharing music. As 21-year-old Will explained, “I like to spread music I’m listening to and I can guarantee that it’s good stuff, man, you know.” Or, as 19-year-old Tessa similarly put it, “I totally feel that, like I totally love this song and want to share it and will be crushed if you don’t love it as much as I love it.”

Informants genuinely wanted to get their friends excited about the music they love. They used music to structure their experiences, and hence those of others, while
increasing their degree of social capital. 22-year-old Fritz similarly touched on the ability to impress others with his musical selections. As he explained, “I like to impress other people with the music I listen to and when they enjoy a playlist I made, it makes me happy and then we all have a good time listening to it.” Sharing music served as a means to connect with others, to make meaning with others, and to relate to others. As Fritz continued, “If a song is really in my head and I’m sure it will blow people’s socks off then I will definitely post it right to my [Facebook] wall and just wait for some type of reaction.”

23-year-old Coby also explained how he shares music through Facebook—and in the process highlighted digital media’s persistent nature.

There are some songs that remind me of my friends and so I’ll just post it to their [Facebook] wall so they can check it out and even though, sometimes you know I’ll post to my roommates wall, because I’ll forget after the day and I know I’m going to see him at the end of the day but it’s there it’s not tangible but it’s there forever.

Digital technology structured as well as heightened the everyday musical experience of informants through the persistent nature of its content. In this case, the Facebook wall enabled relationship maintenance as Coby and his friend experienced the music together over time. However, as the following exchange between 21-year-old Will and 21-year-old Byron illustrates, the meaning-making process is not restricted to Facebook. It flows freely between the physical and digital world.

WILL: That’s like one of the main ways that I socialize with friends. We are really hyped up on this group called Das Rasict right now. It’s all we listen to and it’s kinda been a bit of a weird period
musically, because we can’t stop listening to DR. they put
mixtapes up and they don’t even have a full album but we know
every word to every DR song. And like, I have my friend come
over so that we can listen to DR together and that’s it. Yeah.

BYRON: Just to go back to one of your questions from before. I’m going to
check them out when I go home just because you are speaking so
highly of them.

WILL: Yeah! You won’t regret it!

BYRON: I don’t even know what kind of music, but I’m going to go check
them out!

Music structures sociality and social relations on many levels involving close friends and
family, as well as acquaintances who just met. Listening practices bring new friends
together and reinforce and maintain older friendships. These meaning-making practices
happen through different media. As the focus group conversations unfolded it became
clear that informants had very different relationships with each medium. Some media
technologies, particularly digital devices like iPods, played a large role in informants’
music consumption. Others, such as compact discs, were characterized by a decline in
importance that informants believed would intensify over time. Overall, each medium
plays a role in music consumption, and as such, is explored in the next section.

Meaning Making Through Medium

Radio: “If I forget my iPod I listen to the radio.”
Listening to music via terrestrial radio was strongly associated with automobile travel among the media consumers who participated in my research. As 19-year-old Brad explained, “I feel like I haven’t listened to radio at all this year because I don’t have my car here.” Informants listened to radio in the car when one was available. They often tuned in for a specific morning show and radio personality. At times music was trumped by talk or sports radio. Overall, radio was also the preferable way for informants to listen to music when they did not want to have to choose the music. There was a level of curiosity and excitement attached to radio, as the songs that play are, to an extent, random from the perspective of the listener. As 25-year-old Dan explained, radio “creates that element of surprise.” Having that element of unexpectedness was appealing to informants. As 20-year-old Jen put it, “What might come on!? You don’t know!” While informants acknowledged that they could put their iPods on shuffle, they nevertheless typically loaded every song on the device themselves—radio was different in its lack of control. As 20-year-old Cori explained, “When you’re just driving around you don’t feel like choosing music you just kinda, there’s something kinda fun about the radio in that it’s out of your control and somebody else playing stuff and it can be pretty entertaining.” With radio one might learn of something new—albeit only big hit songs.

Radio still served promotional purposes. For instance, as 19-year-old Patty explained, “If I hear a Drake song played on the radio a million times then I’m gona go check out his album to see if there’s other songs that are similar, just as good.” However, it is worth noting that informants were not learning about a large amount of new music through terrestrial radio. They pointed out that radio only allowed them to be exposed to the few new hot songs of the season that receive extensive play. They also noted that
radio is often annoying because the same songs are played over and over, some radio personalities are an annoyance and get in the way of the music, and the commercials come on all too often.

Perhaps more importantly, other more attractive listening options were available to informants. For example, as 21-year-old Jordan noted, “I don’t listen to the radio at all. Nah. I have the [iPod] plug in in my car.” Indeed, the majority of informants felt that once they finished college and were able to afford a new car—with newer technology—their car listening habits would change accordingly. While informants deemed radio mildly entertaining and useful under certain circumstances, their comments suggested that once they could afford to upgrade to cars with the technology necessary to plug in their digital devices, terrestrial radio may fall to the wayside, and perhaps, be relegated to a more niche audience.

*iPod: “Where I want to control the music.”*

Between the gym, commuting, long trips, parties, and more, iPods tend to go everywhere their owners go. Flexibility and the ability to move with them were highly desirable elements that drove informants’ iPod use. The vast majority of informants reported carrying their iPod with them at all times—as 25-year-old Jess put it, “Mine follows me where I go.” Informants frequently expressed strong annoyance and discomfort if they forgot to bring their digital device with them, or if it lost its charge—“I forgot mine at home today and I’ve been freaking out all day” (18-year-old Manna), or, “If I forget my iPod, I’m pissed” (21-year-old Bobby).
Control over the music is needed to establish mood, which, as we have seen, is often the goal of the listening experience. Hence, informants considered the iPod an attractive option. The technology allowed them to choose and listen to specific music in specific places. For instance, a prime example of iPod use was at the gym. When informants were at the gym they felt they needed to control the situation: they need to be in control of their bodies, their productivity, and their actions. Informants’ iPods offer them the degree of control they desire over certain situations. Informants’ choice of music, as well as their choice of technology, reflected the ebb and flow of their day-to-day activities. 19-year-old Gisela explained why controlling the music was so important for her daily activities:

At the gym and on the train I listen to my iPod, where I want to control the music. Sometimes I don’t feel like listening to what the radio has to play, I want something that I can get my mind set, sometimes they don’t play songs that would motivate me to work out…

Overall, iPods were praised for their ability to enable users to have vast amounts of music with them, wherever they go. As 20-year-old Joshua explained, “If I didn’t have an iPod I wouldn’t listen to half of the music I do. I’d only have CDs and I think it’s because I’m so used to my iPod now, when I’m restricted to like, 20 songs, I’m tired of them before listening to them already.” However, while iPods offered tighter control over what informants listened to and where they listened to it, a number of challenges accompanied iPod use.

For instance, iPod storage capacity often caused issues. Either there was so much space informants could not handle using it or filling it, so they ended up listening to a
small set list of music over and over again, or informants filled it completely and could not process the sheer amount of music: “I have a lot of music on my iPod but I only listen to maybe a small portion of it over and over again” (19-year-old Brad). Another issue informants had with their iPods was dealing with the music they had loaded on it. They were often confronted with the task of figuring out what music was appropriate for the situation. For instance, 21-year-old Roxy explained, “I mean, once again, shuffle also kinda negates the mood thing, because you’re just walking and there’s the music on shuffle…Happy! Sad!... I find myself skipping things.” In other words, it is a challenge to find appropriate music for the moment, when your options are so vast. While an iPod’s shuffle feature may seem like a useful tool to negotiate large music collections, in reality it was not the best option as there is a high degree of probability that it will play songs inappropriate to the setting—or to the mood of the moment.

Dealing with the different varieties of music loaded on one’s iPod was not only a personal issue for informants, but also a social one. “The shame of shuffle” was mentioned by many informants during our conversations. Most informants admitted that they avoided using shuffle in public, or in front of other people as “you just don’t know what will show up” (25-year-old Jess). The fear was that something might come on to play that clashes with one’s public, social identity so informants had to be aware and negotiate this social situation. The following exchange showcases the tension related to the degree of control over what is playing, as well as the space where the music is playing.

ROXY: My friends and I always joke that putting your iPod on shuffle in social situations is very dangerous!
CORI: Oh my gosh! Yeah!

ROXY: It’s like the most stressful thing!

CORI: It’s like, oh no! What’s going to come up?!

In some social situations iPod use was deemed highly desirable. For instance, informants frequently created specific playlists for parties or social gatherings. But the issue of using a personal device in a social setting and the control one feels was actively negotiated. Consider the following exchange:

JORDAN: I feel like iPods are big at parties too…

EVERYONE: Yeah…

CORI: I hate when other people unplug your iPod!

EVERYONE: Yeah…

JORDAN: Instead of songs playing it’s, like, constantly changing and it’s really annoying.

ROXY: That’s one thing that’s actually like, there’s too much freedom with iPods somebody can just be like, Next!

Thus, informants appreciated the high degree of control offered by iPods not only in personal settings, but also in social settings where control over the device was frequently contested. Informants desired the control the iPod offered them, but struggled with the fact that their peers were afforded the same degree of control.

Compact Discs: “My room’s already cluttered. I don’t need CDs.”

CDs were consistently characterized as nostalgic artifacts, with informants connecting them to their youth, musicians they liked when they were younger, and
musicians popular when they actively were buying CDs. CDs were referred to as “retro” in a number of the focus group conversations, which added to the nostalgic tone. Many informants still burned CDs and kept them in their cars; however, they made it clear they intended to leave the CDs, as well as their old cars, and upgrade to higher tech devices once they graduated and secured employment. Compact discs were merely an affordable option for transfer and storage. For instance, 23-year-old Eric noted that “I don’t remember the last time I listened to a CD. It’s not a common occurrence. CD is more of a transfer now.” Or, as 20-year-old Kim similarly explained, “I just feel like it takes up space and I need space and I don’t need stacks of CDs taking up space that I don’t listen to.”

There were a few circumstances in which informants purchased CDs. If a friend’s band or small local band released an album on compact disc, it may be bought to show support—“The times I buy CDs are like, if I’m at a local show or something because I feel like those are the people to be supporting, bands who do small tours” (21-old-Roxy). CDs might also be bought for a parent’s birthday, as a holiday present or for a special occasion: “I think the last CD I bought was the Maxwell CD for my mom. But she only wanted it because Maxwell had made this big comeback and she had liked him when he was out before so she knew it was something she would like” (22-year-old Fritz). Such purchases were frequently tied to an artist established during a time when compact discs were popular, which again touches on the theme of nostalgia. As mentioned, CDs were referred to as “retro” and as such, it is clear that CDs were not considered contemporary cultural pieces. As 22-year-old Marta highlighted in the following comment, compact discs clearly represented the past for her.
I kinda like being able to say all my CDs were from 5 years ago where iTunes wasn’t, you know, I didn’t have a laptop or anything and my parents certainly didn’t want me to download music onto their computer, so all my CDs represent a certain stage in my life I guess. So I love being like, look at what I listened to and there’s none of my current music, like I would never listen to those people like, I don’t know what the examples are. I don’t want to say them, but just like music from back in the day. It’s almost like your parents showing you their tape collection or their record collection, like they are not … my parents don’t buy tapes or records now, but they have them from when they were in college so it just represents a certain phase of their lives.

Discussions about CDs brought up a major theme behind the audience-artist relationship: financial support. This was because CDs represent the clearest and most familiar opportunity to purchase physical media. Purchasing vinyl records was seen as something left to collectors or “music snobs” and audio tapes were completely absent from the conversations. Informants saw CDs as the main and sometimes only physical option to purchase content.

*Vinyl Record:* “I can put it on my wall. That’s kinda cool. Classic.”

The vast majority of informants treated vinyl records as novel items, while music enthusiasts who touted high sound quality and an appreciation for the physicality were in the minority. For example, as 21-year-old Roxy stated, “It’s like a novelty kinda thing. Only some people I know are really serious about it. It’s kinda like, look at this fun old thing. There are some people that are kinda snobby about it.” Informants reinforced
record’s novelty by describing them as something to show off and display. For instance, as 20-year-old Frederick explained, “I don’t have a record player but if I have an artist that I like and I see the record I can put it on my wall. That’s kinda cool. Classic.”

Fetishism, ritualism, and novelty were all descriptors used to characterize records and the associated culture. For instance, informants spoke of the notable physical presence and the actions that go along with listening to records. As 19-year-old Laurie stated, “It’s more tangible. Like it’s there, instead of you’re just listening to an mp3 and it’s just like a little bit of data.” Whereas digital music listening happened with a quick click of a mouse, listening to a record was more of an event. You had to work to make it happen. For instance, 20-year-old Jen described the ritual attached to her friend’s listening habits: “He loves his record player and he loves like going through the crate and pulling out all his records and sorting them and stuff.” With vinyl, informants had to act to make listening happen. This contrasted with their suggestion that digital music consumption simply “just happened” which touched on the more subtle nature of digital consumption.

Vinyl records were often seen as a relic from another time, and were regularly associated with parents or grandparents, or as 23-year-old Eric stated, “Something hipsters put on their walls.” Similarly, 18-year-old Manna explained, “I feel like it’s kind of pretentious for people our age to be listening to vinyls. Haha. Hipsters love them.” In many ways and for the majority of informants, records seem like cultural pieces for identity construction more so than pieces of music to consume. The following exchange touches on the break between listening to music and collecting cultural artifacts.

   ERIC: Well I own a turntable…I haven’t really used it, I packed it away but I listen it to. I listen to records and vinyl and stuff.
MB: Is it currently packed away?

ERIC: I’m not using it. It just takes up a lot of space. It’s giant, I have a little handy dandy iPod, you can just listen to that… I thought it would be cool to have it and I kinda collect things too like I’m a big, I collect things a lot. I own about 30 pairs of sneakers. I like collecting things.

There is an important distinction here. While records technically contain music, they are not necessarily listened to, but collected; they are closer to collectibles. In this way, the nature of record consumption differs from other media. As expressed in the previous quote, like the sneakers records may be collected, but not actually worn nor used in the everyday.

Computer: “If I’m on the computer I’m listening to music.”

Listening to music while using the personal computer is very common. Though, at times the computer will be hooked up so one can listen throughout the house with iHome, or AirPlay. Informants use YouTube, Pandora, Last.FM, FratMusic, iTunes Radio, among others, to listen to music. It often depends on what activities they are doing simultaneously as certain sites provide music more appropriate to the task at hand. As 23-year-old Coby shared, he used different Pandora stations depending on his mood and activity, “I listen on my computer probably more than anything. I always have Pandora, I just love Pandora more than anything so that’s always playing in my room, I just kinda switch depending. Christmas music station’s big now.” 21-year old Cynthia similarly uses her computer to listen to music, especially when searching for new content.
I listen on my computer when I’m cooking and when I’m in my room and sometimes I use iTunes to do that or I use Grooveshark which is really good and a lot of my friends use that too and also there are a few mp3 blogs that I go to to play music off of. There’s this one I like called Motown to Mocha. It’s like an eclectic mix of music and it’s stuff I would never find on my own. And, they update it once or twice a week so it’s just like, if I don’t want to listen to my own music but I want to hear stuff I like, I can go to sites like that.

Indeed, informants closely linked finding new music to listening on their computers. Many online sites’ value was directly connected to the music suggestions made to listeners. Suggestions were valued not only because they introduced informants to new music, but also for their ability to suggest and play songs that fit the mood of the informants. For instance, 25-year-old Jess explained how she enjoyed hearing one style but not the same songs repeatedly, ―I like a certain artists, like I like Ben Harper and I’ll put on Ben Harper Radio and it will play similar style artists without having to always constantly listen to the same songs I always hear.”  The following exchange showcases similar sentiment, and highlights the importance of musical recommendations, in this case the suggestions offered by YouTube.

JORDAN:  I go on YouTube a lot to listen to music, watch music videos too, and I find myself getting lost in YouTube. It’s kind of weird.

MB: What kind of stuff do you look for?

JORDAN:  I don’t know, because there’s always stuff popping up like related songs…

BRAD: That’s what’s really great about YouTube,
JORDAN: Yeah, I’ll search for something I like then I’ll find something that’s related and it’s like oh I’ve never heard that… you can find related songs and it’s just so much current music being uploaded all the time.

Suggestions are particularly welcomed if the genre is not as widely known. Informants often wanted music that corresponded with their mood or desired activity, yet were not as well versed in the genre they thought most appropriate. Certain genres were received much more broadly than others. For instance, many informants reported enjoying listening to electronica, but rarely had a favorite artist to speak of, yet remained very set on specifically listening to electronica. This is where suggestions strongly come into play. For instance, 24-year-old Jon used Pandora to learn about genres with which he had less familiarity:

I use Pandora to listen to music I don’t normally listen to. I have stations that... like the one station is like, RJD2 and electronic stuff. I have one for jazz and stuff that I wouldn’t normally listen to. Just play songs I don’t already know, they’re genres that I don’t know and wouldn’t normally know what to listen to so Pandora just tells me.

For informants, streaming services and suggestions have expanded their musical tastes. However, it is important to note this taste has an endpoint. For instance, an informant might love to listen to Jazz, yet continually rely on Pandora for artist suggestions. Overall, while different listening practices were associated with different media, the music informants listened to was discovered in very similar ways.
Learning About New Music

“Every aspect helps me find new music.”

Informants learned about new artists and releases through their social connections, and the mass media. Friends and family, particularly siblings both older and younger played a key role in keeping listeners up to date. Social situations, especially parties and gatherings where music is the backdrop, were an important place to learn about new music. In fact, word of mouth was consistently mentioned—“Through word of mouth, like my friends or my sister” (Chris, 23)—as the strongest factor in music choice and consumption. Siblings were often mentioned as sources of new musical suggestions. In the following exchange 20-year-old Cori talked about learning of new music from her younger brother.

CORI: My little brother loves music.

MB: How little?

CORI: He’s going to be 16, not that little, little to me. It’s funny, have you heard of Wiz Khalifa? He’s like slowly getting bigger but my brother called me and he was like, will you go to this concert with me so mom and dad will let me go, and I was like sure, and it was really good and I was like wow, who knew? So he makes me CDs a lot, and it’s always new stuff I’ve never heard, so it’s fun.

Friends were also incredibly important sources of music-related information and they shared what they know both in face-to-face interactions and online. 21-year-old Nikki explained how music knowledge spreads, “A lot of times word of mouth, YouTube
catches on pretty quickly, like someone will tweet about it and then you’ll post a link and someone will listen to it.” Or, as 20-year-old Ryan similarly stated:

A lot of times friends will say look this up, on Facebook for instance if someone has a song that they know I would like they put it on my wall and then I look into it and that music becomes into my collective awesome artist category, library thing.

Roommates also played a large role in music knowledge, as music consumption was generally a key part of the household. It set the backdrop for group living and co-habital socializing. For example, informants listened together while cooking, working, and just generally hanging out. 22-year-old Noah talked about his roommate’s impact on his own music consumption:

My roommate... He’s a music guru. He knows everything there is about rock and roll. One day he’ll say check out this new band they’re from so and so and I really like them, and I do. That’s his life. Music, so that’s how I find everything.

Informants also learned about new music from artists they were currently listening to. As 21-year-old Jordan explained, “Wiz Khalifa actually sampled Empire of the Sun for one of his songs and I didn’t even know who they were until I heard that song and then a lot of songs, they cover artists and that’s how I find out about other stuff.” Similarly, 19-year-old Tessa explained how she finds out about new artists through YouTube.

They [YouTube artists] cover a lot of my favorite songs so I’ll type in Kings of Leon “Use Somebody” and that’s how I found the girl, Pixie Lott who covered it better than anyone I’ve ever heard. So you know, they attach their song to a
popular song, so when people search for it, you know, they are searchable. That’s how I find it.

Another important way informants learned about new music was radio. While many listeners reported finding new music from terrestrial radio, internet radio stations, especially Pandora, played a particularly large role in exposing informants to new music. When online, informants looked to news sites, genre specific websites, blogs, mix-tape sites and YouTube. Again, the related artist suggestions were often welcomed and relevant. As 20-year-old Cori explained, “I’ll hear a song on Pandora and be like, yeah I really like this who is it and it will be something I’ve never heard of and then I find myself take that name and type that into Pandora so it keeps going.” In this case it is not merely one artist leading to another, but to another and another in a continual process.

Also, specific websites were important to informants and they often turned to them to learn about new music. For instance, 23-year-old Coby explained how he discovered the English rock band Radiohead:

There’s this website called mediacritic.com and they compile basically averages of whenever you buy albums, where everybody is rated on various magazines and they give them one score and from that, that’s how I actually found Radiohead, because I was like, wow how did they get all these high scores on all of their albums, so check them out. I found a lot of people with that particular website.

In the same vein, 21-year-old Will explained how he uses certain websites’ strengths to decide what he wants to integrate into his daily listening rotation:

I have a four website pallet for the most part. Actually I don’t want to say Rolling Stone’s website because I really don’t like their website, but I’ve subscribed to
Rolling Stone for like 10 years now so, I get that and I’d say Rolling Stone on one end of the spectrum and Pitchfork on the other because they are both very distinct in what they are doing and what they like, and so I try to find the balance between that because I don’t want either to be my main tastemaker. And then, from there I go out to Spin’s website and Gorilla vs. Bear, too. And I try to get an idea from that and I find that Pitchfork especially is good for finding new people, but whether or not they think this new person is great is sometimes not always accurate. So I used them as a radar.

Many answers to the question, “Where do you find out about new music?” came back in list form and almost always included word of mouth from family and friends, websites, and online suggestions from streaming radio. The following exchange between 19-year-old Pam and 21-year-old Kimia represents the usual answer to the question.

KIMIA: Sometimes I’ll go on social websites like Perez Hilton haha or E-Online, but I would say it’s mainly through friends, or even just one day if I’m bored I’ll go on iTunes and start listening to different things, but mainly through friends.

PAM: I’ve been getting every aspect. I find out about new music from friends, Pandora, my younger brother and my one best friend that’s a guy, he always knows everything that’s new, so I think every aspect helps me find new music.

MB: Do you ever look online for new music?

PAM: Only on Pandora or sometimes I’ll go on The YBF that and The Media Take Out. It’s like that.
Overall, these three elements—word of mouth from family and friends, websites, and online suggestions from streaming sites—come together and set the standard for what to listen to and are used by the informants to negotiate their daily playlists. Technology’s role is consistent throughout. It is not only telling informants what to listen to directly through websites and streaming suggestions, but indirectly through word of mouth as friends and family often use digital media to find out about new music themselves, and then to tell their friends about their discoveries. Once informants learned of new releases and new artists, the next step was the acquisition of the musical content, and it is with that topic that the next section begins.

Obtaining Music

“I was thinking about that, if it’s a dollar per song, my iTunes library is worth 50,000 dollars! Is that serious?! That can’t be realistic.”

Informants acquired the majority of their music online. While they sometimes obtained music legally, they most frequently obtained it illegally. Torrent sites were mentioned in every focus group conversation. Limewire, Frostwire, MoJo, MediaFire, RapidShare were all sources of music, with the majority of the content ripped, regardless of copyright. Many listeners recorded songs directly from YouTube, often though AudioHijack, or similar recording software. Blogs and mix-tape websites were mentioned often as well, and it was noted that these sites made new music freely and easily available. As 18-year-old Manna explicitly stated, “I don’t purchase a darn thing!” Similarly, the below exchange between 20-year-old Maggie and myself represents the majority of respondent’s experiences acquiring music.
MAGGIE: Well I don’t purchase, I steal it.

MB: All of it?

MAGGIE: Yeah.

MB: Where from?

MAGGIE: Wherever. I used to be a Limewire girl until I ruined my family’s computer. That was in, like, 10th grade though. Um, just torrents and wherever I have to get it.

As informants perceived it, there was not a financially attractive and realistic option for purchasing music. Maggie continued and addressed the unfeasible situation, “If I bought all my music I would be poor. I wouldn’t be able to survive or I just wouldn’t have music.” This type of response was a common sentiment. The unrealistic nature of the current economic structure was mentioned repeatedly throughout the interviews and often contained underlying feelings of anger and defiance. For example, 20-year-old Jen stated, “I was thinking about that, if it’s a dollar per song, my iTunes library is worth 50,000 dollars is that serious?! That can’t be realistic.” Many informants felt that the established price point was deemed unsatisfactory because it is too high per song. Informants did not believe the price was realistic for a music collection, particularly the type of collections informants are accustomed to having. 20-year-old Kim rationalized illegal downloading with numbers:

What I think of when I’m downloading, I mean I add up the numbers. Say I had 1,500 [songs] and you put a dollar value on that, that’s $1,500 that I spent on music and that’s $1,500 dollars I don’t have, so I’m saving money myself. I mean
I’m not saying they shouldn’t get paid, but it’s just that my situation is more important than what their situation is.

The music collections are not so much about the artist, but about the listener, a point worth noting when considering that artist-audience relationship. The price point impacted the nature of the informants’ relationship with their music collections. For instance, it is one factor that has driven informants to consume songs instead of complete albums, shifting music collections from primarily albums to single songs. 18-year-old Sara explained how her iTunes use leads to privileging the song over the artist:

It kinda sucks like that with iTunes. It’s more, I don’t look at the artist, but the song, you know, so I feel like if you’re buying CDs you are looking at the artist and all their songs, but with iTunes you are looking for a song. It’s more dependent on the song. It always bothers me when I have to pay $1.29 for a song.

Due to the high price per song, informants only purchased songs they loved. As the interviews progressed, it became apparent that the majority of informants grew up during a time when they did not have to purchase music to find out whether or not they liked it. In fact, money was rarely spent and when it was, informants already knew that they like the content. This ability to “pre-test” music impacted informants’ purchasing behavior. 26-year-old Craig shared his disappointment in buying an album he did not love and noted that today that would never happen:

That CD [Chumbawamba] was horrible except for that one song, even when I was however old I was that CD was terrible and it was the type of thing where I only heard one song because they only put one song on the radio, and I bought it and I
brought it home and I was like, man, I spent $18.00 for this or whatever, because nothing else was remotely good on that and you had no way of knowing.

Typically, informants made sure they liked something before they added it to their music collections. Despite this tendency to only obtain content they were already familiar with, their digital music collections tended to be larger and broader, however, than when they were limited to physical content. Digital distribution played a big part in exposing informants to new music. As Craig shared, “I can tell you I wouldn’t be into as many smaller bands if it wasn’t for downloading because there’s no penalty for getting something that you don’t like.” Similarly, 20-year-old Joshua explained that illegal downloading expands his musical knowledge and drives him to make the few purchases he does, “Honestly if I didn’t download stuff illegally I probably wouldn’t know about half the artists that I know and I wouldn’t be buying the one in 20 songs that I buy and the occasional album.”

While there were many positive aspects to illegal downloading, informants also communicated feelings of guilt and a general sense of feeling limited by the industry’s current financial structure. For instance, 20-year-old Maggie shared, “My brother is really bad. He steals movies and TV shows and music and everything known to man, so my family’s a bunch of stealers.” Sometimes similar sentiment was hidden in defensive responses that looked to, in essence, pass the blame. For instance, 24-year-old Jim shared:

I don’t feel bad for them at all, if they are good enough then they are going to be making money so they should have no room in their life for sympathy from their audience, they always claim how they are doing it for us so.
As these comments illustrate, informants had a strong reaction to the industry’s current financial structure. This was further fed by feelings of irrelevance, as informants often felt powerless to impact an artist’s career. For example, 19-year-old Tessa shared, “Sometimes I feel like my one purchase won’t really, it’s like my one vote won’t help the whole election kind of thing.” Similarly, 20-year-old Maggie stated, “I think it’s hard to feel like your one thing is going to matter. It’s easy for me to be like, whatever, how I am going to totally make you or break you if I steal your song.” There was an underlying sense of defeat communicated in the tone of voice stemming from the unrealistic quality that defined the circumstances. Bringing the altruistic nature of the situation to the forefront, along with the problems that brought, Maggie further explained:

I feel like if I was rich I would definitely buy everything because I feel like they deserve it. But I just, I’m just too poor. In a perfect world I would give everybody what they deserve from me, but I just don’t have it.

At the same time, for many informants it came down to clear, simple logic. Buying something available for free was illogical. As 18-year-old Manna explained, “I don’t have purchase money and if I do, I don’t want to spend it on something when I could download it for free.” 19-year-old Patty similarly stated, “I’m saying mp3s are so easy to get for free with good quality that there’s no point in buying.” Logic, ease, and convenience make for an attractive and reasonable option at a time when the official industry offers none. In addition, informants framed free distribution of music as something that helped instead of hurt the artist’s careers. As 26-year-old Craig explained, “Broken Social Scene, they would not be anywhere near as big if it weren’t for torrenting because they had that Pitchfork review and that blew them up.” As the following
comments similarly illustrate, informants firmly believed that spreading music through illegal means helped to increase the popularity of the artist:

**BO:** The music they do now is an advertisement for themselves because they are making money from concerts and commercials and then like they are making money from all different places so the music is just a way to advertise themselves to get people to like you.

**GISELA:** For being a musician, there are people that are going to get your stuff for free; I mean even if you sell CDs people are going to trade. And like, you’re getting more people to listen to you so what’s more important, money or the spread of your name?

Such statements demonstrate how normalized it was for informants to think about musicians as professionals who do not make a living off of the content they produce.

According to my informants, musicians are professionals who do not earn their income from their primary occupation.

With such a strong focus on not paying for content, it is important to note that purchasing music was not altogether absent from informants’ musical lives. Purchasing music is often framed as a last resort, or something that happens in special or extreme circumstances. There were instances, albeit few, where music was paid for which occurred under very specific conditions: the music was not found elsewhere for free, there were issues or difficulties with the technology associated with acquiring the music, the packaging was extremely impressive—particularly the artwork and included extra content—or the artist was a favorite artist and held in extraordinarily high regard.
Informants often mentioned paying for music when they were unable to find it for free. As 21-year-old Roxy explained, “In the past year a couple of times I’ve bought stuff from Amazon from their mp3s when it’s really hard to find stuff to illegally download and I want a whole album just right there, I’ll buy it from there.” Other times dealing with the technology prompted payment. For instance, 23-year-old Shirley explained how assembling individual tracks into an album was irritating enough to prompt her to pay:

Sometimes I will buy a CD if it gets annoying and tedious to find what songs are on the CD and then put together the whole CD yourself and download the whole CD illegally it’s a little annoying so if I don’t feel like doing that and I really like the artist yeah I’ll go and buy the CD.

Sometimes finding a freely downloadable version of appropriate quality was a challenge. This also drove informants’ music purchase. For example, 21-year-old Will explained:

What it became for me was less, having compassion for the artists and more really an audio snob and it was my experience downloading that the quality was not what was guaranteed if you actually bought it so… my purchasing of music has always been for the quality specifically.

Similarly, 19-year-old Patty described her rationale, “The majority is not bought. The ones that are bought are only the ones that you can’t really find or other versions or messed up so you just buy the one because it’s better quality.”

iTunes gift cards played a role in music purchase and touched on the aforementioned issues. For instance, informants used the cards if they could not find the music easily elsewhere. The cards themselves were frequently bought by parents as a
reward for their child, for instance doing well in school, or bought in an attempt to stop their child from illegally downloading. Overall, it seems parental fear drove the majority of iTunes gift card sales. For example, 24-year-old Jim explained, “I bought the whole CD off iTunes. The reason I bought the CD was because I got an iTunes gift card for Christmas and had no other way to use it.” Informants most often used iTunes gift cards because they simply could not do anything else with them.

A small number of listeners bought music from iTunes because they were afraid of dealing with technical issues associated with pirating files. For example, 19-year-old Pam commented, “I’m not really computer savvy.” As with others, she felt iTunes was an easier way to acquire music. 18-year-old Sara similarly explained, “I feel like it’s just easier to do it off iTunes than to have to go through all the converting and I don’t know… I wouldn’t be able to do it. It would be too difficult.” Informants expressed frustration and reported downloading files that would “come out really messed up or I would get half a song or 15 seconds of it, or it might just be another song altogether” (25-year-old Stuart). Based on their prior experiences with computer viruses and spy-ware, some informants thought it was easier to purchase from iTunes. For instance, 19-year-old Morgan stated, “I did the whole download online pirating business online and I got really, really bad viruses on my first lap top and I had to get a new one so I’m wary of doing that and stuff.” 19-year-old Doug agreed, “Yeah, Limewire was really hurting my computer.”

Finally, music purchase was tied directly to the degree of esteem informants connected to the artist. Comments such as “Like Beyonce, I’ll buy her album all the time,” (Pam, 19); “[I buy it if] I like it. I really, really, really like it,” (Craig, 26); or “When it means something; when it’s your favorite artist” (Tessa, 19) suggested that
informants were willing to pay for selected artists. Notions of respect, credibility, staying power, and enjoyment over time were important in establishing the degree of esteem informants ascribed to artists. However, informants generally reported few artists they thought highly enough of to justify spending money. For instance, when informants spoke of American rapper Jay-Z, it was with the utmost respect and admiration for his talent as an artist. The importance of the duration of his career and his success over time was particularly salient. Informants spoke of appreciating his past and his future. For instance, Tessa shared:

I don’t usually buy CDs, but if JZ comes out with a new CD then I will buy it because I respect him and he deserves my $9.00. I think. And he’s my favorite and probably the only CDs that I would buy because I think it will mean something someday, you know, because he’s a genius. I’m going to listen to it for a long time not like the party songs on the radio I mean I still listen to JZ’s first album because I actually have the actual CD I mean I will put it on my iPod and listen to it on my computer, but I don’t know why I mean I feel like I’m just respecting him. I think he’ll be proud of me if I ever meet him one day.

In relation to the duration of artist’s careers, informants made purchases only if they were certain they would appreciate the entire work over time. Purchases were reserved for quality content that had staying power, would be enjoyed for years to come, and was not a fleeting fad. It was important for the music to embody these characteristics when money changed hands. As 22-year-old Emily shared, “I want to buy a song I’m going to like at the end of the year, that’s not going to get old.” Emily further elaborated on her purchasing habits by explaining, “I feel like I would buy a CD from an artist if I know I
will like all the songs. You’re gonna listen to all of them. I’m going to buy one song off iTunes if I know I’m not really liking the band and I’m not going to like all 13 tracks.”

The quotes above clearly illustrate that purchase came down to the esteem with which informants held the artist.

Often these were artists who had been prominent in the industry for a time long enough to fully establish themselves as artistic forces in popular culture. During one focus group interview, R&B artist Maxwell was mentioned and the exchange that followed described the drive to purchase the physical media product.

FRITZ: Yeah I agree, I think it’s all about credibility. I think the last CD I bought was the Maxwell CD for my mom, but she only wanted it because Maxwell had made this big comeback and she had liked him when he was out before so she needed it. It was something she would like and I also got her Barbara Streisand, so again it was something she knew she liked but I don’t think I would ever buy a new artist’s CD… yeah, because you’re putting out that money.

TESSA: I totally agree because I bought that Maxwell CD.

Overall, purchase was mitigated by a number of factors tied to informants’ personal identity and experience with specific artists, technology, and friends. Music purchase was about intensifying the artist-audience connection and if the appropriate framework was not in place for that connection to happen, the relationship did not flourish.

This evidence suggests that the artist-audience relationships may be best understood as a process of meaning-making within a community rather than as one of
financial exchange. As 24-year-old Lou stated, “If there’s a free option, you are always going to take that option, unless you feel like you really love this band and you want to donate, I would call it donating. Donating the money.” 22-year-old Fritz reinforced this characterization when noting, “Fact of the matter is, you can search anything and get it for free so it’s not worth it unless you’re trying to please somebody.” It is with this sentiment in mind that I now explore informants’ reception of artist’s offerings, as well as their negotiation of the technology through which they experience the music.
CHAPTER 8

RECEPTION & NEGOTIATION: THE IMPACT OF TECHNOLOGY

Audience Response

“Yeah, because they are just human beings, not gods. So I like that.”

When asked to characterize the artist-audience relationship, informants communicated a powerful, willing, openness to participate in musical communities. Words such as devotion and dedication set the tone for the relationship. As 21-year-old Cynthia described, she is very willing to include artists into her musical life:

I guess dedicated [would describe my relationship with music], because even like what she said, she’ll download an entire album even if she only knows a song and you don’t even have to like them all because you respect that band and want to build a relationship with them that you’re willing to get all of their songs and give them all a chance and you’re willing to support them. Willing…yes.

Cynthia continued by touching on the real and perceived distance informants felt in their relationships with artists, indicating ways for artists to bridge the distance and allow the audience to feel a closer connection. As she explained:

I would say it’s a close relationship or maybe it’s even naively close almost, because I don’t know, I feel like music does something for me and I do something for music, so it’s sorta like a relationship and it is cool… one of my favorite bands is the Antlers and they were the first interview I ever did and since then I’ve always felt like, I’ve like met them, like after the shows, that sort of thing is like, a real closeness but other stuff I feel like I’m closer to them than I actually am.
However, the level of commitment and enthusiasm was tempered by the actions of the artist. As explained by 20-year-old Joshua, “I feel kind of devoted a little bit….because when I do like an artist I do spend money. They do get money from me but if I feel like it’s just another hype guy I almost feel like I should be taking money from them for wasting my time!”

*Concert Support: “It’s kinda positive reinforcement.”*

The most obvious way informants felt they supported musicians was by going to concerts: Friends’ shows, indie shows, big shows, and summer festivals. Informants saw going to concerts as an integral part of the artist-audience relationship: the artists put out the album and then listeners attend the concert. In fact, informants were often excited to see previously released content performed live. 26-year-old Craig described the central role concerts play in supporting musicians:

I support them by going to shows and if they’re really, really good buying their merch and if they’re good then I’ll go back again and probably with some more friends the next time you know…and it’s kinda positive reinforcement because I guess I only support bands I like or are good but if I’m wasting money on a CD that’s crap. If it’s good, they get my monetary support in terms of me going to their show.

Live music was also heralded for its ability to offer a degree of intimacy and hence a truer connection with the artist. Many informants saw the concert experience as a truer form of communication because it was perceived as less filtered compared to a produced album or televised performance. Informants felt that they experienced the true artist
through a concert performance. 20-year-old Frederick explained part of what drives him to see musicians play live:

I’ll go see them live. Because it’s like, when you see somebody live, again with the whole commercialization thing, you can hear them on the radio, but seeing somebody live is different because when it’s their live tour they can kinda do what they want and show you who they are

While many informants thought the way to support musicians was to see them perform live, they also believed many concerts were too expensive. Numerous informants considered over $30.00 too much money for a concert. However, many informants who attended large concerts would admit to spending more than $100.00 for the experience. As 20-year-old Maggie explained, “I have invested a lot of money in seeing John Mayer, but that’s something I’m willing to do. His tickets cost a fortune but I’ll work an extra shift for the sake of it because I want to go that bad.” It is important to note that this type of experience happened about once a year and greatly depended on the artist and venue. The high price point of many concerts reinforced the fact that artists did not need audience support. As 22-year-old Noah stated, “You can make so much money off of tours. For instance John Mayer… it’s crazy, how much money he makes off of his shows, from his tour, his promotions.” Similarly, 21-year-old Kimia explained how large, sold out performances clearly communicate that artists do not need her financial support.

I mean most of the concerts I would try to go to are sold out within minutes so the availability for the tickets isn’t really there, and that also makes me think that if she’s sold out then clearly this person is making enough money and they don’t
need me to contribute because if I can’t get access to it that means that there’s a bunch of other people that are.

At the same time, this is problematic as concerts are the only way informants are willing to financially support artists. As the conversations unfolded, it became clear that informants would support music they believed needed their support to continue, and would clearly not support musicians they thought did not need their support, as evidenced by commercial/advertisement/television/film/licensing deals which communicated their ample financial backing. For instance, as 20-year-old Bo explained, music is not artists’ primary means of financial support because, “They are making money from concerts and commercials and then, like, they’re making money from all different places, so the music is just a way to advertise themselves.” 25-year old Dan similarly stated, “They already make so much money.”

Consequently, many informants strongly perceived that musicians did not need their support. 20-year-old Kim expressed a very similar sentiment when she declared, “All these artists have millions more than they know what to do with and they’re buying Lamborghini and I’m sitting here counting my pennies. It’s just like I need it more than you do at this point.” 19-year old Morgan felt the same way and explained, “It’s hard for me to empathize with someone who has so much money in the first place.” The feeling that informants’ support was not needed permeated many focus group discussions. It became evident that informants did not support musicians because there was little to no transparency in the majority of artist-audience relationships. Informants had no idea about how the artist was paid, and in turn, these tropes became normalized. For instance,
the regularly heard, “Oh, musicians make a ton of money touring!” was a commonly held belief that justified noninvolvement and the norm of not supporting the artist.

In a related process, when artists prioritized promotion over music it negated the need for audience support. As 20-year-old Joshua stated, “When I feel like they are just doing it to make money I’m not as readily …as ready to pay for their stuff. When I feel like they aren’t just trying to nickel and dime me for everything, then I have no problem spending money on them.” Informants were particularly turned off when the primary emphasis was on the financial aspect of the artist-audience relationship. 18-year-old Manna similarly explained, “I think like, why do they have to make so much money? Like, do they just want fame? I definitely appreciate music and all the stuff they do, but there’s other things that people are working just as hard so why should you have to become a millionaire because you’re making music?” Comments such as Manna’s further reinforced the pitfalls of a promotion-heavy approach.

**Online Support: “When I find stuff I promote the hell out of it.”**

Another way informants supported musicians was by incorporating music, in various forms, into their online presence. Informants often “Liked” things on Facebook, posted videos on their Facebook walls and their friends’ walls, and updated their Facebook status to tell friends what they were listening to. Posting songs and song lyrics as status updates, as well as posting song lyrics on friends’ walls were common activities. The lyrics were used conversationally and would sometimes continue throughout an entire day or more, where friends finished verses and choruses for each other. The songs often had a special meaning between those taking part in the social posting. The
friendships were strengthened through the process of re-enacting and recreating the song asynchronously. The following quotes illustrate this activity:

SARA: I have friends that constantly put up lyrics on my wall.

KIM: Every day I put up a new status for a song.

BYRON: A friend of mine from my old school … Um, there were a couple bands we used to listen to together so that’s kinda our connection. So I’ll write random lyrics on his wall and then he’ll comment finishing the lyric for me, which is kinda cool. Yeah, it’s kinda cool.

Overall, the most significant way in which informants showed support was by talking about and sharing the music they loved in person and online—through word of mouth or through a burned CD or even a thumb drive. As 20-year-old Joshua said, “When I find stuff I promote the hell out of it.” Similarly, 21-year-old Cynthia stated, “I post everything that I like; I make mixes and post them.” As such comments illustrate, informants supported artists by posting information online. As noted, sharing was a critical component of informants’ music consumption and regularly occurred in online spaces. The following quotes illustrate how the artist-audience relationship was often characterized by call and response. In other words, informants actively looked for information to further community participation.

MARTA: On Facebook I usually get bored at work, so like, once a week I will post the newest update from my favorite bands. I have like a group of 10 bands that I follow and also I’ll follow those bands religiously like seeing where they are touring and if they are
touring nearby. I will go to their shows, so that’s good to do, to do that kind of stuff.

TESSA: I use hash tags on Twitter relating to music and I feel that’s me continuing the conversation about the music or the artist and I feel like that’s me doing my favor to them, my due to them. Thanks for letting me listen to your music I’m going to keep your name going.

Active meaning construction took place continually in a complex web that made up the particular musical community. For example, informants linked to music content, posted on Facebook about, tweeted and talked to their friends about music online and offline. In other words, they shared incessantly. Messages were sent and meaning was constructed from multiple angles and often synchronously. The guilt that stemmed from illegal downloading practices, was matched by an equally high degree of positive, excited, dynamic and active participation in informants’ musical lives. For instance, 21-year-old Will talked about using Twitter to connect with his current favorite artists, alternative hip-hop group Das Racist:

WILL: I have a Twitter account that I use heavily for music and sports. I talk more about music than about sports I generally just tweet about what I’m listening to if it’s cool, this Rick Ross album’s really good or something. Sometimes I tweet at artists. I’m severely in love with Das Racist. We tweet at them all day and we just want them to know us, me and my buddy who listen to DR are trying to start our own hip hop group that DR is going to pick up and take places with them. That’s the whole long term plan.
Will also spoke of the thrill he received from his Twitter interaction with his favorite artists. As the following exchange illustrates, getting a reaction to his action was powerfully meaningful and significant because it led to even more interaction.

**WILL:** Tweeting about music’s fun and I got retweeted by Mr. Kanye West, which was a pretty big accomplishment. I felt like I beat Twitter when that happened. It was incredible and the worst part was I felt like such a dick, but I knew he was going to retweet me because I knew he was on his computer because he was tweeting a bunch and they were all coming from web…I knew he was looking right at the screen. So I knew that if I said this that he was going to see it and retweet it.

**MB:** What did you tweet?

**WILL:** When he was talking remixing Justin Bieber’s “Run Away Love” with Raekwon the Chef. Raekwon is one of my favorite rappers. I named my cat after him. So I tweeted the idea of Kanye West, Justin Bieber, and Raekwon the Chef recording together literally just made my brain explode or something like that, and then Kanye retweeted and then Raekwon retweeted. And people started following me all of the place, and all these Justin Bieber fans started following me and sure enough they made the song and it’s really awesome and it’s just like this whole whirlwind of a week. It was good times.
Many informants thrived on community participation and Twitter was often mentioned as a particularly critical point of meaning making. While informants used Twitter to directly interact with artists, they also used it to interact with music in general. For instance, as 19-year-old Tessa shared, “I was watching RENT the other day and if you check my Twitter live feed I tweeted every single lyric like, ‘No day but today!’” In this case, Twitter was just one component of community participation that played a role in informant’s everyday musical lives.

Informants responded to artists’ use of social media to form more personalized connections. For instance, the following comments illustrate the positive reception such messages received. 20-year-old Kim and 19-year-old Tessa shared their impressions of Facebook posts and explained the importance of connecting:

**KIM:** On Facebook when you like it they update it on your news feed and it’s like, “Oh this is what Paramour said” and it’s like you’re more connected with them on a personal level rather than on a TV level.

**TESSA:** Interact with their fans. A couple artists have video blogs from backstage on their tour, like the band I like The Script documents their tour, posted videos, posted photos to us, their entire website gallery was not professional photos it’s just photos they posted like hanging out and trying to make that connection with the audience and a lot of bands have Twitter pages and Facebook that we follow so, they talk back to us.
On the other hand, some informants felt frustrated with their connections or lack of connection with artists. Frustration often stemmed from what informants perceived as the artist’s poor use of social media. For instance, 21-year-old Nikki explained how inauthentic content was detrimental to her relationship with an artist. She stated, “If you get the vibe from their webpage that the artist has nothing to do with their webpage and someone else is uploading or tweeting for them. You’re like this isn’t really…If it seems more personal than that would help.” Other informants felt that artist-audience connections were at times not established despite the plethora of tools available to facilitate community connections. 22-year-old Fritz attributed his lack of engagement to a lack of direct contact and a lack of reciprocity. He explained, “This is my reasoning of my lack of activity with an artist I feel like it’s me to none. I feel like I can just never speak to them directly and I’m just talking to a blank wall if I tried and I don’t like it.” And, similarly, 23-year-old Kathleen perceived a gap in the artist-audience relationship she felt social media might not have the capacity to bridge.

I just feel like, you could email them but that’s just going to go to their producer, manager, publicist if it even gets there! And then, you know, if you Myspace them, are they going to read it? Or is there going to be a generated message that comes back to you?

The lack of connection translated into ambivalence about support and overall involvement in the community. This is particularly important in relationship to illegal downloading, as 19-year-old Patty shared:

I don’t know them, and they don’t know me, I feel like there’s no connection that … you’re not getting caught, so I guess it’s kind of bad to say but I don’t feel bad
because they don’t know who I am. If I did have a connection with them I would probably feel really bad.

*Content & “Relatability”: “They are regular people, doing their thing.”*

Informants responded to some aspects of artist’s self-promotion more positively than others. Being able to hear an artist’s music was the top priority for most informants. As 19-year-old Morgan explained, “I think it’s important for them to have snippets of what they sound like because it’s completely useless going to a site that’s like hi we are a band and you have no idea what they sound like, so that’s important.” Beyond the music itself, certain biographical information was important as it provided relevance and “relatability”. For instance, informants thought where an artist was from was very important.

**MORGAN:** Maybe where they’re from because there are times I stumble across a band and I’m like Ah, they are from Colorado! And then you just like them more because that’s where I’m from.

**MARTA:** If the artist is from Philadelphia, like Dr. Dog, I’ll buy their stuff because I feel like connected somehow… I’m not even from Philadelphia I just go to school here.

Besides biographical and location-related information, there was also great interest in what the artist felt passionate about outside the realm of music. Artist’s online spaces are prime areas to learn in depth about these interests. 22-year-old Marta spoke of multi-instrumentalist Andrew Bird’s interest in other art besides music and how meaningful that information was in developing her connection with that artist.
Andrew Bird’s website is amazing, because he makes a lot of his own videos and like he does a lot of things that are conjoined with other artists, not like musical artists, but like painters and sculptors, which I think is amazing to incorporate all aspects of art into things like that and also like, news feeds into other things that are going on in the music and art world, not just focusing on, ”Oh hey, buy this stuff and go to this show for me.” I like it when artists are involved in a bigger cause or like, they are part of something and if you go to their website you can see what the artists other passions are not just their own music.

Liking artists for more than just their music was a recurring theme in focus group conversations. Providing information so informants can learn about interests beyond the music is one way to provide “relatablity”¹ and transparency.

Offering complementary music and media content was also seen as reinforcing the overall community experience. Such offerings communicated that it was more about the overall experience between the artist and the audience and the overall community experience, than a single release. 22-year-old Marta explained how extra content enriched her experience with the rock band The Flaming Lips:

There’s a lot of artists I listen to and like, if I saw them walking down the street I wouldn’t recognize them and I feel like that’s something that if they post like external links you can like them more than just their music that you get for free. That opens the door to more things, like if they are putting out, like the Flaming Lips, they put out some video that corresponded to one of their albums. It was

¹ The term “Relatability” has somewhat recently come to mean being relatable or having a relatable quality. More information can be found in Ben Zimmer’s The Origins of ‘Relatable’ (Zimmer, Ben (2010, Aug 13). The origins of ‘relatable’. The New York Times Magazine.)
really expensive, but I bought it because I really liked the visual effects and everything. It was really neat looking.

While extra content provided depth to the community experience, informants loathed blatant promotion. Music was not seen as a product so informants did not want advertisements. Anything perceived as promotional was decidedly off-putting to informants. This was a particularly common issue for website content. For example, in the following exchange 20-year-old Bo explained that promotional information often keeps him from accessing the information he truly wants:

MB: Do you ever go to their website?

BO: No, not really because when you go to their own website they are mostly just trying to promote their own CDs instead of giving you the information you want.

Another exchange with 25-year-old Seth similarly illustrates informants’ distain for strong promotion.

MB: What do you look for on artist websites?

SETH: Tour dates, not a lot of self-promoting bull shit.

However, 20-year-old Frederick acknowledged the delicate nature of promoting music and explained, “It’s not really the promotion, but how you do it.” Similarly, the following exchange highlights the thin line musicians must walk between promotion and communicating themselves as artists. While open, transparent communication was vital, overt promotional communication had an equally powerful and detrimental impact. The following exchange between 20-year-old Frederick and 23-year-old Eric illustrates:
FREDERICK: It’s good to promote you have to put it out there, but when every time you see them it’s like buy my album, you start to think well why are you really doing this? Is it just about the sales and money or are they passionate about it? So I think start thinking about their motives, because if you have a good fan base and you are pretty popular they are going to support you regardless. When they promote too, too much it makes me question their motives.

ERIC: I think I feel the same way; too much blatant promotion is a turnoff because right now when you think about it... is the artists are they turning their passion for music into a business? I mean they are, but I for one...when you see them on TMZ “Buy my album buy my album”…

20-year-old Kim similarly explained that when promotion overshadowed the music it took away from the musical experience:

I actually just thought, with these artists putting it out there and updating on their songs and like, putting their songs up there, they are making it seem like they care more about the music and that people hear their music rather than making a lot of money off of it so if they were like, hey we just released a CD, go here to purchase it, it’s like oh now you’re just doing it for the money, but if they are like, here go listen to this, then you’re like, ok they’re really caring that you hear the music.

During the focus group interview a number of artists were offered as examples of laudable online presence. One example was the Chicago-based rock band Deerhunter.
The following exchange illustrates how Deerhunter’s online presence successfully communicated their information, without forcing anything on their audience. Part of Deerhunter’s success was attributed to the fact that they “contribute a little more,” according to 26-year-old Craig. In other words, they engaged their community in the proper and more importantly productive way.

CRAIG: I’m just thinking of Deer Hunter because I just saw them last night but they have a blog that’s really interesting where they show a lot of stuff … it wasn’t about music, it wasn’t about where their show was, it was just a bunch of interesting stuff just like, thoughts basically.

MB: What kind of thoughts were they?

CRAIG: Just they would put up a playlist of music that wasn’t their own, just stuff that they liked. Basically a mix tape or just like a story about what happened last night, you know what I mean? Just personal stuff that makes you feel a little bit more connected to them and like, nowhere on that page would you see anything saying please buy our CD, please come to our show. So I guess it makes it feel a little more personal.

Similarly, 21-year-old Will explained how Brooklyn hip-hop group Das Racist personalized their community interactions using YouTube.com.

DR [Das Racist] to keep my example going, they put up the best things, they just put up this 7 minute thanksgiving video of them making a 5$ thanksgiving dinner with like, slim jims and crackers and stuff and it’s great because they are super
disgusting and weird looking and they’re just like joking around so you are listening to DR and watching them and it’s like you are hanging out with them. It’s the coolest. I never really liked videos or rigid interview that websites would put up, but now that there’s this new animal of artists doing their own thing without really caring about it. It’s really cool.

In this way, the relationship was framed in terms of authentic connections, as opposed to promotion that aimed to get something out of community members. As 20-year-old Kim noted in reference to the sharing of everyday events, “She links pictures or will be like, look at this new product I’m in or this picture of where I was, or she’ll post a picture of her nephew and be like, oh look at how cute he is… like, oh, they are regular people, doing their thing.” This open approach humanized musicians and strengthened the connection with members of their community. This, in turn, made informants that much more interested in the music musicians were playing.

Twitter was an important tool for making such connections. As 22-year-old Hillary explained, “Have a Twitter and have more ways of contacting their fans so, like the casual listener can get to know who they are, and their real fans will be able to develop more of a relationship with them.” Similarly, 25-year-old Stuart stated, “If you have a favorite artist sometimes you probably want to know a lot of things about them, and through Twitter, you can know them through Twitter and you can see, ‘Oh, I see you’re going through this, you’re going through that, and ok, well that’s pretty cool, well ok, you’re in town…cool.’” Twitter was heralded for its ability to accessibly humanize artists and provide authentic interaction. The following comment by 21-year-old Will illustrates the success of Das Racist’s use of Twitter to connect with their community.
I really like what Twitter is doing for the ability for the musician to not come off as the PR version of the musician all the time. It’s great it’s totally unprecedented. You can see how they are chilling out and what they are doing on tour and between dates. Like check out this funny slice of pizza we bought that looks like so and so. You know you take a picture. It’s dumb but when I’m listening to music I don’t wanna be in this PR mindset. I want to feel like I’m hanging out with the people I’m listening to, you know? So yeah, it’s definitely cool following people on Twitter who just talk about their thing.

While social media provided an unprecedented avenue for meaning-making between artist and audience, the most basic way in which musicians made connections with their community was through their music and accompanying lyrics. Lyrics shared what issues were important to musicians, as well as what topics were in the forefront of their minds. Most significantly they provided informants with something to respond to. As 20-year-old Frederick explained, lyrics are crucial in terms of an artist’s “relatability”:

Even though you might not know the artist personally you can relate through the music. The words in their music… As a fan I might not be at every concert and I might not buy every [piece of] merchandise, but the fans relate to the artists on a mental level, to the words in the song. The artist is talking about something and they go, I’ve been through that or I might be going through that. Even if they can’t buy everything, if you relate to them you are going to support them, even if it’s defending them when arguing, like oh their song is good! And I like it because it is so! That’s how it is with artists, so it’s just like whoever you really connect to or relate to on a mental basis.
For informants, relating to the artist on a human level, person-to-person, was a highly desirable characteristic of the relationship. As 20-year-old Kim explained, “It’s the relatability I guess, because if they’re around your city or eating food that you eat or liking the same things that you like. It’s like. Ahh, they are like me.” As the comments above convey, “relatability” was critical to building a strong relationship as it promoted positive word of mouth and support. While overt promotion was detrimental to musical communities, “relatability” made them stronger. For instance, 21-year-old Bobby spoke of LA hip-hop collective Odd Future’s attitude towards their community and how that impacted his impression of them as artists:

The one show I went to, the band that’s blowing up now, Odd Future, they just rolled because of their fans. They let us all, half of us were on stage the entire show; they talked to us after the show, kind of like a friend basis. I talked to them a couple days afterwards, and if you interact with your fans I feel like you get a bigger, more respect, like if I’ve seen someone that I like in the band that I liked I said how ya doing, and they just walked by, I’d flip ‘em off and not really care, but if they gave you the time to talk to you, you feel like their friend, not like their friend but a fan base…Yeah, because they are just human beings, not gods. So I like that.

This quote illustrates the importance of the back and forth, conversational nature of the community. For informants, following up by way of social media was critical in continuing the conversation. For instance, 21-year-old Roxy recounted a concert experience, which, due to the band’s continuing of the conversation, became much more of a powerful and positive community experience.
The last show I saw at Johnny Brenda’s. I really like it there because after the band is done playing they just go and hang out with everybody and that’s like, kind of a really special opportunity, and so I looked on this one band’s website after that show and they were like, “Yeah it was really great to meet all the people from Philly at the show! Everyone was really dancing and showing their spirit”, I mean it’s just fun to read that, you get to give your review of the show and you get to read their review of the show. I think that’s good.

Roxy’s experience, just as Bobby’s, illustrates the importance of the give and take between artist and audience. Even better known celebrity artists were held in high esteem for their ability to relate to their audience in a way that acknowledged their humanity. For instance, 20-year-old Kim shared her impression of popular country singer/songwriter Taylor Swift:

I feel like when certain artists put out CDs, specially people who write their own music, they put out their life experiences hoping people relate and the most prevalent in my mind is Taylor Swift, because she writes her own music and it is the most relatable to a lot of different people and that’s why she’s so big and even being to two of her concerts she just seems so humbled by everything. Like a couple times at her concerts, she like stood there taking it all in and almost crying like she couldn’t believe it was real, like it was not real. Like, you are all screaming for me, and she thanks everyone and you can just tell that she wants to relate to you and makes it a point to relate to you.
For the majority of informants, social media played a large role in the artist-audience connection. It is with that in mind that I now turn to the specific impact of digital technology.

Technology’s Impact

“It just facilitates it completely.”

When talking specifically about technology’s impact on music consumption, a general theme in the interviews was technology’s ability to make things happen. Technology was at the center of informants’ musical lives because it helped them obtain music and commence listening. As 19-year-old Morgan explained, “It’s how we get everything. That’s how we get music. None of us really buy CDs and other than digital forms of media, that’s all the only way we are going to get music.” As this quote illustrates, digital technology was the primary means to obtain the music that constituted informants’ collection. Indeed, it is “too easy,” as 21-year-old Byron stated. He further described how music spreads quickly with minimal effort:

Yeah it’s too easy. I was talking to my friend on iChat, like 2 weeks ago, and he was like, “Do you have the new whatever song” and I was like, “Yeah” and he said, “Can I have it?” Right click on his name, transfer file, click on the song, within 8 seconds he was listening to it on his computer.

Additionally, technology allowed informants to easily transport music collections anywhere and everywhere. As 20-year-old Reggie added, “It’s important because it makes everything readily available. I can go on my phone and listen to whatever song, whenever I want.” The fact that technology allowed informants to bring music with them
was an important characteristic of the technology, because it permitted them to more fully incorporate music into their everyday life. The following conversational excerpt illustrates how technology, especially the iPod, allowed music to go “beyond the bedroom”.

MAGGIE: I think technology has enhanced my music listening. I think it has only helped me and the ability to get it and have it and store it and move with it and do all the things that I can do with it. It has only made my life better. If I was struggling to buy it or struggling to somehow put it on something to walk with, I don’t have to do that it’s all at my fingertips. I have my iPod. I know how to use it; I know how to download. So I think technology and the digital revolution has made it better for me. I can hear one song and then get every song that person has ever done. So, I think it’s just made it better.

MB: More fully integrated music into your life?

MAGGIE: Yeah, I mean when I was in 6th grade I was pretty much some punked out rocker girl, but I only listened to it in my bedroom when I cleaned my room. I didn’t have an iPod, obviously. It wasn’t a big part of the rest of my life, it was just what I did on my own, but now music can be …

MB: Beyond the bedroom?

MAGGIE: Exactly. Now music can narrate my sister’s wedding and can be everything I can make it into. So, that’s cool.
Or, as 21-year-old Cynthia succinctly summarized, “It just facilitates it completely.”

A number of issues nevertheless arose to complicate the consumption process. At the heart of many of these issues was the higher degree of access technology affords. Digital technology provided practically unlimited access to almost any recorded music informants’ desired. 19-year-old Tessa explained the importance of diverse media content:

Now there’re more options for me because I can find what I can’t find on the radio or what I can’t find, what Best Buy won’t sell to me. I can find my own community, my own type of music. It’s more individualized and connected to me as opposed to, like I said, coming through the radio speaker, with the cable TVs, and one guy dishing out everything.

Tessa’s quote illustrates the personal crafting that went into informants’ musical lives. The impetus was on the audience, rather than the traditional producer, to seek music and incorporate it into their everyday life. Similarly, 22-year-old Marta spoke of technology’s ability to equalize, which translates into more choices for the music consumer:

A lot of celebrities like Miley Cyrus she was on the Disney channel so automatically she gets put in that mass mold of people that you are almost guaranteed her songs are going to be on the radio. If you have the resources it doesn’t matter if you are actually talented. There’s so many talented artists that a lot of people won’t hear about until they search for them on the internet because they don’t have access. So, I feel like that sort of unfairness, we realize that as consumers, as people who like music, so that makes us go out and search and
use technology to find those artists who are actually talented and don’t just have the popular parents or access to big labels.

While digital technology facilitated informants’ musical lives in many ways, it also presented them with a number of salient challenges to negotiate. The following sections explore those challenges.

**Technical Challenges: Access**

There was a utopian slant evident in the way informants talked about the abundance of music from which they could choose. However, such offerings presented new challenges as informants negotiated their consumption. Many times, dealing with the logistics of the technology was an issue, as well as figuring out how to process such vast music collections. Concerning the former, issues such as where to obtain files, how to use a website, whether or not the site was safe to use or even up and running, and the quality of the files were all obstacles informants had to confront. For instance, the popular website Limewire caused problems for many when it went down. As 19-year-old Morgan noted:

> You don’t realize how big a role things have in how you listen to music, because like, the fall of Limewire, I know so many people who were devastated by that and completely paralyzed. Like, how do I get music without Limewire? One website completely froze how they go their music.

Limewire was not the only website that impacted informants’ music collections. Another popular site for procuring music was YouTube. Informants noted that YouTube had its own issues revolving around finding and obtaining music. While some songs were
deemed easy to find, others proved more difficult. Furthermore, informants found it tiring to weed through the different versions of songs posted as each varied in quality. The following exchange between 19-year-old Tessa and 22-year-old Fritz touched on a number of the issues mentioned above:

TESSA: Yeah, YouTube it’s rare you can’t find something I mean you can ask me for a song from 1901 and I can find it. Haha!

FRITZ: I have noticed lately, though, that with the new albums that come out they are getting really good with shutting them off right when they do. Like, the Jay-Z album came out yesterday, so none of the links are working on YouTube. I had to go download it illegally. Haha!

As the exchange illustrates, informants negotiated music’s accessibility by working with the available tools appropriate for the type on content they desired. In this case, since Fritz wanted a more recent release he torrented it instead of ripping it from YouTube.

Technical Challenges: Content

Once informants built a large collection of music, they then negotiated their relationship with the collection. This was often a challenge due to the vast content. The focus group interviews were marked with sentiments similar to 21-year-old Byron’s when he stated that “It’s almost overwhelming how much music one can obtain and listen to.” Informants characterized the process of consumption as extremely overwhelming at times. 25-year-old Seth similarly explained, “I feel like there’s so much of it now and you can get your hands on it so easily that you have to file through so many artists. It’s an
overload of music these days. It’s hard for one band to really stand out from the rest.” As a result, there was a large body of music that informants did not listen to. For instance, 27-year-old Joseph noted that he didn’t listen to much of the music in his possession:

I think a lot that happens is that you have a band you like, and you download the CD, and you put it on your iPod, but you never actually get a chance to listen to it and you’re just flipping through and it’s not that song you wanted to hear. So it’s there, but you never really listen to it. It happens all the time.

At times, the amount of music available drove informants to other devices, where content posed less of a challenge to negotiate. 19-year-old Morgan, for example, explained how she is driven to devices that offer fewer choices.

Whenever I listen to my Zoon for instance, sometimes I just get real pissed at it because there’s so much music on it that I have to skip so much so I’ll say, screw this and grab my boyfriend’s computer because he doesn’t have as much music to listen to.

Part of the challenge with musical consumption is that the activity has become increasingly fragmented. Listening to music is not often the main focus of informants’ attention. As a result, the importance of the cultural product was downplayed, as 26-year-old Craig explained:

I liked a little bit ago before iPods were so prevalent when listening to music was more special maybe. Or more something you did in the car or focused your time on, now it’s something you can do whenever you want to, too.

Similarly, 21-year-old Jordan touched on the downplaying of musical content and how that impacted where he directs his attention and time. As he explained, “I feel like songs
are kind of, not disposable, but there’re not a big production so to speak, so it’s just easy to forget about them and move onto the next ones, especially new music.” Indeed, the disposable nature technology imposes on the cultural product was apparent to informants. 25-year-old Seth also shared how the amount of content available impacts his listening habits: “You have to be disciplined to actually analytically listen to an album and make it special for you because there’s just so many that you are trying to listen to at once... you just end up kind of skimming over it.”

**Technical Challenge: Choice**

How informants’ negotiated their relationship with their music collections—particularly what they listened to and how they chose from their collections—was a recurring theme in interviews. While some informants put notable effort into structuring their personal and social listening, others carelessly clicked the next button. For instance, 25-year-old George described his carefully negotiated approach to iPod use:

I got two different iPods, my social, party people iPod, random songs whatever, and then I got my personal iPhone which is always anything I want to listen to. But then I have my other iPod and it’s like, ok there’s going to be 50 random people here and this probably won’t annoy anybody. You know what I mean?

When the conversation turned to choosing what to listen to, however, informants frequently reported resorting to mindless, mechanical clicking through their collections song by song. Clicking “next” seemed like a conditioned response for many informants, as there was not much thought given to it—it was reactionary. For instance, the following
quotes show the blasé attitude that sometimes accompanied music choice. As 21-year-old Kimia shared:

I just feel like I can keep clicking next so I don’t feel overwhelmed by that, because if I don’t like it, fine, it goes away so it doesn’t overwhelm me that there’s too much. It’s a plus that there’s too much because I always have choices.

The following exchange between 19-year-old Patty, 19-year-old Pam, and 21-year-old Kimia conveys a similar sentiment:

PATTY: I don’t think I think about it as much because there are so many options, it’s not like I only have five things to look at. I have so many options in music that sometimes I just click and I don’t really think about it.

PAM: Sometimes I just put on shuffle and whenever something comes on I don’t want to listen to, I’ll just click next.

MB: Easy come easy go?

EVERYONE: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

While trying to make sense of their music collections and choose the appropriate track for the moment, many informants turned to established preferences in order to make choices. 23-year-old Shirley explained her reasoning:

It’s true, it’s just I know what I want and if I download something and I happen to not like it, just delete it. If I meet somebody and I don’t really like them, I just don’t talk to them and I’m not going to sit there. I know I don’t like country music. I’m not going to go and download country music. It’s just about knowing what you want.
The established preferences were not merely musical, but compared to preferences in their everyday life, such as taste in company. 24-year-old Jim explained how time comes into play when making musical choices:

I think it depends on the person. She’s listed artists that she spends her time with and so has he and so have I and I think it’s all about what you want to devote your time to and who you want to devote your time too I think it’s comparable to who your friends are or who you spend time with you know what I mean, you are allowing that concept, person, into your life and there’s only so much time in the day.

Informants’ ability to obtain large amounts of music often resulted in their collecting content they may never listen to. 22-year-old Marta noted, for instance, that she often felt an intense desire to possess every song by a particular artist in order to have a complete collection.

I’m kinda OCD about that kinda stuff. If I like an artist and I’m listening to one song I have to have the entire album, or all of their albums so… that’s funny because some things I don’t even like but I’ll download the whole albums just to have them.

This type of behavior served to further reinforce the gap between artist and audience by fragmenting the relationship in two ways. First, compared to earlier times in their lives, informants did not spend the same amount of time and attention on a specific piece of music. Second, the sheer number of artists informants could potentially listen to resulted in the further fragmentation of their attention. Informants simply did not have the ability to control their attention and use it in a manner that would allow them to thoroughly
experience their current music collections in their entirety. The following quote by 22-year-old Hillary highlights the disconnect:

I think that’s true, because I used to buy CDs and you listen to the whole CD and you find the ones that aren’t playing on the radio and those were obviously your favorite and as soon they were playing on the radio you’re like, “Oh I knew about it before”, but now I have so many different songs from so many different artists that I’m not really loyal to a lot. I mean there’s a few I really like and I’ll watch a documentary on them, but I don’t know… I don’t really feel connected.

Along with the fragmented nature of consumption, informants noted an accompanying pressure to consume as much music as possible. As 26-year-old Craig shared, his consumption sometimes felt like a race that no one could win:

There’s so much music everywhere and it’s like a race to be cool, up to date. So sometimes I’ll go through and download 6 albums in a day and then I feel like I have to listen to them all at once so when my friends is like, “Oh did you hear the new whatever?”, I can be like, “Yeah” even though I didn’t really listen, listen to it... It’s just like, to be up to date

This facile consumption belittled the potential impact of each musical piece. As a result, some informants felt they were much more selective in choosing the music they incorporate into their musical lives. 18-year-old Sara noted that regardless of whether or not they realize it, weeding through large amounts of content makes the audience much more selective. As she further explained:

I think it makes you more selective. I think people that think, “Oh we can get whatever we want now.” Everybody’s not taking the time. Even if you don’t buy
your own music I think you are being very selective. There’s a need to choose because you can have everything and it makes if difficult because you can download all this stuff and realize you don’t really like it or want to listen to it, but then it comes up and you have to click next. So I think it is more selective and I think it depends on what you like.

The vast amount of music made available to them suggested to informants that technology made it easier for artists to get music to the public and, consequently, easier for smaller bands to support themselves. In reference to technology’s impact on artists, 21-year-old Will explained, “I think that it’s unfair to say that the entire music industry is suffering because of this; I think specific genres are mobilizing a lot better than other ones.” Similarly, 26-year-old Craig described how this specifically impacted an artist’s ability to tour, which they could parlay into financial support:

I think it’s actually going to be easier or has become easier for smaller bands, to make a living maybe not the greatest living, but to be able to make some money, or be able to tour or buy new instruments or something you know, because with blogs and things like that it’s so much easier to get people to go to your shows.

Taste-making websites were often specifically acknowledged for the important role they played in popularizing artists and the influence they can have on artist’s ability to tour. As 25-year-old Seth stated, “If Pitchfork gives a band a good review it will blow up and people will download their stuff like crazy and go to their shows and they’ll still maintain a decent revenue and I think people will still be playing shows no matter what.”

However, informants also acknowledged the pressures that accompany releasing music to an increasingly fragmented audience. The following quote illustrates the
perceived lack of cohesion in the music industry, as there is not one established release strategy for career success. As 21-year-old Cynthia noted, in reference to electronic musician Pretty Lights:

I feel like right now there’s a trend where people don’t want to feel like they are the mainstream and I feel like with that it is going to make it harder for artists because people are searching for more and more subsets of music, and I feel like some artists feel pressured to release stuff for free, like Radiohead. There’s this artist Pretty Lights. He’s released seven full albums for free on his website and, I don’t know, I feel they are kind of struggling to figure out what to do.

Success was a particularly salient issue in focus group conversations. Celebrity status musicians seemed a thing of the past for many informants. As 22-year-old Marta put it, “I don’t think you can say anymore like this person has changed the face of music as we know it.” The fragmented nature of available content reinforced this characterization:

There’s so many options and everybody can pick these artists that maybe when Michael Jackson was around you would have never heard of because he dominated, but now everybody has a chance and it really is going to be based on how good your music is and who it appeals to (Jen, 20).

Relatedly, technology impacted the way informants characterized what it meant to be a musician changed over time. As 21-year-old Roxy explained, commercial—as opposed to popular—music can support musicians just as commercial art supports artists.

You think about people who are visual artists, the idea of a starving artist, and well you can still create your own work, but you can also do graphic design and stuff on the side or that as your main job and if you are a musical artist you can do
commercial work and it’s not like, your name on a toothpaste commercial singing a song, but somebody’s gotta make that music, music like that and you know people make music for other forms of media like film and TV, there are jobs in that, so you could do that to support your art.

Overall, technology impacted the way informants’ integrated music into their everyday lives. It impacted their personal and social, as well as online and offline action. The previous comments point to the need for transparency in musical communities as this helps them better understand artists, which leads to them being more willing to support artists.

As previously demonstrated through Hersh’s case, transparency is particularly helpful for overcoming the challenges technology brings to the artist/audience relationship. Similarly, my informants demonstrated a desire for interactions displayed within Hersh’s community. For example, Hersh’s humanizing tweets and subsequent “relatability”. Informants responded to innovative content and conversational relationships as they led to positive, memorable community experiences. For the communities to flourish, participants must be aware of the financial support structure driving the art that they value, as well as have support to negotiate their musical lives. Overall, reciprocity is at the heart of the successful artist-audience relationship. The following chapter reflects further on the nature of the artist-audience relationship by reviewing the primary findings and theoretically situating the data.
CHAPTER 9
CONCLUDING REMARKS: ARTISTS AND ACCOMPLICES

Digital communication technology has greatly impacted both music industry and culture (Knopper, 2009; Kot, 2009; Wikstrom, 2009). Much has been written about the financially deleterious impact of digital technology on the music industry, specifically how the proliferation of freely downloadable music contributes to notable profit loss (Burkart & McCourt, 2006; Fairchild, 2008). On the other hand, there is an unprecedented degree of shared culture, as the public has the ability to download, burn, create, remix, redistribute and reinvent sound with increasing ease (Knopper, 2009; Kot, 2009, Sinnreich, 2010). As Wikstrom (2009) explains, currently there are “…all kinds of platforms facilitating fans’ creative expression” (178). Indeed, digital technology has significantly influenced producers and consumers of musical media, leading to major structural reconsiderations for artists and new challenges to nurturing a sustainable music culture. While digital technology enables listeners to receive musicians’ work for free, it also has the potential to build powerful communities able to support artists and provide a foundation for their continuing cultural contributions. Digital technology’s impact on the artist-audience relationship has been explored in the prior chapters. The following pages review the primary findings, address the proposed research questions, and provide strategies for contemporary musical artists. These three areas will be addressed by specifically examining how artists and audiences negotiate the online environment, how they conceptualize their relationship with each other, the role digital technology plays, as well as the issues technology introduces to the artist-audience relationship.
Music Culture and Technology: A Review of Primary Findings

My investigation into how artists negotiate their online environment was closely tied to how they conceptualize their relationship with their audience. To begin, the CASH Music approach embodies flexibility. They do so with their open source tools that offer opportunities to artists and audience to interactively connect. CASH Music’s tools provide the foundation for Kristin Hersh’s community. Hersh’s approach is carefully fashioned with the unique artist and audience in mind. Careful consideration is given to what content is appropriate for what platform, as well as what platform her audience is most responsive to. With her direct to audience model, she provides valuable content and receives valuable participation in return.

The digital, social tools are used to share content “situationally”. However in general, Hersh freely offers a large amount of content to her audience. Furthermore, she is very open and transparent about the processes connected with each release. Information related to Hersh’s work comes from multiple sources, including Twitter, Facebook, the Forum, and her website, which leads to explicit documentation of the community process. Through her online presence Hersh enthusiastically invites active participation in the community. In essence, Hersh’s approach to online community is marked by a merger of commercial and altruistic motivations. Analogous to Baym’s (2011) Swedish case study, Hersh’s case demonstrates that artists engaging with their audiences as equals can build mutually beneficial communities.

While Hersh communicates logistical information related to releases, she more importantly communicates how she experiences the process. In other words, Hersh shares her musical life as her audience shares theirs. Twitter plays an especially large role for
Hersh and is key in humanizing the process. Particularly, there is a distinct blurring of the personal and the professional in Hersh’s Twitter usage. Her humanizing approach generates further participation because personalized connections are meaningful to the community. Both analysis of her online forum and my interviews with media consumers suggest this is an effective strategy. Whenever my informants reported a lack of engagement, there was also a distinct lack of reciprocity. My informants and forum participants desire content that helps them connect with artists. They do not think of music as a product, and as such were turned off by blatant promotion. In the process of humanizing the artist, the audience gets excited about the music and about creating shared meaning within the community. With deep understanding of both artist and audience Hersh has built a sustainable community. Her approach is successful because, as my data demonstrates, she provides information and content media consumers find fulfilling.

The community’s sustainability largely stems from the fact that Hersh’s offerings are made to be built upon. At the same time, Hersh continually supports that “building” process through social media. The manner in which her offerings are shared makes it almost impossible to merely listen to the music. While there is a spectrum of involvement, with some more invested than others, the very process engenders even greater activity. Those very active community members make it possible for those less active to enjoy the breadth of Hersh’s musical offerings.

Online activity plays a major role in Hersh’s approach. It is a key constitutive element of contemporary music communities, as well as music culture (Baym, 2007). Hersh’s online forum is where community participation is fostered in a number of ways.
On the one hand participation is driven through Hersh’s and her team’s actions, but it is also indirectly supported by giving the community the space to experience their musical lives. Forum participants directly interact with Hersh’s co-manager Billy O’Connell, as well as with each other in a complex web of connectivity. Notably, all participants in the community are addressed as being on the same level. For instance, the consumer often takes roles traditionally ascribed to the producer, such as catching information errors in content, or answering questions in O’Connell’s absence. The community comes together to experience collective knowledge-building and hence collective meaning-making (Jenkins 2006).

This highly personalized type of forum could exist without Hersh, but it would not be the same. If Hersh and O’Connell were not involved the dynamic would be completely different. Their actions have a true impact in that the audience feels validated, involved, and that their participation actually matters. Their approach also changes the nature of the relationship among the various forum participants. Hersh has learned this approach and acknowledges participation in her community over time, and that is one aspect that drives her success. They managed to avoid spreading resources thin and blindly using software. Instead, they are strategic and deliberate; thoughtful in their community contributions. Their actions are the opposite of blind use that adds to media content clutter which ends up making it more difficult to make meaningful connections with your community.

The community is specifically nurtured in a number of ways that each prioritizes the community’s sustainability. Its growth, technical support, financial support, and socio-emotional support are all areas given careful attention. Each area is approached in
an open, flexible, and welcoming manner. As informants and forum participants discussions often illustrated, experiencing their musical lives together was incredibly important. It is crucial to experience the music together. Hence, the community is greatly marked by sharing. The online forum gives the community space to celebrate their musical lives and that helps makes it stronger. Participant’s welcomed diverse content (i.e. songs, videos, art, etc.) and multiple versions of content. The interplay between physical and digital content is particularly significant. Everything is a work in progress and can be built on and hence, should not be thought of linearly. That flexibility the content embodies, particularly in terms of the combination of physical and digital, is valuable. Both digital and physical artifacts increase in importance when they are a part of something larger, as seen with the *Crooked* release. The close interplay between physical and digital aspects of artist and audience is salient throughout the study. Hersh’s approach is analogous to Grammy Award winning artist Imogen Heap. Wikstrom (2009) explains that Heap’s strategy is an “immersive multi-platform Imogen Heap experience. It is the combination of all the different pieces that enable her to build such a relationship with her fans and stimulate fans’ demand for more twitters, more video-blogs, more concert tickets, and more music” (177).

The investigation into media consumers negotiation of the online environment was also highly linked to their conceptualization of their relationship with artists, as well as the role technology played in their everyday life. Music is a completely pervasive experience in contemporary society. Listening is characterized by sharing and sociality and is greatly dependent on the technology as it plays a large role in structuring the experience. As Adorno (1976) explains music provides structure as a building block of
social life. At the same time, technology enables music to be more fully integrated in almost every aspect of daily life. Indeed, music is an integral part of the everyday experience. Music structures both personal and social experiences through the technology used to access it. It both mirrored and complemented the structure of the audience’s day. Music is often shared, which leads to shared experiences. Those experiences are valuable, which highlights the intrinsic link between sharing and value. Indeed, value comes from sharing. The audience wants to get people excited about the music they love and technology helps them do that in a very ubiquitous way. While not completely disconnected from what music consumption used to be, the extent of its pervasiveness is new.

However, it is important to note that the informants had very different relationships with different media technologies. Just as Bakardjeva’s (2005) demonstrated, informants and forum participants negotiate technologies “to make them fit into meaningful activities” (p. 24). For instance, terrestrial radio, compact discs, and vinyl records were relatively low in importance. CDs were thought of nostalgically, and overall thought of as a device to transfer music files. Records were seen as collectibles; novelty items to show off, rather than listen to. Comparatively, iPods and personal computers played a much larger role in music consumption. iPods were considered crucial and informants carried them at all times. iPods gave them a sense of control over their environment because iPods privileged their choices. As they are highly transportable, iPods allowed informants to carry their choices with them. However, iPods also introduced new challenges. There were personal issues, such as the desire to fill the space given, yet not being able to process all the options. This, at times, drove informants
to listen to the same content repeatedly. There were also social issues such as negotiating use in social settings. In response many informants avoided the shuffle option, filled their iPods specifically for situations, or kept both “social” and “personal” iPods. Listening on personal computers also played an important role in the informant’s musical lives. Whenever they were on the computer for work or fun, which was a large part of their day, they were usually listening to music. They listened to both their own collections, or streamed music from a website if they did not want to choose the music. A website’s value was strongly tied to the caliber of music suggestions and played a large role in learning about new music.

Informants learned about new music from friends and family, as well as the media, and as mentioned websites and streaming services. Technology was consistently present throughout the process as it is how the information spread. Informants obtained the overwhelming majority of their music illegally from torrents. Informants felt that access to such a vast amount of music expanded their knowledge, but also diverted their attention. They rarely paid for music that managed to get their attention. However, while not willing to pay for music, informants did express a powerful willingness to participate in musical communities. It was very much an issue of give and take (i.e.” music does something for me and I do something for music.”) As such, artists must speak to their audiences appropriately and “situationally” to give and get value. This is particularly important when addressing the topic of relationship characterization. Informants often felt that artists had more than enough money coming in from other sources, such as licensing and touring, and used that to rationalize not paying for music. The only time music was purchased was when it absolutely could not be found elsewhere, the artist was
a friend, or they truly loved the artist. In fact, the artist must be their “friend” if media
consumers are going to provide financial compensation. Certainly, establishing a
meaningful relationship through nurturing and reciprocity is crucial for a sustainable
artist-audience relationship.

Informants perceived concerts as the clearest option to provide artist’s financial
support. Frequently, concert experiences serviced to strengthen the relationship between
artist and audience. However, high ticket price points often soured the potentially
valuable experience. This is a critical aspect to keep in mind as recognizing what is
valuable for audience and artist is important as we move forward. Audience activity is
valuable, and that value is found in both their online and offline musical lives. Informants
demonstrated this by incorporating music fully into their digital and physical worlds.
There was a very blurry boundary between online and offline activity. Musical lives flow,
fairly freely, between online and offline spaces. For instance, an informant enjoys a song
with a friend, it takes on meaning, and they revisit the meaning online through Facebook,
Twitter, etc. They experience singing along to their favorite song communally and online.
Informants thrived on such community participation because it was fun and enjoyable.

My investigation into the role technology plays and the issues it introduces was
marked by technology’s pervasive quality. Technology facilitates music’s ubiquitous
integration into everyday life. Integrating music into my informants’ lives was in fact so
effortless they were often unaware of it. Obtaining and listening to music was second
nature, just like breathing. At the same time, technology did pose a number of challenges.
Informants had to understand and use many technological platforms to be able to access
music. Once they managed to access the music, having to process the large amount of
music they acquired was a challenge that sometimes led them to having a weak, facile connection to the content. Their attention was in essence pulled in so many directions that concentration was often too difficult. Many informants had a passing familiarity with many artists, but not a strong connection. It often came down to the paradox of choice. As music availability increased, mood came to play an even more critical role in music selection. Musical choices were driven by mood, with no noticeable difference in gender and race related to consumption habits. Overall, with the multitude of options, content became disposable. As time is limited, informants felt they just did not have enough. A deciding factor was as 24-year-old Jim put it “I think it’s comparable to who your friends are or who you spend time with.” However, because there are more choices, both artist and audience have the opportunity to find who fits with them, just as Kristin has found her fit.

Experiencing Everyday Life Together: Analysis and Recommendations

As ICT&S theory posits, people design and use technologies while they simultaneously enable and constrain human action, which in turn transforms society (Fuchs, 2008). The actors and technological structures mutually influence one another. The technology enables informants and participants to continually acquire music. They can collect weeks or even months’ worth of media content, while simultaneously their behavior brings new challenges related to access, content, and choice. Fuchs (2008) explains “this is a double process of agency and conditioning. Agency produces and reproduces social structures that enable and constrain human thinking, behavior, and social actions” (p. 336). Technology impacts the way media consumers think about
musicians, their behavior towards the music, and their social activity as music becomes more fully integrated into their everyday lives. Bourdieu (1977) similarly addresses the relationship between structures and human action and states “habitus provides conditioned and conditional freedom … it is a condition for freedom but it also conditions and limits full freedom of action” (p.95). In this case, habitus illustrates how technology enables and constrains artist and audience action and, as they broaden the capacity of their musical lives, they concurrently negotiate the new challenges technology introduces.

ICT&S theory involves a dynamic tension between cooperation and competition (Fuchs, 2009). Fuch’s (2009) explains that “cooperation is seen as the very essence of society… But such a society isn’t reached automatically because there is an antagonism between cooperation and competition immanent in capitalism” (7). However he also states, “the information society promises a new transcendental space – a cooperative society…” (Fuchs, 2009, 7). While confronting traditional capitalistic, competitive forces, Hersh’s community illustrates the cooperative nature Fuch’s ascribes to ICTs. He explains, “Human beings are social beings; they enter social relationships, which are mutually dependent actions that make sense for the acting subjects” (Fuchs, 2009, 43). Hersh’s musical community embraces cooperative action instead of competition. As opposed to capitalism and its accompanying exploitation of labor and privilege of monetary accumulation, Hersh’s community focuses on actions that foster mutually beneficial sustainability; everyone is working, as well as benefiting in a shared, networked system. Community activity is itself cooperative. Transparency plays a large role in realizing community cooperation and theorizing the artist-audience relationship.
As Hersh demonstrates, transparency is critical to the cooperative process in that it sets the tone for sharing, as well as provides crucial avenues for meaning making.

As illustrated in previous chapters, technology has led to a change in music industry and culture, and as Bauman (2003, 2007) argues, that contemporary consumption is characterized by a breakdown of normative social guidelines. This is distinguished by the blurring of consumption, production, and distribution practices that now mark contemporary music culture. The audience is changed as they become “promoters of the commodities and the commodities they promote” (Bauman, 2003, p. 9). Yet the term commodity itself is not entirely appropriate as a commodity is often defined as an item or good to be sold. In this case, the audience is not a commodity, but a community. The community is made up of individuals with musical lives that pertain to music creation, recording, performance, dissemination, obtaining, and listening as well as attending events. As Shuker (2008) argues, when examining music consumers we must acknowledge that they occupy a “critical social space” where “music acquires cultural meaning and significance from cultural interpretations and understandings, which are embedded in musical texts” (p. 189). Music acquires cultural meanings and significance from cultural interpretations, which are then embedded in the music itself. Meaning is embedded in the text, but also simultaneously made by the social experience of the song or album which is mediated by a technology. Indeed, technology also occupies a critical social space.

Overall, as O’Hara and Brown (2006) argue “new social phenomena around music” (p.4) has emerged and new related practices have changed the way people interact with music. This study demonstrates that digital technology impacts the relationship
between consumers and music by making it closer and more multidimensional. This is intensified by the fact that everyone is participating; the audience and artist actively engage each other. The omnipresence of music culture combined with the omnipresence of technology is particularly salient. Media consumers are simultaneously engaged with music through technology, and technology through music and this happens on many different levels. As this study demonstrates, the major levels include the interplay between the community and the person, the social and the personal, and community participation and personal identity construction. Taken as a whole, artist and audience’s musical lives are fragmented as they occur in multiple online and offline places, at multiple times, and are continuous. Informants and forum participant’s practices reflect Dunn’s (2008) characterizations as they encompass “a vast range of human practices and mental and feeling states all of which involve complex relations and attachments to an infinite variety of objects and experiences” (p. 1). They download, stream, listen, share, burn, and build upon content while engaging in multiple personal and social practices. And, in the process, media consumers experience rich meaning making attached to particular life events, people, places, and times.

As music becomes more portable it also becomes a larger part of informant’s identity and plays a bigger role in social capital. Identity and consumption are more to the forefront, more visible in everyday life, yet play lesser role in identity construction. The interplay between private identity and social identity is particularly salient when addressing the role technology plays. Because it is so accessible it truly becomes part of one’s social and personal identity construction and in the process demonstrates the tension between community and personal competition. This study suggests issues of
cultural capital, power and control are introduced as artist and audience negotiate their relationship with technologies. As informants and participants illustrated, the degree of control changes the function of the music. As the high level of control that, for instance, the iPod offers is a young phenomenon, media consumers are currently negotiating how to use it in social and private situations. While there is also a higher degree of personal competition due to media consumer’s desire to wield their control, there is simultaneously a notable amount of positive excitement concerning sharing and social connections.

This is not so much consumption, as it is people engaging in a culture; artists and their accomplices experiencing music together. Engagement in a music community is not just listening to music, or consuming music, but participating in a culture. Whereas some people used to engage in music subcultures, everyday engagement with music in general has become the norm. This normalization defines the experience. In fact, it is very difficult to grow up today and not be a part of it. For example, social platforms enable a breakdown between the private, personal time of the artist and the music community. Many in our society have always had an interest in musicians’ lives, and now private information is shared and accessed online with ease. And on both sides, artist and audience, sharing is more important than ever. As Giddens (1984) argues, through people’s activities they set the stage for future activities that “resources draw upon in the production and reproduction of social action are at the same time a means of system reproduction” (p. 51). As we consume conversationally, our consumption truly become a social process.
This type of behavior is not entirely new. What is new is the level at which it occurs. Consumption has also become much more subtle, yet simultaneously more encompassing. For instance, Hersh’s audience is not like the Beatles audience, because that gap, the divide between artist and audience is much smaller. When you humanize someone it changes how that person is perceived. Further, this research also suggests that the relationship between artist and audience has changed and the concept of fan, as it has been discussed, may have lost some of its explanatory power. As Jenkins (2007) states, “As fandom becomes part of the normal way that the creative industries operate then fandom may cease to function as a meaningful category of cultural analysis” (p. 364). We might better think of the audience as *accomplices* to the artist.

Contemporary media production and consumption tends to be blurry, global, and fluid. As the music is free, it has a disposable quality. Listeners do not pay for a product so they have a different relationship with the text/content. Musicians must directly engage their communities. The nature of contemporary music culture is best characterized by community. Today, Kristin Hersh is 100% community supported, but in essence every artist is community supported, whether they realize it or not. People will support artists if they understand the process, which is why transparency is critical, and why Hersh is successful.

This study suggests that what constitutes value is redefined and as such presents a number of recommendations for practical strategies for those involved. Overall, providing valuable experiences through the community process is crucial to sustainability. The importance of building good will and establishing positive word-of-mouth far outreaches selling a compact disc. As the live performance is a valuable
experience for both artist and audience, it would behoove the industry not to make the same mistake it did with CDs and overcharge for concert performances. Providing your community with a dedicated space to experience their shared musical lives is crucial for community engagement. Once the space is established, providing content that can be built upon gives your community more reason to participate. The approach to community activity should be open and supportive. For instance, Hersh trusts her community’s participation, which sends the message that their contributions are valuable. Feeling valued sets the stage for a mutually beneficial relationship. As informants and forum participants illustrated, “friends” receive financial compensation for their content. Friendship is built on mutual respect. While the artist and their audience are not “friends” in the traditional sense, it is this type of relationship this study recommends artists strive to cultivate. In other words, instead of implementing a more tightly controlled approach to your content and your community, approach your community as accomplices in the creation of your musical life. This study suggests, in the same vein as Baym’s (2011) Swedish model, that “what distinguishes the successful companies from the failures may be how proactively they pursue the participatory new visions rather than clinging to models based on conditions that no longer exist” (p.). My prediction is that those who move forward and embrace fluidity, flexibility, and openness to opportunity will lead us into the future, while those who attempt to maintain traditional means of centralized power and control will fall to the wayside. As Attali (2006) explains, "Music runs parallel to human society; is structured like it, and changes when it does" (p. 10).

Kristin Hersh offers what my informants demonstrated they desired: open, flexible, transparent interaction or in other words, a rich fulfilling and valuable musical
life. In conclusion, Hersh sums up her approach in four poignant words “music happens between people”. She states, “Even at 14 we knew that striving for success in music was inherently tragic, as success in the music industry was, for the most part, ugly and devoid of substance…music happens between people. We never forgot that.” (Hersh, 2012)
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

• How often do you listen to music?

• When do you tend to listen?

• Where do you tend to listen?

• How do you listen? (radio, iPod, computer, record player, cd player, etc.)

• What types of artists and specific artists do you listen to? Like?

• How do you find out about artists/ new artists? Specify

• How do you access recorded music? Can we touch on the pros and cons of each?
  o Borrow from friends?
  o Paid subscription service? (rhapsody)
  o Buy Cds? Records? Mp3s? (From retailers? Directly from artists at shows, etc.)
  o Stream? (MySpace, etc.) (Pandora, streaming radio)
  o Watch on youtube?
  o Off the internet for free (Specify)
  o Anything else not mentioned?

• What factors influence your decisions about acquiring music?
  o Do you need a physical copy or item?
  o Quality?
  o Cost? What are you willing to pay for access? Would you pay more for a more popular artist? What is a fair price for a single? Album? Ect?
Accessibility?

Where you can transfer it? (How it can be played)

I don’t care about ownership just access to music

Want to make sure the artist is being compensated?

Any concern for giving back to the artist?

Anything else?

- How do you support the bands/artists you like?
  
  Live shows, merchandise, promote their music on blog, to my friends, via FB

  Anything else?

- How much money, roughly, do you spend on the music culture (meaning, recorded music, shows, merchandise)?

- In your opinion, what are the most important parts of a musician’s web presence? Why are they important? Are there certain things/information you expect to be able to access?

- What type of content do you like to be available online (extra content, video footage, mp3s, communications from the artists, extra information)? Why?

- What happens to that digital content? (How involved or engaged with it are you?)

- What beyond listening to it are you doing? Are you making mixes? Remixes? Sharing it? Blogging about it? Take an active role in the artists online presence? (Take part in a forum or group?) Incorporate the band into your FB, MySpace, Webpage, blog?

- As members of an audience, do you feel that you are an important part of music creation? What role do you play?
• Can you tell me about your favorite artists? How would you characterize the role they play in your life?

• How do you think technology structures your musical life? Your connections with artists?
APPENDIX B

KRISTIN HERSH INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- To begin, could you talk about how you use the internet to reach out to your audience? What factors influence your choice of use of internet/digital technology?
- Can you tell me about Strange Angels? What’s the idea behind it, how did it come about, and how does it work?
- Can you tell me about releasing Crooked? (I’m really interested in the format!)
- You have so many things online (videos, messages, journals, media, etc.), which brings me to this issue of the internet making it so easy for people to get music/content for free. Do you see that as a problem or an opportunity? What kinds of things do you typically include on the internet/make available to your audience? What do you hold back? How do you decide what content falls under what category? On your website you encourage people to post and repost content. So, overall I guess I am wondering how you negotiate what to give and what to keep.
- You have a new-ish website. Is there a certain concept or strategy that brought it to life? Can you talk a bit about your website?
- Why do you release under Creative Commons? It seems very important to you; can you talk a bit about why?
- As music culture is a bit in flux at the moment, I’m wondering if you think any specific strategies/approaches to creativity and sustainability seem particularly
promising for music culture as a whole? Notice any particularly salient themes? Things are note or that deserve emphasis? Things that stick out as definitely not working?

- How does one, or how do musicians, make new media work for them? Now, conversely, the opposite is that it can have a severely negative impact on their livelihood, which brings me to ask, what core problems or issues do you see stemming from new media? An overarching question might be, how does one make a living in times when music is available so freely? What strategies does one develop to make digital media a positive, rather than a negative?

- While the industry’s traditional gatekeepers are in flux, who are the new gatekeepers or tastemakers that can help listeners through the process of establishing relationships with artists? How would you characterize their role, as well as, their level of importance?
APPENDIX C

JESSE VON DOOM INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

• Can you tell me about CASH, the goals of the organization and the role you play?
• Where do you come in? What do you do on a daily basis? What’s your job?
• What differentiates CASH from other business models out there that the industry has tried?
• Do you notice any particularly salient themes in terms of what’s working and what’s not working?
• How do musicians make media work for them in a time when it has a lot of negative consequences… what should be available freely versus held back?
• How do these creative ideas come up, like the book with Kristin, what about other bands, are you coming up with stuff? Is it the bands? Is it a collaboration?
• What info goes on what social media sites?
• How much goes into the follow up once you put something out there, for instance on Twitter, FB, etc.?
• Follow up on the other end of things? Like band out on tour, posts picture from town they were just in etc.?
• Who are the new gatekeepers/tastemakers?
• Is there a newish band that you are totally into these days?
• Can you tell me about Learning Music Monthly?
• Anything you think I haven’t hit on that deserves mention?
APPENDIX D

FORUM TOPICS

TM BBC Sessions
Spring :o)
Throwing Muses Anthology?
UK Festival season 2011
50 Foot Wave Cash Track
10-4 cds...
With Love From the Mens Room
TM University sticker
Coming Soon...like, in the next few days!
Paradoxical in the US?
London UK show Jan 24, 2011
BBC 6music
Glasgow Paradoxical event
Kristin in Dublin
Another Kristin show in the UK
Throwing Muses Raw Studio Feed?
Teller Question
Early Muses downloads anywhere?
Question
Whatever happened to Leslie, anyway?
Rat Girl: A Memoir
"Rat Girl" amazing book. Film adaptation?
The Box! The Box!
The Season Sessions
"Crooked" the book
Lady Gaga, and Kristin Hersh. !!!!!
"Rat Girl" author event
New Live KH CD?
Hay-on-Wye Book Festival
APPENDIX E

IRB CERTIFICATION

Research Review Committee B

Certification of Approval for a Project Involving Human Subjects

Protocol Number: 13234

Pi: DARLING-WOLF, FABIENNE

Approved On: 25-Jun-2010
Review Date: 25-Jun-2010
Committee: B BEHAVIORAL AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
Department: SCAT-JOURNALISM (1703)
Project Title: The Digitalization of Music Culture: A Case Study Examining the Musician/Listener Relationship with Digital Technology

In accordance with the policy of the Department of Health and Human Services on protection of human subjects in research, it is hereby certified that protocol number 13234, having received preliminary review and approval by the department of SCAT-JOURNALISM (1703) was subsequently reviewed by the Institutional Review Board in its present form and approved on 25-Jun-2010 with respect to the rights and welfare of the subjects involved; appropriateness and adequacy of the methods used to obtain informed consent; and risks to the individual and potential benefits of the project.

In conformity with the criteria set forth in the DHHS regulations for the protection of human research subjects, and in exercise of the power granted to the Committee, and subject to execution of the consent form(s), if required, and such other requirements as the Committee may have ordered, such orders, if any, being stated hereon or appended hereto.

It is understood that it is the investigator’s responsibility to notify the Committee immediately of any untoward results of this study to permit review of the matter. In such case, the investigator should call Richard Throm at 707-8757.

ZEBULON KENDRICK, Ph.D.
CHAIRMAN, IRB
APPENDIX F

IRB RECERTIFICATION

Re-certification of Approval for a Project Involving Human Subjects

Protocol Number: 18284
PI: DARLING-WOLF, FABIENNE
Expires On: 23-Jun-2012
Committee: B BEHAVIORAL AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
School/College: Communication and Theater (1700)
Department: SCT: Journalism (17030)
Sponsor: Temple University
Project Title: The Digitalization of Music Culture: A Case Study Examining the Musician/Listener Relationship with Digital Technology

Based on a review of your status report, the Institutional Review Board hereby re-approves protocol number 18284, originally approved on 25-Jun-2010, for the period ending 23-Jun-2012

Agenda Date: 17-Jun-2011
Start Date: 24-Jun-2011
End Date: 23-Jun-2012

It is understood that it is the investigator's responsibility to notify the Committee immediately of any untoward results of this study to permit review of the matter. In such case, the investigator should call the IRB at (215) 727-5360.

This is the Certificate of Reapproval. Supplemental documentation will follow under separate cover. Enrollment may not begin until all documents have been reviewed and processed by the IRB and received by the study team.

ZEBULON KENDRICK, Ph.D.
CHAIRMAN, IRB
Title: The Digitalization of Music Culture: A Case Study Examining the Musician/Listener Relationship with Digital Technology

Principal Investigator – Fabienne Darling-Wolf – (215) 204-2077
Student Investigator – Mary Elizabeth Ray – (609) 405-1501

Temple University, Department of Mass Media & Communication

General Research Procedure:
I understand that I am being asked to participate in a research study as part of a dissertation being written by Mary Elizabeth Ray for Temple University’s Mass Media & Communication department. I understand that I will be interviewed and asked to share my thoughts about my music consumption.

Purpose of Research:
This research seeks to learn more about how the rise of widely available digital technology is shaping the way music is produced, distributed, promoted, and consumed, with a specific focus on the changing nature of the relationship between producers and consumers this new technology has engendered.

Selection of interviewees:
The study includes interviews and discussions with individuals who are popular musicians, or producers of music, as well as with audiences, or consumers of that music.

Duration of Interview:
The interview will last about 30 minutes.

Identity:
I understand that the results of this study may be published and that my identity may be disclosed with my written consent provided in this form.

Subject rights:
"If I have any questions about my rights as a research subject, I may contact the Institutional Review Board Coordinator at (215) 707-3390. The Coordinator may also be reached by email: IRB@temple.edu or regular mail:
Temple University
Temple Research Administration
Institutional Review Board Coordinator
Student Faculty Conference Center
3340 North Broad Street – Suite 304
Philadelphia, PA 19140 “
Benefits:
Musicians: Participation in this research includes no compensation.
Listeners: Participation in this research includes the opportunity to earn extra credit in a Temple University course. If you do not participate, your grade will NOT be influenced in any way.

Risks:
This research poses no risk to the interviewee.

Disclaimer/Withdrawal: You are not required to participate in this study. Your participation should be voluntary:

I understand that I am free to decide whether or not to participate in the interview. I understand that non-participation in the research or withdrawal from the research will not prejudice future interactions with the researcher or Temple University. I understand that it is my option to participate and I am free to choose not to if I so desire.

Questions: You are absolutely encouraged to ask questions, which will happily be answered, at any point in the discussion.

Overview: I have read and understood this consent form and I voluntarily agree to participate in this research project.

I understand that I will be given a copy of the signed consent form.

________________________________________________________________________
Interviewee Name (please print)
Date
Address
________________________________________________________________________
E-mail
________________________________________________________________________
Phone number
________________________________________________________________________
Interviewee Signature
________________________________________________________________________
Signature of Researcher
Date
________________________________________________________________________
Signature of Witness
Date
Initials ______ Date ___
APPENDIX H

PERMISSION TO AUDIO RECORD

Student Investigator: Mary Elizabeth Ray
Department: Mass Media & Communication, Temple University
Project Title: The Digitalization of Music Culture: A Case Study Examining the
Musician/Listener Relationship with Digital Technology

I give Mary Elizabeth Ray permission to audiotape me. This recording will be used
ONLY for the following purpose(s): RESEARCH

This audiotape will be used as a part of a research project at Temple University. I have
already given written consent for my participation in this research project. I understand
and permit my name to be used in the research.

WHEN WILL I BE AUDIOTAPED?
I agree to be audiotaped during the time period – Date: ___/___/___ Time: __________

HOW LONG WILL THE TAPES BE USED?
I give my permission for these tapes to be used and stored indefinitely.

WHAT IF I CHANGE MY MIND?
I understand that I can withdraw my permission at any time. Upon my request, the audio
recording will no longer be used. This will not affect my care or relationship with Mary
Elizabeth Ray or Temple University in any way.

OTHER
I understand that I will not be paid for being audiotaped or for the use of the audiotapes.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION
If I want more information about the audiotape(s), or if I have questions or concerns at
any time, I can contact: Mary Elizabeth Ray / Department of Mass Media &
Communication / Temple University, 2020 N. 13th Street, Philadelphia, PA 19122 /
Mobile: 215-880-4511
A copy of this form will be given to me, which I will retain in my records, and a copy
will be kept by Mary Elizabeth Ray.

*THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION IN THIS RESEARCH*
Name (please print):

Address: ________________________________________________________________
E-mail: ___________________________ / Phone: ____________________________
_______________________________________________________________________
INTERVIEWEE SIGNATURE

Witness Signature
Initials _____ Date _____