

Abstract

My project is based on how technology has changed music consumption practices. With downloads creating a much more accessible way of obtaining music, I was interested in looking at how this may have affected the collection of music and our attachment to those collections. I focused on issues around materiality, control, public consumption and private consumption incorporating theories from Benjamin (1999), Adorno (1976, 1944) and others. This study was based on a small sample group using survey data and a small focus group. There were several key findings. Music has changed form, but we still use and consume it in similar ways to how we consumed physical formats and there is still an emotional attachment to virtual formats. I also found that people like to collect music in order to learn new vocabularies for playing instruments or to gain a better overall knowledge of different music genres. We use music in both a private and public way. We use it in a privatised way, through headphones, to make us feel more comfortable and less alone when travelling and in other situations. We also use it in a public way, as representing our identity and for impressing peers.

Introduction

In this project I look at how changing consumption practices have affected our relationship to music. I argue that we have more control as consumers now, and I also investigate how music is a paradox of being both public and private. I am interested in how consuming digital media, as opposed to having an actual record, tape or CD, might make us feel more, or less, attached to the music. I also want to investigate how inventions such as the MP3 player have led music to become more privatised and less public. There is a lot of literature on consumption practices, and how people can relate to objects, yet there is little on the consumption of music, especially on more up to date practices, in an era of iPod's, playlists and downloads. I feel this is an area that has been quite neglected and is not taken seriously enough which is why I am interested in researching it. In my project, I build upon literature on book and record collections such as Benjamin (1999) and Shuker (2004), as these are useful for a comparison with modern day consumption practices. I look at current work in the field of digital music such as Kibby (2009), Giles et al (2007) and Beer (2008). I collected a large amount of survey responses, however the one difficulty encountered in my research was the limited number of participants in my focus group. Three people participated in my focus group but had I more time, I could have used a larger group or several small groups.

It is important to look and see if our values have changed when consuming music, as the literature I will mention, has all emphasised the organisational aspect of music files. I want to research this topic as I have a passion for music myself. I can remember a time

when I would have the radio on and I would record songs off the music charts to make my own personal mix tape. When I was only ten years old, I was saving up in order to collect every album that the Red Hot Chili Peppers had released. I would listen to these albums on repeat while reading the lyrics off the album sleeve. When I got to see them live in the Phoenix Park it was possibly the happiest moment of my childhood. Now, I take pride in my iPod and organise my music into playlists, which suit my mood and the majority of the time I have my music on shuffle. I have grown up consuming music in its rapidly changing forms, so investigating how changing practices have affected people's relationship to music on an individual level is an extremely exciting project for me.

I think it is vital, in an era where everything is changing so rapidly, that we investigate the part technology has played in shaping our culture and society. Music is everywhere and it is rare in the sense that the consumption of it can be an experience; it can accentuate or alleviate the mood we are in. For many people, music is deeply personal and makes life worth living. My project, although limited to a select number of people and based on the individual rather than a whole population, can give more insight into this relationship to music. It will also give an idea of how this relationship may have changed because of technology usage. It is important that we investigate reflect on earlier findings and see whether they need to be revisited in light of what we learn about contemporary forms of consumption. Perhaps this will help us anticipate the effect that this new technological era will have on future generations.

Literature Review

Collecting and Materiality

It is important to outline a brief history of the literature on collecting and its motivations before moving on to look at digital formats specifically. The main work to discuss is Walter Benjamin's extremely interesting and relevant chapter "Unpacking My Library" (Benjamin 1999). In his witty analysis of book collecting he gives great insight into what possessing an object can mean to someone. He describes collecting as "a relationship to objects which does not emphasize their functional, utilitarian value- that is their usefulness" (Benjamin 1999:62). We can apply his theory to music consumption as for many record collectors it also holds true. In Giles et al we are told that some collectors saw "records as objects that are desirable to own in themselves" (2007:435) and that they "hoard items for non-utility purposes" (2007:438). The main non-utility purpose I believe should be mentioned is nostalgia. For Benjamin, his books hold many memories and he talks about "the spring tide of memories which surges toward any collector as he contemplates his possessions" (1999:61). Giles et al similarly discuss how "the purchase of specific recordings is tied to certain memories and sentiments relating to that period in the consumers life" (2007:437). Also Roy Shuker tells us that there is a "strong connection between collecting, displaying and memory" (2004:324). Music is still an important trigger for nostalgia and memories so I am interested in looking at digital music collections and applying the ideas of these authors to them. I want to look at whether they do not hold the same nostalgic meaning that record collections once did. Giles et al tell us that "clusters of records may also remind them of a particular life

period" (2007:438) which I do agree with but I want to argue that *listening* to music brings back memories too, and we should concentrate on music as a listening experience because, after all, that is why it is made.

However, the main aspect of collecting which is mentioned in these older accounts is "the thrill of acquisition" (Benjamin 1999:62). For many collectors it was all about the difficulty of obtaining particular records or amassing a large amount of them. In other words "ownership of a complete 'set' of a particular artist's work is regarded as a significant accomplishment by the consumer and possibly by the consumer's friends" (Giles et al 2007:437). Therefore, it is interesting to keep this in mind when we are looking at the ease of downloading music now. This contrasts greatly with Benjamin's idea of the challenge of getting something for your collection and in a sense that this challenge strengthens your connection with the object. So one area that can be looked into is what impact this has on the relationship to the collection or music itself. Benjamin felt that to connect with something it had to be a material object. When talking about his collection he constantly uses phrases such as "as he holds them in his hands" (Benjamin 1999:62) and "once you have approached the mountains of cases in order to mine the books from them" (Benjamin 1999:67), it is clear that he has a preoccupation with the actual physicality of his collection. This view is now questioned with the emergence of new digitalised versions of what were once material objects and the lack of 'collecting' (or Benjamin's understanding of collecting) nowadays.

Shuker mentions that "collecting processes take on different emphases over time"

(2004:327) which is proven by the disappearing notion of completism. For Shuker, collecting involved a "preoccupation with collection size and completism" (2004:317) and as digitalisation has taken over, there is less focus on these aspects for the consumer. Now it is extremely easy to find any song you want from the internet and it is possible to download as many as you want with increasing MP3 memory and hard drives. Giles et al also look at this in their article and mention how people expect to "retain the item throughout our lives" (2007:430) and that "consumers believe they will pass on their collections to their offspring" (2007:438). I do not believe this idea exists anymore, as when a person passes on, it would be unusual for a child to snoop around on the parent's computer in the hope that they may have left a file to be passed on. Inheriting things does seem to be attached to materiality. However, they mention that "digital ownership of music is more about the listening experience itself" (Giles et al 2007:441) and that digitalisation makes "music consumption a highly social act" (2007:441), so I would say that the advantages far outweigh any disadvantages that may be experienced with the loss of physical forms.

Moving from Physical to Digital Forms

Simon Frith (2010) offers us a brief history of the music industry and how technology has changed musical forms, which is important, in order to establish the context. The history begins with the phonograph which soon became the inspiration for the gramophone which was regarded by the United States Gramophone Company as "a machine for home entertainment and the mass-production of music discs" (Frith 2010:233). A switch in consumption took place, as previously consumers just wanted to buy the hardware (such

as the gramophone itself) and the industry had to promote the software (music records) as being worth buying in themselves (Frith 2010:233). This led to the first recording studio being opened and the creation of a mass audience (Frith 2010:233). Following a slump in the industry in the 1930's a small number of 'major' recording companies survived which established the music industry as we know it today (Frith 2010: 234). Soon "radios replaced record players in people's homes" (Frith 2010: 235) and were seen as a threat to the music industry so companies became obsessed with big sales. "They became less concerned to service an existing public taste than to create new tastes, to manipulate demand" (Frith 2010: 235). They managed to use the radio to their advantage, by using a star system and promoting these stars via the radio, to create popularity and consumption (Frith 2010:235). Soon it became obvious that with new technology emerging, there was a need to "improve recorded sound quality and to ease record storage and preservation" (Frith 2010:237). "By 1950 tape recording had replaced disc recording entirely" (Frith 2010:237), and this eventually developed into digital recording and compact discs. From this history of the 20th century we move on to the 21st, and the development of digital files.

Anticipating the Digital Revolution

Once digital forms arrived, within a short period of time they dominated, and to a much larger extent than imagined. Judging by literature mentioned already, such as Benjamin, one would expect music collectors to be quite against converting their physical collections to virtual forms. An online article by Dibbell (2000) begins to think about Benjamin's critique and its relevance in a technological era and poses many interesting

questions. Dibbell is himself a music collector and he describes his experience of converting his CDs to MP3s. Interestingly, he says that once he has ripped his CDs onto his computer, they lose the meaning he attached to them. In his words; "having given up their ghost to my machine, they no longer retain even the vestigial charisma that they had going in" (Dibbell 2000:No Page Number Given). Instead of viewing this as a bad thing, the physicality being of prime importance for the collector, he embraces the change. In his opinion, "we stand on the threshold of an era in which collecting... is more intense and intimate than ever" (Dibbell 2000:No Page Number Given). I agree with this, and will later discuss the notion of consumer control and how it intensifies our relation to music. Dibbell even goes so far as to say that ripping the files was a "thrill of a new kind of acquisition... it was an act of redemption" (2000:No Page Number Given). This shows an acceptance of a new kind of collecting, which was inevitable in this technological era. He goes on to describe the benefits of virtual files, including the organisation of them, and finishes his article by saying "I feel closer to my music than I ever have before... my music collection lies naked before me, more available to my touch in some ways, than it was when I could actually touch it" (Dibbell 2000:No Page Number Given). This article clearly shows that the digitalisation of music has not affected this writer's connection with it, and so prompts many questions regarding the importance of materiality to collections.

I think it is worth mentioning two New York Times articles here to give a sense of what the initial reaction was when MP3 players began to emerge. Jon Pareles wrote an article in November 1998 saying that digitalisation would "liberate music from the clutches of

gatekeepers and profiteers and perhaps return music to its intangible essence" (1998:No Page Number Given). I think he is saying here precisely what has been found in more contemporary literature, that music has returned to being a listening experience more than anything else. He does in fact make the claim that "for listeners, music has never been about its physical form" (Pareles 1998:No Page Number Given) which I believe the previous literature mentioned would contest, for as Shuker pointed out, collectors did so not only for the thrill of acquisition but also for "love of the music itself" (2004:316). Pareles does however anticipate many of the benefits of digitalisation speaking of how "general listeners' tastes could broaden and budding musicians could learn new vocabularies" (1998:No Page Number Given). Overall he gives quite a positive review, apart from mentioning that "music would stop being something to collect... the music might seem disposable" (Pareles 1998:No Page Number Given). I disagree with this statement as I believe we still collect music, but that people are unsure of the term and would hesitate to call themselves 'collectors'. Here, he suggests that lack of physicality is linked to disposability yet his earlier comment was that music is not about its physical form, therefore he does not seem to be in full conviction of his own arguments which are slightly paradoxical.

Just 8 months later there is a review by Neil Strauss (1999) which is quite transgressive compared to Pareles. He seems to know little about actual MP3 players and digitalisation- he focuses on a computer MP3 player, different software and different skins etc. for the whole article, rather than looking at the music or consumption itself. He also claims that "there is little doubt that MP3.. is a transitional format" (Strauss 1999:No Page Number

Given). I think it is important that we look at these opinions from when digitalisation was beginning to occur, because we now know that although there are many other file types available, the MP3 still prevails. Strauss does anticipate that "with the internet.. the idea of the album is dead" (1999:No Page Number Given) and I will investigate this idea in my research. Overall, these reviews are quite positive but it is clear that they could never have imagined just how much digitalisation would explode and take over the music industry and consumption. Some statistics on music consumption in the UK to show the explosion of digitalisation are: "68% listen to music on their computer every day. By comparison, only 15% use their CD player on a daily basis" (Bahanovich and Callopy 2009: 6), "The average computer or hard drive contains over 8,000 tracks (approximately 17 days worth of music)" (Bahanovich and Callopy 2009: 6) and "61% of respondents download music using P2P networks or torrent(s)" (Bahanovich and Callopy 2009: 6).

The Digital Takeover

There is some literature on the digitalisation of music, although it is quite dated already. It is important that we have a knowledge of this so as to understand *why* virtual files have taken over the music industry. An important thing to keep in mind is that "music can be an object but it can also be an experience" (Kibby 2009:431), as I think a lot of literature, especially that on collecting, is prone to forget that music is made to be *listened to*. We must remember that "the music collection is an archive with particular understandings, practices, rituals and identity forming properties attached to it" (Beer 2008:82) so although it is a collection, it has a lot more elements that come into play along with acquisition. David Beer tells us that "the MP3 player has reconfigured and re-

contextualized music” (2008:71) and there are several ways it has done so. Duncan and Fox give a good account of how different aspects of music listening have changed form but point out that "listening behaviour had already begun to change with the arrival of cassette tapes" (2005:No Page Number Given). One main change in listening to music is that "individuals are happy to download individual songs" (Duncan and Fox 2005:No Page Number Given) which supports Strauss' (1999) prediction that the album will cease to be of importance. Kibby's study found that participants "acquired music as single tracks rather than albums, and then combined the tracks into 'albums' of their own" (2009:435). I am interested in finding out if the same applies to my participants as Kibby's interviews took place in Australia. This notion of the death of the album ties into personalisation and control, which I will discuss further below.

Another important aspect which has changed in music consumption is the "phenomena of downloading music that we never listen to" (Duncan and Fox 2005:No Page Number Given). There is evidence to suggest that this is to do with portraying a particular identity. Kibby says that "music that has been acquired by individuals usually consists of both tracks that are not currently played, but are seen to be important to own; and music that is currently listened to, but is seen as a temporary interest with no long term value" (2009:430). I want to investigate more into this notion of having music that 'says' something about your personality and also the fact that now there is a lot more scope for downloading music of temporary interest or to extend your knowledge of music. Kibby goes on to say that music is a sort of "cultural autobiography" (2009:431) and that "there has been a reluctance on the part of researchers to accord digital collections a similar

role" (2009:431). I think music can say a lot about the society we live in and the individuals in it, particularly in relation to identity and impression management, musical tastes, consumption practices, and the relationship between consuming and performing music.

There seems to be mixed feelings about virtual files and emotional connection as we can see in Tom McCourt's article, where he states that "digital sound files lack potential emotive contexts altogether" (2005:250). He does go on to discuss the paradox that our sense of ownership can increase as he says "possessing digital files is a more intense and intimate experience" (McCourt 2005:250) and links this to compacting, immediacy and customization. Yet it could be argued that he focuses too much on the possessing aspect and fails to see that there is emotional connections still apparent in music consumption. Duncan and Fox attribute the domination of digital files to "four areas of information technology innovation.. a) compression of digital files, b) storage and retrieval of files, c) the transmission of the files and d) selection for playback" (2005:No Page Number Given). Clearly digitalisation has led to a much more efficient way of consuming music but I believe that if the consequence of this was to lose the emotive effects of music, then it would not be as pervasive in our society as it is now. As Kibby found "music files played an important social and symbolic role in their owners' lives and were interacted with in similar ways to music collections in solely physical formats" (2009:430). Music is still an impressive force in our society and has many properties, one of which being the ability to change our emotions.

Kibby believes that we have created a "new type of materiality" (2009:434) which would account for the fact that "ease of acquisition and the intangibility of the format did not appear to lessen the affective attachment to the collection" (2009:432). I am excited to see if the same results appear in my investigation and to try to uncover why this is so. It makes sense that we would create a new kind of materiality or begin to interact with things differently as society is constantly changing and we constantly adapt. Duncan and Fox discuss playlists and say that "designing playlists for ourselves.. eliminates the possibility for the elements of surprise or discovery" (2005:No Page Number Given) which people used experience from radio listening. This may be true but I think we counteract that with the use of the shuffle function of MP3 players, which is a way of being surprised by what comes on, as the majority of MP3 player users would have thousands of songs from which to choose from. As for the element of discovery, iTunes 'genius' suggests songs or artists you may like, based on your downloaded music. Youtube also suggest videos for you to look at so discovering new bands is still alive and well, in my opinion. I am interested in finding out if my participants make use of the shuffle function for this reason, although I cannot go into great depth about surprise and discovery.

Control and the public/private paradox

I believe that digitalisation has exploded mainly because of the element of control it affords us. Adorno critiqued modern culture, and said that commodification has led to identical products being produced under the illusion that they are different (1944:No Page Number Given). He believes that we do not really have freedom of choice, although we

think that we do, and that "everybody must behave.. in accordance with his previously determined and indexed level, and choose the category of mass product turned out for his type" (Adorno 1944:No Page Number Given). More specifically about popular music, he says that it causes "pseudo-individualization" (Adorno 1976:31). He believes that music hides the "all-governing standardization, the ready made aspect of form and feeling, from a listener who should always feel treated as if the mass product were meant for him alone" (Adorno 1976:31). Essentially, his argument is that although the consumer feels like he is choosing the music he wants, it is always pre-packaged by the artist and production companies so it is never his choice. I want to critically interrogate this proposition in my project, and whether we could view playlists and digital music consumption as being used as a way for the consumer to take back control. As Tom McCourt points out "with an iPod, flow is determined exclusively by the user" (2005:249).

If we think about this, and the capability for organisation that digitalisation of music has afforded the consumer, we can begin to examine consumer practices and how it relates to control. Kibby found that "music file collectors express.. sentiments about the organization of their collection into categories that denote significant moments in their lives" (2009:434). Playlists are an incredible source of power for the listener, as they can organise all the songs that make them happy into one folder, or particular songs which remind them of a trip etcetera. The consumer is no longer constrained to the pre-packaged theme of the album as decided by the artist and producers. Pareles predicted that "listeners can have more choices while musicians may get away with making fewer

of them" (1998:No Page Number Given) and this appears to be the case. As McCourt says, music is now "less about an artist's self-expression, than a customer's desire for self-reflection" (2005:232) and that "digital files enable heightened utility, power and control for their users" (2005:251). The option of downloading separate files rather than a whole album means that consumers are "creating their own listening experience" (Duncan and Fox 2005:Page Number Unavailable). This desire to create your own experience can also explain the privatisation element to music, which has emerged due to earphone use.

Kibby found that "travelling.. was the space most likely to be filled by music" (2009:429). Music consumers can create playlists that affect their mood in a particular way, or music that is familiar and makes them feel safe, so as to create their own comfortable bubble when they are travelling through a city or areas that they do not know, when waiting for a plane or bus, when exercising etcetera. An article by Michael Bull investigates this practice and tells us that listening to music through earphones, not only blocks out background noise but also can control "user's thoughts, feelings, and observation as they manage both space and time" (2005:344). By using music in this privatised way listeners feel like they have control over places they might otherwise be uncomfortable or even scared in. Digitalisation has helped this process as it affords greater portability. Moods can change various times throughout the day and Bull talks about how users disliked having to "attempt to judge what music to take with them on their daily commute" (2005:344). With the era of MP3 players this is no longer a problem. This process of listening to music while travelling shows the "power of music in enabling iPod users to construct meaningful and pleasurable narratives out of the routine linear and cyclical practices of their everyday movement through the city" (Bull

2005:346) and shows music's involvement in "management of experience and the power of sound to direct experience" (Bull 2005: 346). I think looking closer at these types of qualities of music can help validate music as something which should be taken seriously and that is an important aspect of our society. Music comes in to play in all areas of our lives, be it how we experience the world around us or how we present ourselves to others, and clearly digitalisation has played a massive role in aiding this.

Paradoxically however, music is also extremely public and social. Although music allows listeners to "focus in on themselves" (Bull 2005:349) it also "often becomes intrinsically bound up with the owners' identities" (Giles et al 2007:431). Music and its genres seem to be associated with particular kinds of people and identities. Beer mentions that we should pay attention to music and the "identity construction it facilitates, this is both how we think of ourselves and how we wish to present ourselves" (2008:76). Collecting particular kinds of records or digital files can be a source of "cultural capital within the peer group" (Shuker 2004:314). This could relate back to downloading music we never listen to. I want to investigate this topic more closely in my research and try to identify if this is the case among Irish people too. Kibby found in her interviews that music "was an important part of their personalities and was part of what defined who they are" (2009:437), so I want to look at how digitalisation has affected impression management or identity portrayal through music. There appears to be a gap in the literature as I was unable to find Irish examples. A lot of the work on music consumption is theoretically and not empirically based, with the exception of Kibby (2009), Bull (2005), Giles et al (2007) and Shuker (2004). It is important to see if digitalisation has affected our relationship

with music as a whole, how it has helped the paradox of music consumption in a private and public way simultaneously, as well as focusing on the concept of control.

To sum up, I have looked at articles from the last 15 years, in order to get a knowledge of the historical context and assess the current literature in the field of digital music. My main themes are that of music collecting and how our relationship to it has, or has not, changed with the disappearance of physical formats and the emergence of digital files. I want to investigate if we have lost emotional attachment to music through the conversion of material forms to virtual forms. I am going to examine Benjamin's concept of 'the thrill of acquisition' (1999: 62) and whether completism has disappeared. I will also investigate the relationship of control to collecting music, and discuss briefly benefits and disadvantages to digital collections. I want to look at how music can aid identity formation among peers and discuss the public and social elements in more detail. Finally, I want to look at how digitalisation has led to the privatisation of music.

Methodology

Research Methodology - Qualitative

For my project, I opted to use qualitative methods, as I was interested in getting detail and depth into how *individuals* interact with and feel about music, rather than a whole population. Although I was focusing on certain aspects of current music consumption I also wanted to leave room for other unanticipated concepts to emerge. I decided that I would use triangulation which is "combining multiple theories, methods, observers and empirical materials to produce a more accurate, comprehensive and objective representation of the object of study" (Silverman 2006:291) so as to get a better understanding of my topic. I distributed surveys to get some general feedback on my topic and then followed that research up with a focus group to get a deeper insight into some topics. Survey research is "research in which information is obtained from a sample of individuals through their responses to questions about themselves or others" (Schutt 2009:256) Rather than treating my survey data as quantitative statistics, I analysed my responses as qualitative material. I began by scanning through all my responses, and re-reading over the next few weeks. I then used colour coding in order to pick out recurring themes and ideas which I related back to my literature and investigated further in my focus group. In a focus group "the researcher acts more as the facilitator of a group discussion than as a questioner" (Silverman 2006:110). I used non-probability sampling methods in both areas of my research. . By combining these two methods I was engaging in progressive focusing throughout my research. Progressive focusing is a "process by which a qualitative analyst interacts with the data and gradually refines her focus" (Schutt 2009:359). I was able to analyse my survey data and pick out important concepts to

discuss and get a deeper insight into in my focus group.

The Research in Practice

I had originally planned on using purposive sampling; “a non-probability sampling method in which elements are selected for a purpose” (Schutt 2009:173), for my survey. I intended on handing out the surveys in a college where the students are studying music production, as my brother, a student in the college, was my gatekeeper. A gatekeeper is “a person in a field setting who can grant researchers access to the setting” (Schutt 2009:328). However, when a classmate mentioned 'surveygizmo.com' I decided to use this instead as it was much easier to create and distribute my survey. This was availability sampling; "sampling in which elements are selected on the basis of convenience" (Schutt 2009:170). I created my survey and did a pilot with some of my friends, which uncovered some issues with my questions. I edited the survey and then published it on my facebook which was beneficial as it led to a much higher response rate, of 43 respondents, although my aim was to have approximately 20. Obviously I wanted people who consume music for my research so anyone who clicked into my survey and did not view themselves as a music consumer did not have to respond. My survey consisted of a combination of closed questions for statistics, such as age and occupation, and open questions about favourite genres, listening and downloading practices. The site I used also gave the option of generating a profile report which was helpful to me in order to properly summarize my statistics and to do a content analysis which is when "researchers establish a set of categories and then count the number of instances that fall into each category" (Silverman 2006:19). Individual responses could be downloaded in a pdf file and printed off so that I

could also analyse them separately. I wanted my sample to mainly be made up of people in their late twenties, as I wanted to investigate people who began consuming music before these new technological practices emerged, in order to get their opinions on what the effect of these practices might be. However, as I decided to distribute my survey online and so could not chose a specific age group, I made up for this in my focus group which consisted of a 28 year old and two 32 year olds. My focus group was a purposive sample as I used my friend as a gatekeeper as she lives with two members of a band. This also meant that it was easier for me to organise the focus group as all members were assembled in the same place at the same time. I also think that by using their home as the setting that the atmosphere was more relaxed than it would have been elsewhere. It also enabled me to conduct the focus group as more of a conversation that would have been going on between them any evening. My participants were relaxed and comfortable which helped remove the tension which could arise from knowing that your conversation is being recorded. I recorded the conversation on my laptop as it is password protected and only accessible to me.

Ethics and Confidentiality

While doing the research I kept in mind that these results only apply to a select group of people and not the population as a whole. However, I was able to theorize about some trends that emerged in my survey data, which I believe, could be investigated further in a larger project. I was aware that people may be giving me answers that they think I want to hear, especially in the focus group. Also in the focus group I anticipated that participants may be inclined to adjust their attitudes based on what they thought looked

good or bad in front of their peers. However, my participants disagreed in some aspects and did not seem to be afraid to argue their own points. This I attribute to the relaxed setting. I obtained consent forms from the focus group participants, a sample is included at the end of the project (Appendix 1), and was completely honest about my motives and how I will use their data in line with the ethical guidelines; "sociological research should be based on the freely given informed consent of those studied. This implies a responsibility on members to explain as fully as possible, and in terms meaningful to participants, what the research is about, who is undertaking and financing it, why it is being undertaken, and how it is to be promoted" (Sociological Association of Ireland 2008:6). For the survey data I did not need to use consent forms as respondents filled out my survey voluntarily and had the option of not including their name. The Sociological Association of Ireland states that "The anonymity and privacy of those who participate in sociological research should be respected whether or not an explicit pledge of confidentiality has been given" (2008:7). I use pseudonyms in my transcripts and the project itself to protect people's identities and I am keeping the information I gathered confidential by storing it on a password protected computer. I avoided spoiling the field during my focus group by being honest and friendly with the participants and I left the setting on good terms with them. When analysing my research data I aimed to have an emic focus; "representing a setting with the participants terms" (Schutt 2009:359), although after reading so much literature I know I was more inclined to focus on particular aspects that seemed more important to me, and also that I may have a slight bias to back up my own points, although I tried to avoid this. I encountered very few problems although a fraction of my survey responses were only partially filled out, which

could be due to the respondent growing tired of my questions or a bad internet connection, as returning to the page would open a new survey and not the previous one.

Observations

My project itself is not really a controversial one which was helpful as there was less risk involved of causing harm to the participants. The majority of answers tied in quite well with the literature I had read, although certain responses did challenge some concepts in the contemporary field. I believe that some respondents may feel under-qualified to make claims about their music listening practices and how it could be relevant to a wider sphere. Also I believe the survey respondents in particular may be inclined to use music as a representation of their identity which would mean that even when answering questions in my survey, impression management could have been involved, especially as I knew some of the respondents quite well. From my data, however, I have developed some ideas about my topic which do not appear to have been investigated yet and that I will propose in the discussion of my findings.

Discussion

In this section I will discuss my research findings and how it may relate back to the literature. I will be focusing on the topics outlined in the literature review and trying to understand motives behind people's listening practices. All results used are from my survey and focus groups and are available on request. I have included a sample survey response at the end of the project (Appendix 2). I undertook survey research as the first part of my thesis in order to find out how technology is affecting how we access and listen to music. Although I originally intended on having about 20 surveys I got 43 responses and chose to work with all of them so as to give myself more reliable statistics. Four were completed by hand, so I have incorporated these into the statistics report from the online surveys. I had difficulty getting a focus group together so I settled on a focus group with three participants for the second part of my research, who were of an older age group and two of which were in a band. I would have been happier to have had a bigger focus group or to carry out more, if time had allowed. Some general statistics that are relevant are that 55% of survey respondents were students, and 74% were aged between 16 and 25.

Collecting; a valid analytical tool?

One idea which I must pose after looking at my research findings is that the idea of collecting has changed significantly since the time of Benjamin (1999) and his contemporaries. I believe we can attribute this, or at least the speeding up of this, to digitalisation. 88% of respondents use digital downloads. 48% said they use them because they are free and 44% because it is easy, with the majority saying both aspects were a factor. As put by one respondent, digital downloads are "easy and quick to

download and its free!" (Respondent 166). This ties in with the reasons for the success of digital formats as outlined by Duncan and Fox (2005:No Page Number Given). In the modern era, people seem to be experiencing a time squeeze, and this applies to all areas of their lives including music. I was told in my focus group; "I just rip the audio off a youtube video coz I couldn't even be bothered, at this point I couldn't even be bothered finding a torrent file, that's how lazy I am" (Ben). This obsession with time, and the desire for everything to be easy seems to be the main reason for digital files success. Interestingly, 41% still use CDs, 30% using them as well as downloads. So although downloads have become the most popular format, CDs are still important for some. Only 12% mention liking having a material object so it suggests less meaning is attached to physical forms than would have been in previous decades, but it still prevails. When asked why they use CDs one respondent simply replied "I like CDs!" (Respondent 56) while another said "I like to have something physical" (Respondent 160). I would suggest from this that we are still in a transition period, hence why CDs are still around, but the speed at which digital files became popular suggests that in a few years CDs may disappear completely. In the focus group, one of my respondents pointed out; "I actually don't know where any of my CDs are anymore" (Ben) which shows that for this individual, digital files have completely eclipsed physical forms. One respondent did say that she "collect(s) CDs" (Respondent 136) which means that collecting physical forms is still around, but not is as common as before. It is important to look at how this idea of collecting transmits onto virtual files. Another respondent who used digital files said that they did not delete music as "its like having a library" (Respondent 137), which would suggest a collection aspect to it.

From talking to my focus group participants, I gathered that collecting is still alive and well, but that the meaning of it has changed. When asked if they would see themselves as music collectors one responded immediately saying "music acquirers" (Adam), although he himself had told me what a large and unusual music collection he had. When I asked Ben, a focus group participant and a previous CD collector, if he notices a difference now that he uses digital files, he told me "when I was a kid I would've been much more excited when I got new music that I never seen before coz it was harder to get". Perhaps there is a social idea that because getting music is so easy now, the 'thrill of the acquisition' is gone, so people no longer feel comfortable saying that they collect music. Collecting implies an effort and a hunt for the thing you are looking for. Whereas, acquisition seems to encompass a mere click of a mouse-a much easier way of getting what you want-almost as though it just appears in your hands or on your computer. Earlier, in my literature review I suggested that there is less of a focus on completism, however one respondent said that he would download "whole discographies, would download many albums from different artists in one day" (Respondent 150) and another said "I like to collect a good library of various genres" (Respondent 140). From this we could say that perhaps old trends are being applied to newer forms, and adapting to the digitalisation of society. Another aspect of music libraries is that they can be an important influence for musicians, especially if there is a large range of music and genres in the collection. I relate back to Pareles who said that digitalisation can allow tastes to broaden and new vocabularies to be discovered by musicians (1998:No Page Number Given) and I believe this prediction is true. From my survey's I was told that "being a guitarist I like

listening to the other artists and their creation for inspiration" (Respondent 108) and by another that it "inspires me to learn songs on guitar and/or drums" (Respondent 163). As for listeners tastes one respondent said that he is "constantly looking for new sounds that I've never heard before" (Respondent 112), so I think it is important to recognise the benefits of virtual files and their easy accessibility.

Death of the Album and Control

One other prediction from the outset of digitalisation was the 'death of the album' as mentioned in Strauss' article (1999:No Page Number Given). However, 67% of my survey respondents still downloaded albums, although 48% downloaded single songs. The idea of downloading an album still appears to be relevant but only 2 people mentioned *listening* to an album. All others used different categories for music playback. I tried to probe deeper into this in my focus group and I was told "if people say listen to this as an album then I'll listen to it as an album" (Ben) but otherwise it was not an important category, which is interesting as this participant was an artist himself. I asked the two band members how they felt about people not listening to their album as a whole and I was told "putting an album together is part of being an artist" (Adam) and that "when you're playing a gig you need it to flow" (Ben). However they themselves as *listeners* prefer not to listen to an album as a whole. I got more insight into this from the third focus group participant;

Rebecca: "There's certain bands that I would consider good albums full stop.. the kinda golden oldies.. but then when you've got newer stuff that have say four good songs and the rest are all shit.. I'd try and pick out those songs..

I'd delete the ones I don't want and just keep the rest of them."

Perhaps this means that newer albums are not being constructed in the same way as they used to be. Another changing area of this is that songs may be listened to in their own right now, not in relation to the album or even the artist. As Adam told me "artist and album come as information so how good or bad the song is.. it doesn't make any difference who it is, it's a savage song". This suggests that through digitalisation, we are not only getting used to organising and customising the files we collect, but our actual music taste is changing-it is customised and more individual than before. These focus group participants were avid playlist users. Adam told me that "you have to use them if you've got an iPod and you've got loads of music". In my survey responses, playlists were the most used function of MP3 players with shuffle coming a close second. This suggests that contrary to Adorno's belief that in modern consumer society we have no choice (1944:No Page Number Given), people are now constructing their own listening experience, through playlists, and taking back the power for themselves . No longer listening to a full album is a prime example of this, as listeners now decide for themselves, and pick out individual songs that they like.

The Private and Public Paradox

I found it interesting that 58% use mp3 players to play music and 30% use their phones. A number of people mentioned iPhones etcetera which suggests wanting everything compacted into one device. In current society we have an obsession with saving time and having everything on one device allows the user to have everything they need there for immediate retrieval. All other devices mentioned for playing music were electronic with

people listening out of headphones the majority of the time, which implies that music is definitely becoming more privatized. Only 18.6% did not mention travelling as a place where they listen to music and a large majority mentioned listening alone which could support the idea seen in Bull's (2005) article that music is used in a privatised way by listeners to achieve a sense of security in their everyday life, when travelling through places unknown, although we can extend this to other areas also. He tells us that "the iPod user struggles to achieve a level of autonomy over time and place through the creation of a privatised auditory bubble" (Bull 2005: 344). In the survey data, the main reasons people stated for listening to music was to alleviate boredom or so that they do not feel as alone. So when travelling and listening to music, users could be said to be achieving autonomy over the space they are in so that they do not feel alienated. One survey respondent said "you don't feel as alone as before" (Respondent 151), and two others told me "its the soundtrack to your life" (Respondent 145) and "music adds the soundtrack to my life and escalates my emotions and feelings" (Respondent 160). This could be said to support Bull's (2005) findings. Another respondent said "its a way of switching off" (Respondent 156), so we can see how users are perhaps using music as a way of shutting out the outside world and decreasing their sense of alienation.

I have already said that I am interested in looking at the paradox of music being both private and public. When I brought this up in my focus group I was told by Ben; "I would have a very public, like I make music at this point with the thought that people are gonna hear it... but my favourite time listening to music is probably when I'm sittin' on a train or a plane on my own with my in-ear headphones that stop all the noise". I think this is

important as it shows the different aims of the musician and the listener. Adam also gave me great insight as he said that "it's situational dependent for me. Listening to music on the iPod on your own is not the same as listening to music live with friends.. when I go to a gig it's not just about the music, it's about the event, the performance". Rebecca concurred saying that "that's actually what dictates for me a good band from a shit band, when you see them live and they actually do their songs to justice or even they change it a bit to make it sound good live, em, and everyone goes mad, you feel the electricity". This is something I had not anticipated, although I was looking at this paradox, I never really thought about the difference between listening at home or at a party, and listening in a group at a concert. This suggests that digitalisation is creating new repertoires of listening- the privatised aspect- yet the old and more public ways of experiencing music, such as live gigs, are not disappearing or changing. As we can see in the UK survey, they found that money spent on music was divided evenly between live and recorded music (Bahanovich and Callopy 2009:15). This is something I would love to learn more about. Duncan and Fox do briefly cover this in their article, saying that "when we attend concerts we experience music with like-minded individuals.. sense of community" (2005:No Page Number Given). This was evident in my survey responses too as one person told me that music "brings me closer to friends- going to live gigs and shows together" (Respondent 103).

Social Elements and Identity

It was clear from my survey that music for my respondents was an extremely social thing,

51% respondents have music they do not personally listen to and gave social reasons as to why. Among the reasons given for the pleasures that they derived from music, I was told "social elements" (Respondent 158), "it brings people together" (Respondent 136) and more specifically "music has added friends that I've met through a mutual love of music" (Respondent 154). It is clear that music can be something to have in common with someone, it can even be a basis for some friendships. Recommendations was a strong factor when people came to choosing what music to download, as I was told by some participants "she was recommended to me by a friend" (Respondent 151) and "I have seen many people post a link to it on Facebook" (Respondent 126). Identity and impression management also tie into this however, when we look at people storing files they do not listen to or not deleting music they have grown tired of. 50% of the survey respondents do not delete music with the majority giving sentimental reasons, among others, as to why not, which I will discuss further below. This is similar to Kibby's findings that "most of the participants did not delete files they no longer listened to" (2009: 437). When asked why they would keep music they do not listen to I got responses such as "so I can have a choice of music for guests if we are having a party" (Respondent 163), and that "it's good to have a wide range of music, even after its gone off trend, so you can listen to it in the car with friends and they will think you're cool" (Respondent 151). One participant even told me that the music he had that he does not use is "mostly artists that I would like to listen to more but tend not to put in the effort to listen to" (Respondent 160), so clearly certain music is thought to say something about you. There is a sense that not having the 'right' music could nearly lead to being stigmatised from peer groups.

Interestingly, I think there is an age gap in this perception of music. 55% of the survey respondents were students, aged between 16 and 25, and as my focus group was conducted with an older age range, I found different results. All respondents said that they had music they do not actually listen to but when asked if they had music they would be embarrassed about I was told "I like some great songs and I like some terrible songs. I don't care that's just the way it is" (Adam). Later Ben commented "it disappoints me that people buy Xfactor singles every year. I'm disappointed with people that they do that, that they don't actually pick music they like as opposed to music they're told to like" to which Adam responded "Well a lot of them are kids. They're impressionable". So there does seem to be an idea that people are more accepting of your music taste at an older age and perhaps it is just for teenagers or young adults that music is a criteria that you can judge a person on. However, I thought perhaps the respondents may have been trying to project this image of a more mature listening culture as later I was told "I think usually when someone suggests music you get a window into how they think" (Adam) yet when I probed deeper and asked him if his music represented his personality he disagreed and said "They'd have to listen to it all". One important thing he did mention however was that Apple released a Ping service which was sort of a social network for music, and that it was discontinued due to lack of use. He believed this meant that "people are perfectly happy to like a band but feel pressure that everyone has to like them before they'll publicly admit it" (Adam). This is an interesting hypothesis which could be looked into further. Clearly there is a difference between private and public listening, which would be an important aspect to look into on a larger scale.

Changing Forms and it's Implications

As I have already said, 50% of survey respondents did not delete their music and those who did said they did so only to free up memory. The majority of people said they kept music for sentimental reasons and I was interested in looking at this as I hypothesised that although we no longer have material objects, we still have an attachment to digital files. Reasons given for not deleting music were "I don't think you should ever erase music" (Respondent 163) and "I keep them just in case" (Respondent 134). Here we are seeing an attachment to these files similar to that of the book and record collecting. Music is an incredible format for emotional control also, and this does not appear to have lessened because of digitalisation. I was told that music "brings back great memories" (Respondent 150) and that "music I listen to over and over again gives me a sense of nostalgia that I don't get from TV or movies" (Respondent 112). Another said about not deleting files that they "keep for friends or if it reminds me of something" (Respondent 118) and another said that she "love(s) the association of songs with experiences and memories" (Respondent 104). So it appears, for the younger generation at least, that the qualities of music have not been affected by the change to virtual forms. I wanted to probe deeper into this in my focus group to see if there was an age difference in this aspect and found that although these participants would have collected CDs, very little had changed about their connection with music. I was told by Rebecca that "I listen to all kinda 90s songs like.. MC Hammer.. That reminds me as a kid coz that song was always on the radio when I was a kid in the kitchen and around the sitting room so I'd have lots of memories of just being inside my household". The men agreed saying that "music is

quite nostalgic.. pictures a time and a place where you listened to it" (Adam) and Ben's belief was that "If music does not actually make you emotional its just.. that's the entire point of music". In summary, for my respondents, music is listened to so that they do not feel as alone, to impress peers, memory recall or nostalgia, to alleviate boredom and to enhance or change moods. These are all the same reasons as are mentioned in literature from previous decades so although music has changed form, the experience itself has not been deeply affected.

Conclusion

I am delighted to have had the opportunity to argue against certain theories that I do not agree with, based on my own empirical data and on a subject that I am extremely passionate about. As I have shown, although music has changed forms, the way we use and consume it has not changed significantly. The only changes seem to have been for the good, allowing a greater knowledge of music and easier organisation, in fact creating a more personal listening experience than ever before. I think this is an important finding, as society is very quick to condemn the use of technology or digitalisation over more traditional ways of doing things. Overall, I found this research project extremely exciting, and it was a great learning experience which has given me the confidence to investigate things which interest me, and argue my findings based on empirical examples. I have found since the beginning of this project, that my confidence in my own research has increased significantly and I feel ready to go on to do my masters using the skills I have acquired over the last 7 months. My suggestions from this project, if time and money allowed would be to look at my topic on a larger Irish scale and also investigate the different experience of going to a gig and listening to recorded music. A study which focused more on the identity and impression management aspects could be beneficial also.

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Appendix 1: Sample Consent Form

Thank you for agreeing to take part in my research project on how technology is changing how we access and listen to music. I am conducting this research as part of my coursework for my third year Sociology dissertation at the National University of Ireland,

Maynooth.

There are no risks involved in this research and the survey does not constitute any type of counselling or treatment. The benefit to you is that you will have access to the research when it is finished and you may use it to understand how your experience compares to others or to the wider sociology literature. All of your information will be kept confidential. I will store your responses safely. Your identity will be kept confidential and I will use a pseudonym to identify your survey data. Neither your name or your private information will appear on the final research project.

Your participation is voluntary. You are free to refuse to take part, and you may refuse to answer any questions. You may also withdraw at any time up until the work is completed.

If you have any questions you may contact me at 0860720682.

“I have read the description above and consent to participate.”

Signed _____

Date _____

Appendix 2: Sample Survey

1. Name:

Michael Keeley

2. Age:

16-20

3. Gender:

Male

4. Occupation

Unemployed

5. Can you list, in order of preference, your three favourite genres of music?

1. : Rock

2. : Hip-Hop

3. : Folk

6. How often do you listen to music?

More than 3 hrs a day

7. What is the main means by which you listen to music? (MP3 player, smartphone, radio etc.) If you use more than one method list the top three in order of importance.

1. MP3 player. 2. CD

8. Where are the places you are most likely to be listening to music? (Alone at home/travelling places, hanging with friends, at concerts/clubs etc.)

1. Alone at home 2. Hanging with friends

9. What format of music do you use? (Downloads, CDs etc.)

CDs and Downloads

10. How do you acquire your music? (Buy from a shop, Torrents etc.)

Torrents

11. What is your main reason(s) for acquiring music in this way?

Easy and cheap.

12. How often do you acquire music?

At least once a week

13. How much would you acquire in one go? Would you get a single, album, whole collections etc.?

Album

14. Give an example of a piece of music you recently acquired and explain the reasons why you did so?

All Things Must Pass- George Harrison. To listen to post-Beatles music :)

15. What genres or types of music do you generally get?

Not important, I listen to music I've never listened to before.

17. Are there any other functions of your mp3 player you feel are worth mentioning?

No

18. What sort of categories do you mainly use when listening to your music?

(Album, artist, genre etc.)

Artist

19. Do you delete old or unwanted files? Please indicate the reason for your answer.

I delete old/unwanted files because I do not have enough virtual memory to keep them.

20. Do you have music that you don't personally listen to? If yes, please explain why you retain this music in your repertoire?

No

21. What pleasures do you derive from listening to music? What does listening to music add to your life?

I am constantly looking for new sounds that I've never heard before. And music I listen to over and over again gives me a sense of nostalgia that I don't get from television or movies.

22. Use this space to add any other comments.