A Critical-Cultural Analysis Of Evolving Music Technology and Human Communication:

Should We Let The Music Do The Talking?

A Senior Project Presented to

The Faculty of the Communication Studies Department

California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Bachelor of Arts

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March 2015

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A Day in the Life

On Friday mornings, I wake-up early and go for a run. I make sure to grab my iPod Nano, swivel the track pad to my workout playlist, place it in my fitness armband, and run like the wind through my neighborhood. On this playlist is a mix of everything, from the latest Beyoncé single, to 1980's one-hit wonder, British pop band, Dexy's Midnight Runners, to Chicago, a rock band, to Ok Go. These tunes are strategically placed in an order for me to run with more speed and more stamina; these songs pump me up. I can stay even more focused on running farther without the need to fiddle with my iPod.

In another instance, I am in my room on a Friday afternoon at the end of a busy week. I make it a point to take some time to myself and relax, slipping indie folk band The Head and the Heart's *Let's Be Still* out of the record sleeve and on to the Crossley Spinnerette portable turntable my father gave me when I was twelve. I sit back, unwind and listen to the entire album straight through, getting up only to flip the A-side to the B-side. My mind drifts back to the one time I watched this band fill up an entire outdoor concert arena in Portland, Oregon; I am immediately at ease while slowly being flooded with nostalgia about the amazing performance from that specific night.

Later on in the day, I turn to my computer as I prepare to host my friends at my house for a fun, social gathering. An hour beforehand, I immediately pull up Spotify, a popular music personalization site, and quickly put together a playlist of songs I think they will enjoy and put everyone in a good mood. I conveniently drag and drop songs from the "Top Hits" section of the application along with other popular playlists, and cross my fingers for entertainment satisfaction.

The Music Medium is the Music Message

Music is ingrained in the human experience. It inspires different cultures, provides for an artistic outlet, develops meaning, guides social interactions and provides a lens through which different groups and individuals view the world. Much of what can be said about music's impact on the world would be hard to encompass in just one senior project. Music can be intentional or unintentional. Scholar Philip Auslander makes known that "the advent of recording technology brought about a crucial change in the sensory economy of music consumption that made hearing the dominant sensory mode in that subsector of cultural production" (78). The ability to playback live music resulted in new avenues for music and ideas to spread far and wide.

Music is an important mode of communication, and it communicates in several ways. One way is identifying what the direct message of a song or album conveys. In The Beatles' famous song, "Revolution," for example, it is easy infer from the lyrics, context, and composition that the song is a political response to what was happening in Vietnam at the time. From this, they hoped to evoke a change and inspire others to act. Songs and albums anywhere and everywhere are constantly dissected for the apparent or underlying message. But what about *how* the music is listened to? Is it saying something when someone is listening to the British rock band's popular hit on a record player as a part of the larger album, or on their iPod as its own separate song? What if it was discovered via Facebook as a post from a friend that reads, "you need to check this song out, it will change your life" or through a music blog with a large comment thread attached to it?

Noted media communication scholar Marshall McLuhan said it best when he famously asserted "the medium is the message." He continues on, recognizing that "the personal and social consequences of any medium -- that is, of any extension of ourselves -- result from the new scale

that is introduced into our affairs by each extension of ourselves, or by any new technology"

(McLuhan 7). McLuhan's idea of media ecology can be applied to any technology that has been

improved upon and aimed at making the lives of individuals easier. One category of mediums it

applies best to is music. This interests me, as a communication studies student and as someone

who aims to understand the role that human interaction plays in music technology. This

prompted me to ask this question: how has the relationship between human communication and

music been affected by the change in music listening mediums and emerging technology?

Preview

I propose to examine this relationship through an applied critical-cultural approach. I will

first provide a brief history of different music-listening mediums (the record player, the CD

player, the MP3, Napster, the iPod, music and radio subscription services, etc.) interwoven with

how said mediums have influenced human communication trends at different points in time. To

enhance the subject material of this project, I conducted a series of twenty qualitative interviews

with local musical artists, record store owners, radio DJs, music promoters, faculty from the Cal

Poly San Luis Obispo Music Department, and individuals with experience using customized

radio streaming sites. In these interviews, I asked participants about their experiences with

different music listening mediums, attitudes towards said mediums, and how they feel this guides

their interactions with others about music. My goal was to achieve a diverse array of

commentary and opinions about evolving music technologies in order to better understand the

topic at hand. Then, I will apply the commentary obtained from my interviews to a variety of

important ideas, principles and theories from communication studies scholars. To wrap up, I will

be analyzing overall themes from my interviews as part of the larger conjunction between

communication studies and music, and adding concluding thoughts about the future of music

mediums.

A Brief History of Music Technology

For the purpose of brevity, the music listening technologies I am interested in exploring

begin with the radio and record player, and span all the way to current day mediums, methods

and systems. This is due to the fact that the layout of music changed more dramatically in just

eighty years than it did for the rest of human existence. Though there have been many mediums

that have risen up during this extended period of time, it's safe to say that "the general historical

progression of music media has been in the direction of disappearance: the trend has been toward

smaller and smaller objects (78 rpm disc to 45 rpm disc to cassette to CD) and now to no specific

object at all" (Auslander 82). It is important to understand why these earlier physical objects

came about, and also to realize why the transition from technology to technology occurred.

Early Gadgets

Thomas Edison developed one of the earliest record players in 1877, known as the

invention of the phonograph. Many individuals of the time considered this "a breakthrough, as it

had the ability not only to record sound, but to play it back" (Bower). This was a technology that

revolutionized the way that humans were able to interact with sound. Fast-forward sixty years

and many innovations to its design, and "most households had what was then commonly known

as a record player and most recently called a turntable" (Bower). Radio had been alive and well,

and threatened the earliest forms of music innovation. With much improvement toward higher

quality fidelity, the record player became a dominant force between the 1960's and 1970's. *Gizmodo's* Adrian Covert describes the evolution of the vinyl medium:

> The advent of the 45 RPM single in the 50s is arguably the first big shift in the way popular music was consumed. Records went from longer-playing 78s and 33s, to the cheaper 45 format, which carried two or three songs on a disc, and became much more accessible for mass consumption. Soon, every big pop artist was releasing their big hits on 45s, and this became the main mode of consumption. (Covert)

The redesigning of the record player made it a staple in American society, and paralleled the commonly used medium of the radio as one of the main sources of music discovery and listening.

As a result of the shift, compact cassette tapes made their way into the technology scene in the early 1970's. Not only was it possible to buy these tapes with entire albums from artists such as Michael Jackson, Queen and Chicago, but it also became an option to purchase a simple, blank tape to record music of one's choice. This made possible the mix tape, described as a "compilation of songs often put together as a present for a loved one. The process of creating the mix tape was immortalized by Nick Hornby in his novel High Fidelity" (BBC News). This allowed for personal recording and customization, as it was possible to tape multiple songs from different artists. This medium existed and co-existed with other forms until its ultimate competitor came along: the CD. In 1982, the first compact disc was developed, and altered what music had originally been. The physical format of CD's allowed for easy transport and better economy for the record label and the artists, as "CDs were lighter than vinyl and cassettes which made them cheaper to ship. The new higher quality format also gave companies an excuse to

nearly double prices from an average of $8 for cassettes and vinyl to $15 for CDs" (Aubin).

Originally there was no way of recording music onto a blank disc, but as with everything,

someone out there realized this and created the recordable drive. CDs and cassette tapes made

music listening a portable experience for car rides, travelling long distances, walking to specific

destinations, and simply hanging around the house. Of course, there still remained a visual

component to the discs and tapes, because most included album artwork on the front, a list of

songs, lyrics, and/or artist bios.

However, a significant issue that arose with these analog instruments "is that they wore

down and degraded over time. Vinyl lost its sound quality the more you played it, scratched

easily, and storing it in the wrong place would warp its shape. Tapes would sound muffled over

time, and the actual tape could easily be spooled out from the cassette" (Covert). Ed Frawley,

owner of Central Coast Music Store in Morro Bay, CA, recalls that it would take him "3-5 hours

to make up a 90 minute cassette tape when it was more common to do so." Physical music has a

lifespan; the possibility of damaging a cherished album was a common danger. It became

challenging for one to have their musical library all in one place, and to listen to multiple artists

without constantly changing the medium.

The Rise and Fall of Napster and Web 2.0

As soon as the Internet became much more widely used in the mid-1990's, the presence

of music on the Internet also became much more of a reality. With this came the appearance of

Napster, a company known for providing ground breaking peer-to-peer music file sharing, as a

revolutionary way to obtain access to an unlimited amount of music. Napster became one of the

first mediums centered on sharing music for free; the only other mediums that really did this

beforehand were through CD burning and cassette recording, and even then, someone had to own the CD or cassette to do that in the first place. Anyone utilizing this site had access to a vast musical library, an "online database of song titles and performers, searchable by keyword" (McCourt and Burkart 339). This transformed the way people sought out music, and made assumptions about the accessibility of music. It also reconstructed the way people communicated with one another about music. However, the music giant did not become the staple it was thought it would. When it was finally shut down in 2001, due to a lawsuit from major record labels over copyright laws, people everywhere were wondering "what the new platform for music distribution will be, and what flexibility and sharing of roles between creators, publishers and consumers will be allowed?" (McCourt and Burkart 334). Companies that were established later on, like Madster and LimeWire, provided a similar function yet also ceased to exist due to legal troubles. It was now clear that accessibility came with a cost, and if artist royalties were not distributed properly, there would be consequences.

After the time that Napster was prevalent and CD's and cassettes were coming to a gradual halt, Web 2.0 was born. Web 2.0 was defined by "increased accessibility and a consumer expectation of on-demand digital delivery of the entire catalog of musical offerings, legitimately or otherwise...a flattening of what was once a distinct divide between creator and audience" (Young and Collins 341). With the development of Web 2.0, came the rise of "five different categories: blogs, social networks, content communities, forums/bulletin boards, and content aggregators" (Constantinides and Fountain 233). At this time, social media sites like Facebook and Myspace were altering the way that bands and musical artists promoted themselves and their music. Music-based blogs like *Pitchfork* and *Consequence of Sound* were asserting themselves as large web presences, and people everywhere could publicly share with the world what they were

listening to. Web 2.0 also changed the way fans devoted themselves to the music they liked, seeing that "in addition to using YouTube as a point of connection between fans, online band forums played a significant role in fan communities" (Lingel and Naaman 341). The rise of YouTube, now one of the most popular websites of all time, brought live concerts, band interviews, and song covers right to the computer screen.

Enter the MP3 player, the iPod and iTunes, which made the buying of different albums and individual songs simpler than ever. These devices and systems forever altered what the CD and cassette player tried to encompass; people all over the world suddenly regained this access to multitudes of music with few spatial constraints. Yet, unlike Napster, music not already owned on CD format could be bought through the expansive music store iTunes. Another innovation that these devices and online services brought was the ability to purchase specific songs from an album as opposed to the whole thing. Anyone with a computer could condense his or her musical libraries on to one simple utility, making the music sorting and finding process simpler than ever.

Personalization Nation

Soon after Web 2.0 went from large transition to lifestyle, radio, as one of the primary mediums of the 20th century, was sought to be modified. Online music streaming applications became available to the public, and fueled one of the largest modifications to music technology. This includes the emergence of services such as Spotify, Pandora, Last.fm, Rdio, Soundcloud, and Songza to name a few. Students at Cal Poly San Luis Obispo are utilizing streaming services and their features even moreso than other schools out there, as the university was ranked number one in the nation for campuses with the highest Spotify usage (Beauchemin). Additionally made present in the form of apps, listeners can now personalize their radio experience with either little

or no monetary fee. They can create unlimited playlists, see what others are listening to, and receive suggestions from the service itself about what music they might like based on what they already listened to. Rather than taking the time to familiarize themselves with things such as a band's history, musical artist bios, song meanings and albums as stories, listeners now have the musical world at their fingertips, and can sift through songs and information quicker than ever. The social media aspect of these sites possesses the power to influence our perceptions about any given artist, band, song, album, record label or genre. With all of this physical change over the years, then, come the differing attitudes toward what these emerging technologies are doing for the culture of music listeners.

Communication and Music Technology: An Interdependent Relationship

There are several arguments out there regarding music technology, and which medium is better for listening, discovering, posting new music and streaming. With this topic, I'm not concerned with which one is "better" or "more efficient," but rather reasons why people gravitate towards one music medium versus another, and the viewpoints of different groups of people pertaining to modern technology's place in music. Throughout the process of interviewing individuals throughout the Central Coast, several themes emerged, regardless of if the specific person preferred their beat-up old cassette player, or used their computer to strictly stream. Thus, different concepts from the communication studies discipline were illustrated. These include uses and gratifications theory, computer-mediated communication, impression management theory, commitment, convenience, and framing. In addition, much was mentioned about the so-called "Vinyl Resurgence" and the accessibility to various types of music throughout the world.

Uses and Gratifications Theory

A way to trace some of the changes that have occurred to communication and interaction habits is to understand why individuals seek out the mediums they do. Why do people use their iPod? Why are individuals attached to their record player? What makes someone reach for their computer screen to search an artist on Soundcloud?

Enter what is known as uses and gratifications theory. This notion, down to its essentials, provides that "(1) the social and psychological origins of (2) needs, which generate (3) expectations from (4) the mass media or other sources, which lead to (5) differential patterns of media exposure (or engagement in other activities), resulting in (6) need gratifications and (7) other consequences, perhaps mostly unintended ones" (Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch 510-11). There are motivations behind the choices humans make when they want to listen to music; this largely depends on several factors, such as location of the listening, what the consumer is hoping to accomplish by using the medium, what other social interactions are taking place at the same time (if any), among many others. Some gratifications obtained from music listening include a need for escape and relaxation, entertainment, arousal, learning, social affiliation or identity, to pass time, companionship, among several others. This theory is important to our understanding of music-seeking motives, as "few scholars have applied the complete uses and gratifications model to music listening or attempted to predict music-related effects like music discussion" (Belcher and Paul Haridakis 376). Though both music listening and communication studies are well-studied fields on their own, not much research has been done to indicate how their combination influences medium choice.

A big reason people utilize online streaming sites is to discover up-and-coming artists, songs, albums and overall genres of music. As mentioned with most of today's online sources,

there are free versions that only cost you and extra thirty seconds of listening to an ad from the latest product or service. Haley Brown, a DJ at Cal Poly's radio station, KCPR 91.3 FM, says that, "digital music is for when I'm trying things out. Physical music it's music that I am committed to and music I know that I will want to have in my car. Radio wasn't really something that I listened to until I became a part of a radio station." Physical music, in this case, is relied upon for listening satisfaction, when the listener knows that the album she has already invested time and money purchasing is worth hearing for a car ride.

For local singer and songwriter, Erin Teran, her gratification comes from buying and receiving new CD's and albums, her main mode of music listening and discovery. She mentions "there is a sanctity and ceremony of opening a new album. I want to know everything about it: I want to know about the songs and the artist, I want the Thank You letter that comes with buying it, and I want something tangible and to hold. I see a great value of anticipation of the album" (Teran). For many people, there is still a clear psychological gratification in actually seeing and touching what they listen to, despite large transitions and shifts from physical to digital formats. Fred Friedman, a radio DJ at KCBX 90.1, and an employee of Boo Boo Records in San Luis Obispo, mentions how these gratifications have possibly changed over time. From his experience, he thinks that over time, "people interact differently with music. In the past, I would buy an album, go home and listen to all of it. I think nowadays a lot of people don't do that; it's more in the background (Friedman). As he observes, music serves as a companion for times when maybe no one else is around or there is a need for noise in the background.

It's important to realize that, while there are large trends that generally point to why humans gravitate to Spotify versus vinyl, for example, personal motivations should always be accounted for. There might be specific reasons for the need to listen to the radio instead of an

iPod, and vice versa. Still, uses and gratifications is one of the most useful ways to understand why technology has changed. Music satiates people's need for support, empathy, entertainment and learning, among others. But it also has also broadened. As Fred Friedman put it, we sometimes now seek out music as a companion now, something that might not have necessarily been as common as it was fifty years ago. Simply restated, they way we use music and they reasons why we use music have transitioned as a culture over the years.

CMC and IMT

One thing that radio, the record player, the CD, the cassette and the iPod do not have in common with current music technology is the ability for users to see what the world around them is listening to. This translates into two concepts that play a huge part of the communication studies discipline: computer-mediated communication (CMC) and impression management theory (IMT). Known as CMC for short, academic Joseph P. Walther states that "early CMC research frequently focused on how the medium affects group discussions and decision-making. As the field evolved, it has frequently retained its focus on virtual groups in organizations, education, and other domains" (226). Increased social media usage, as described with Web 2.0, is a significant driver of this idea. Many personalization sites have features that function as a form of social media; users can share, rate, and create. On sites such as Spotify and Soundcloud, for example, individuals can see in real-time what their friends around them are listening to and what playlists they have "favorite'd" or created, via the "follow" feature.

As a former music and arts education administrator for Cal Poly's Performing Arts Center, Melody Klemin views this trend toward more and more social media as beneficial. Klemin, herself, is an artist that plays for local venues in San Luis Obispo, and she expresses that

"individuals are not only able to listen to what they already know and like instantly, but they are encouraged to explore new music based on what they currently listen to and what their friends or connections are listening to. As an independent artist, this is incredible news because it means my music now lives in a global forum." Though Melody is unsigned, she can share her music with her close friends and family, as well as with the rest of the world, and can encourage others to share and promote her music. With the aforementioned "follow" feature, the user can also stay up to date with what their best-loved artists are posting and, in turn, what they are listening to. Before the Internet and online streaming, this was almost unheard of. Colin Webster, one of the founders of the Cal Poly Music Production Union, enjoys the ability to follow certain artists, "because you feel like you are supporting something much more tangible; you can see their updates in real time and keep connected with their fan bases better." It is essentially the same as having any other "friend" through a social media site, thus changing the relationship between content seeker and content provider. Users have the potential to feel a close bond with artists, decreasing the gap between the general population and well-known names in music.

The way users connect over social media also plays a lot into the overall music experience. Impression management theory is defined by communication academics Mark R. Leary and Robin M. Kowalski as "the process by which individuals attempt to control the impressions others form of them" (34). Hyun Ju Jeong and Mira Lee go on to say "impression management theory considers publicity an important situation al element that increases individual motivation to manage the impressions" (440). It is natural that over the Internet, the way messages are transmitted has the potential to be much more crafted and planned out than via face-to-face communication. Colin Webster explains that, "it's a lot more social, their stressing the aspect that you can share, and make playlists and communicate with each other, and that used

to not be as big of a deal. A lot more is becoming oriented towards festivals and it's not

necessarily good for the artist." It gives people the chance to make public their current

preferences, as well as the opportunity to be influenced by those around them.

Indeed, the development of the music festival has dictated much of what music becomes

"popular" in this day in age. These weekend-long and even four-day events bring together some

of the largest musical talent of the day, along with many performers that are unsigned or just

about to reach their big break to fame. Haley Brown asserts that music has become a social

event. In large part, large-scale music festivals have contributed to this:

> Spotify and Soundcloud have socialized music a lot. This is not just from modern
>
> music technologies, but also social media and the way information is
>
> disseminated in general. It has changed the culture of music in an odd way. Also
>
> the advent of large scale music festivals has done this as well, it has made music a
>
> social thing. Coachella sold out 100,000 tickets three years in a row before a
>
> lineup was even announced. This to me says that music, in that sense, and in the
>
> way people view music, has a lot to do with these social aspects. You look cool,
>
> you go for the experience, you go with your friends, but I wouldn't necessarily
>
> say that's a music experience. (Brown)

When one shares that they have purchased a ticket to a large music festival like Lollapalooza,

Coachella or South by Southwest, they are purchasing more than just the variety of live music;

they are purchasing anticipation of and participation in of a huge social arena. According to a

study done by Eventbrite, "17% of all positive conversation specifically commented on the

festival experience. When people do discuss the artists performing, they are four times more

likely to discuss the lineup holistically as compared to calling out a specific artist or

performance" (3). This is not to say that the music component of these festivals have been lost completely, but functions more of an indicator that much of what these large musical events have become are more geared toward communicating about this big social event itself rather than the content.

Monte Schaller, who is the general manager of local concert venue SLO Brewing Co., mentions, "back in the 60's or 70's you might have had to borrow a record from a friend to get exposed to a new band, and there was a very social aspect to sharing the music which I think is very cool in a romantic way, which I think is gone now and we are missing that." Though there's plenty of commentary currently out there about different artists and albums, it was more likely for music to be talked about in a face-to-face environment when digital mediums were not prevalent. People would get together and pine over the latest release, listen to it together, and then talk about how much they did or did not like it. Interpersonal interaction also fostered music discovery. This accounts for the other side of the much stronger argument that personalization sites do not encourage communicative habits that are as beneficial as analog mediums. All of it is done through a computer, so where's the rich conversation about the artist background or the album artwork? You can see what people are listening to and what large scale festivals they are attending, so there isn't much of a need to address it in person.

Either way, the consistently upward-moving trend of music as social media continues to rise. People will obviously continue to converse about songs, artists, and musical events, but the degree to which that happens face-to-face might shift throughout gradual periods of time. Social media has revolutionized the relationship society has with their music and music providers, and has become a part of the way this generation seeks out information. This online shift benefits places like SLO Brewing Co., who can get details about their concerts and events out to the

public much more rapidly. Thus, playing into how simplicity shapes interaction with music devices.

Convenience

  A consistent progression seen not just with music technologies but also with technology in general is the convenience of being able to access more and more information. A present-day meaning of the concept of convenience denotes "a sense of suitability, but radically redefines its connotations. Now, something is convenient only if it is suitable to one's personal comfort or ease" (Slack and Wise 29). The record player took what was being played over the air, and brought it into the homes of listeners everywhere. The CD and the cassette player made listening suitable for on-the-go entertainment. The MP3 player and the iPod took these devices and made them even more portable and customizable. Fast-forward to present day technology, and the world of music is now at the grasp of anyone with Internet access. Each medium came about because the creators of each new device took an aspect of its usage, and made it accommodate even more so to the human condition. When asked how technology has changed the way that people interact with music, Cal Poly Music Department professor, Kenneth Habib, replied with, "it's no longer how technology has changed the way humans interact and seek out music, it's more of a question of how *hasn't* technology changed this interaction." When it seems like a medium is perfect and provides optimal satisfaction, it is overtaken by new improvement or solution altogether.

  A lot of this has to do with identifying and surpassing limits. Scholar Thomas F. Tierney asserts that "the desire to overcome bodily limits has taken two forms primarily: the desire to overcome the limits of space and the desire to overcome the limits of time" (Qtd. in Slack and

Wise 31)**.** An argument made for the convenience of modern streaming technology is that it can easily connect music lovers to new forms of music they might not otherwise have been able to seek out. David Arndt is the president of SLOfolks, a non-profit organization on the Central Coast that provides concerts of all different types of folk and traditional music. For his personal listening, he feels that "Pandora has been a great boon to listening to music because I can select an artist, or two, or three, or four and have them blend and make a concert. It's nice because it will bring in something to me that I haven't heard before that I don't own." Arndt does not have to take as much time to discover new artists, and puts in as little effort as typing in the name of the artist he wants other music suggestions for. In another instance, Vanessa Pham utilizes TuneIn Radio, a popular radio application. This allows her to "stream all different radio stations from all around the world. I love tuning into 'Triple J', which is an Australian radio station. I enjoy local Australian artists, but unfortunately, there's not as much globalization as far as streaming music from Australia to the U.S. It's helped me so much to discover artists while I'm driving" (Pham). We see then that with the creation of apps that transcend time and space, comes the ability to stay in the know about music being created and played throughout the world. Rather than actively digging for it through a various mediums, new music of an extremely specific genre can be brought straight to the comforts of a car radio.

But with the surpassed limits of sites like Spotify and Soundcloud, does that necessarily better the experience for everyone? Malik Miko Thorne, buyer and manager of Boo Boo Records in Downtown San Luis Obispo, says that this idea is a Catch 22. He remarks that, "from a band's perspective, you can get your music out there so much easier but because of that, it's harder to be heard because there's a flood of people that are pushing their music out there" (Thorne)**.** Not only does the listener have the opportunity to be exposed to a multitude of music, but also just as

everything has a cause and effect, the choices of the listener and user have a direct outcome on

the band. Caitlin Gutenberger, of L.A.-based indie band Two Sheds, explains a perfect example

of this. She feels that the convenience of it all has taken some opposite effects:

> It's perceived value has gone down. I think many consumers have come to believe
>
> that music is something that they should get for cheap or nearly free and in great
>
> quantities, and that attitude and business model are creating a really desperate
>
> financial situation for the artists creating the content. I played a show two nights
>
> ago and a very nice man came up to me to tell me how much he enjoyed our
>
> performance. He was really excited to tell me he was now following me on
>
> Spotify. He meant it as a compliment, but inside I was thinking, 'Buy my album
>
> dude!' (Gutenberger)

While convenient for some, streaming sites do hold the potential to impact the artist negatively,

depending on if their motivations for using these sites align with what they want their fans to get

out of it. It also might adversely affect the artists and their profits. This specific situation of the

Two Sheds fan is represented by what Slack and Wise iterate in their work. They maintain that

"convenience becomes a problem when the value of convenience and the desire to achieve

convenience come to dominate technological culture" (Slack and Wise 28). When the notion of

convenience becomes the major reason for usage, this begins to eliminate what the purpose of

using the medium is in the first place: to explore the world of music.

Commitment

The flip side of Slack and Wise's notion of convenience is the idea of commitment.

When one uses a specific technology to simplify life, how does that change the devotion to the

content, or the relationships that involve that content? New York Times writer Dan Brooks articulates this, in saying "if you liked the New York City squat-punk band Choking Victim, it was a sign you had flipped through enough records and endured enough party conversations to hear about Choking Victim. The bands you listened to conveyed not just the particular elements of culture you liked but also how much you cared about culture itself." He goes on to say that when artist enjoyment "became as easy as typing its name into a search box, particular musical tastes lost their function as signifiers of commitment. What you listened to ceased to be a measure of how much you cared and became a mere list of what you liked" (Brooks). Commitment is, then, defined as the depth of a connection one feels to an artist, including their extensive knowledge of songs, artist background and fan culture. It drives the amount of time and investment one places into understanding and supporting the artists, through CD's and albums owned (digital or physical), concert attendance, money spent on merch, etc.

Opinions toward commitment with today's technology vary. Vanessa Pham, media manager for Pickathon Music Festival in Happy Valley Oregon, says "it's interesting for me because I feel like I can listen to more artists but I feel like I don't take a lot of time to listen carefully to each artist as I did in the past when I didn't use these technologies. More technologies increase my general knowledge but not my engagement with each artist." As demonstrated by the idea of convenience, modern gadgets put the world at individuals' fingertips. However, an increased breadth of information does not necessarily equate to an increase in depth of exploring individual performers. As a member of the band, Proxima Parada, Andy Olson's views contribute to this idea of quickly moving on to the next, new thing. He notices "that much of what people discover and like, they'll listen to for a while, but sort of forget about it when more new music comes around. It's almost like music is becoming more

disposable or something. The whole 'monthly subscription for access to everything' paradigm seems to feed into that" (Olson). New music, then, has the tendency to get pushed to the side once something newer comes along; this is a common theme of technology replacements as well. This trend is obviously not true for all users of newer technology, but it has become a significant trend with the development and higher usage of the Internet.

In reference to the ways current technology has shaped the listener experience, Haley Brown feels that "it doesn't lessen it, but it does water down what it means to be committed to an artist. It has brought on a flock of new listeners that haven't had to commit to anything. They subscribe to a million things that are free, and it's a strange cultural shift. I've seen the change in me too...you don't have as much time to labor over something." This is not necessarily something that is a negative to the music industry, but rather modern instruments are the result of a "big transitional period since CD's became out of style. There was a lot more loyalty to a specific artist, nowadays you have access to anyone who has a computer and can get their name out there" (Webster). This works with regard to the notion of convenience, but does not necessarily fuel the amount of commitment one might have for a band or individual singer.

Even though there is a significant population that feels artist commitment and involvement has gone down with the development of music personalization sites and applications, there remain others who take a different perspective. Schaller at SLO Brewing Co. benefits from this shift, saying that "the way the music gets passed down is a little less intimate, but it definitely happens faster and at a broader range. So, from a musician's standpoint or a music venue's standpoint I think it works in our favor." SLO Brew makes use of line-ups from mentioned festivals (such as Coachella or Outside Lands) to scout for potential entertainment. With more information and more artists appearing on the scene, come more opportunities for the

venue to seek out new artists and sort through more talent to come to their venue. Though you might not be absorbing the content as thoroughly, it works for them because they benefit from the quick discovery of up-and-coming artists.

We see here that with the change in the way people communicate over the Internet and with each other, also comes a change in the way humans define words. Commitment to one person might mean that they have read the artist bio on Spotify and know a good amount of their songs and album titles, while other people see it as being a die-hard fan, going to every concert, knowing facts about the artist that are not common knowledge. There is no right or wrong answer as to what medium facilitates this commitment better or worse. Rather, it is important for the user to come up with their own definition of commitment, and adhere their music medium usage to the amount they feel is appropriate for artist devotion.

Framing

Early on, when the record player and radio were the most prevalent sources of listening and discovery, music popularity was tracked by charts such as the Billboard Top 100 developed in the mid-1930's, which provided people everywhere with information about what the best-selling recordings were, as well as what was being played most on jukeboxes and by DJ's throughout the country. Similarly, there was also American Top 40 starting in 1970, which aired on the radio and provided a similar function. Fast forward a little over ten years, and MTV and VH1, both prominent television networks centered on music, made their way onto the scene. Programs like *TRL* (*Total Request Live*) and *Top 20 Video Countdown* dictated what was at the top of the charts and listened to by people who kept up with big-named artists. Though now these

channels are much more reality-TV and entertainment-based, they still possess a few music programs.

Today, with personalized streaming sites, charts from user data are available to see what people using those specific sites are listening to, and similarly, what some of the best-selling singles, albums and artists are. Framing is a concept widely referred to within communication studies. Framing is viewed as "patterns of interpretation through which people classify information in order to handle it efficiently. Framing emphasizes specific aspects of reality" (Scheufele 402). Though typically analyzed with events that happen in the media, I argue that framing can be applied to the realm of music and technology. Music suggestions shape what audiences are listening to, or not listening to, and ultimately music as a culture.

Lou Mars, a local musician who is currently on the Top 100 Indie Chart, is constantly seeking new information in regards to what is being listened to most. He conveys that his "number one choice is Spotify right now because they don't lock out new performers. It's very important for me to know what is next, not what has already arrived. Unlike Pandora, Spotify has much more of an open entry…I like their Indie Top 100 Charts. College has always been up to date on music trends, so I pay close attention to what is happening on those charts" (Mars). By having this information readily available to him through this site, Lou is able to get a feel for what the trends are, and see how his band, Lou Mars Band, compares with other artists out there. In this way, top playlists and user data functions in a way to help musicians. Music promoters like Monte Schaller and Vanessa Pham, as well, use popular charts and suggestions in this way, helping them to scout for effective ways to market their business and, in Monte's case, search for talent to play at his venue.

Malik Miko Thorne says these sites are "curated a little differently, which I think could be a bit of a problem depending on where you pick up your music. With a radio DJ, that's what their job is and you get a bit of their individual taste, versus with Spotify, you get an algorithm." Both provide updates of what is being listened to, but one form is a little less personal than the other. The argument here can be made that society is losing its value of personal preference and becoming a lot more centered on a formula for satisfaction. Craig Russell, another professor of Cal Poly's Music department, iterates that "students will send me links to new artists, so I like being introduced to new music or ushered into a new direction. But I don't use automated sites that have an algorithm that tells me that because I like X, that means I will like Y." While recommendations and charts do wonders for artists like Lou Mars, they do not work in favor of those who want personal opinions from the DJ's and music aficionados themselves.

Framing is a useful concept to apply to the understanding of music and technology. For one, it simplifies the task of tracing trends throughout music history. What was popular in the 1940's is certainly different from what is popular now. On the other hand, the way people access discover this music can also be traced, further explaining why certain mediums were dominant at different points in time. Sites like Spotify and Pandora provide instant recommendations if you are listening to their radio feature, a possible factor in the decreased commitment some feel they have to their music.

A Vinyl Resurrection?

Resurrection of vinyl, resurgence of vinyl, vinyl revival. There are several phrases out there that describe the supposed comeback of and increase in vinyl sales. An article from www.digitaltrends.com reported that in 2012, "vinyl record album sales in the United States

jumped 17.7 percent to almost 4.55 million units. At the same time, CD sales continued to

decline, dropping 13.5 percent from 2011 to 193.4 million units" (White). Though it is

undeniable that we have moved into the digital era, this shows a clear spike in the revisited

popularity of the physical album. Fred Friedman comments on this revival, and agrees that "vinyl

has definitely come back, and the sales of vinyl have increased considerably. I always say there

is well recorded vinyl and poorly recorded vinyl, and there's well recorded CDs and poorly

recorded CDs." Certain vinyl records that stand the test of time sound just as good digitally as

they do on the turntable, a possibility for this increase.

A recent article from *Billboard Magazine* in December 2014 found that "people that buy

vinyl are more likely than the average music consumer to listen to Internet radio, follow artists

on social media and stream on-demand music. They're heavy music consumers that need

something beyond digital files or CDs" (Peoples and Crupnick). Perhaps the vast world of online

music streaming has become too much for music lovers, and the kinship between music and fan

is desired again. Haley Brown seems to think that "a lot of the resurgence of vinyl has come

from this nostalgia uprising, and you see that in artists like Lana Del Rey and the Arctic

Monkeys. It also has a lot to do with this place where suddenly being into music is 'cool' and by

buying vinyl, it shows 'I get to own and hold my cool'." This revisits the idea of impression

management theory in a different way. Seeing that vinyl sales have spiked considerably, it's only

natural that the medium itself becomes one of important social value. Members of society need

to have the most recent technology, even if that means reviving something that many thought

would become obsolete. Just as people need to publicly comment on the lineup for large music

concerts or their ticket purchase, people also need to share about their most recently acquired

album. Artists also begin to release their singles, EPs or LPs on vinyl, immediately driving the popularity of the turntable itself.

The way an album is structured also plays a role in the way contrasting mediums are utilized. As mediums have become more concise and accessible, artists have released more and more singles as opposed to albums with multiple songs, and possibly the reason why record sales have spiked in recent years. A way that several artists organize their songs is either in the format of several songs that flow into one overarching theme. This is known as the concept album. Malik Miko Thorne explains "from an artist's perspective, there are people who make great records. Beck's record won Album of the Year, it was a cohesive album from start to finish. To try to chop that up on something like Spotify, you might not get what this band created. That's why we have these records that stand the test of time." He argues that taking only a piece from the puzzle does not give you the whole picture, in a sense. Personalization sites such as Spotify, Soundcloud and Last.fm give users the ability to craft playlists with single songs, and much less of the focus has gone away from the album itself.

Jeremiah Highhouse, the owner of Morro Bay's Vinyl Isle Record Store, has witnessed firsthand this comeback of vinyl, almost as a backwards effect for some of his customers:

> I'll get a lot of kids that come in who have only ever heard music on an MP3 player so they have never actually felt vinyl. They've only ever seen the little album artwork on the screen, and all of the sudden, they can see it and open up the jacket and read the lyrics. I think that's huge because you can touch it, and feel it, and turn it, and it makes a big difference. It's exciting for me to see young kids who have never experienced this falling in love with it for the first time. (Highhouse)

Whereas the trend in the past seemed to have been many people making the gradual transition from physical sources of music to digital platforms, a new generation of listeners are springing up that are making the transition from digital back to physical sources.

Analysis

The commentary that I received through each of my twenty interviews is largely illustrative of much of the research that is out there pertaining to communication studies and music technology. San Luis Obispo is only one small section of America, as a part of a much larger world, but there is something to be said for gaining a local perspective on transitions that affect the rest of the world.

As mentioned with CMC and IMT, one big influence is certainly music festivals and large-scale concert events. When I was first considering technologies to research and interview about, music festivals were not something that I considered to be of the same nature as say, an MP3 player or CD. They are not physical objects that individuals utilize regularly. But these full-on musical conglomerations of people, talent and equipment largely influence and redirect the landscape of popular music. This ties in the idea of "thingness." Thingness is a concept that argues "to focus on bounded artifacts -- on thingness -- is to deflect understanding from the ongoing energies, activities, relations, interpenetrations and investments within which these things appear, take flight and have effects" (Slack and Wise 97). This suggests that, though these technologies do play a role in a physical sense, the evolution of culture as a whole matters as much as the developments of these things themselves. Things like the record player, the CD and Pandora hold meaning outside of their actual intended function, and have a lot to do with other events happening outside of the music realm. Festivals are mainly about the people and

experience of seeing multiple artists on several stages in a short period of time, and as shown in festival research, have been a huge factor responsible for shifts in music trends and tastes.

Their attitudes toward different mediums were clearly diverse. But for the most part, it was widely agreed that today's apps and personalization sites increased convenience and accessibility for the user, yet did not hold as much potential in terms of commitment to music source and artist. The social setting of the record player and CD focused more on a community aspect of listening, and online streaming encouraged a much more independent-user focus, and in large part, much more singles-centered.

The resurgence of vinyl was brought up in almost every interview I conducted, but varied in the extent that it was an important part of each interviewee's life. Haley Brown and Colin Webster indicated that vinyl products have become relevant again for specific reasons, for social capital and a need for the gratification of physical music. Some people like Jeremiah Highhouse and Malik Miko Thorne, who encounter vinyl products daily, argue that vinyl never went out of style in the first place. At the same time, there are people like Melody Klemin and Vanessa Pham who are strictly digital yet have mixed feelings about how vinyl stacks up in this very information-heavy world. Again, this becomes a matter of perspective and experience. As reaffirmed throughout this project, different musical minds and artists see modern mediums as both a blessing and a curse for different settings.

Concluding Thoughts and a Look to the Future

Through all this change and development, where does humanity stand and what will ultimately be next? This is a question not just applied to the music scene, but really any field in general. But with regard to music, Lou Mars thinks "there will be another medium just like there

always is. We don't know what it is yet, but it's definitely on the horizon." The reason why new technologies are continuously emerging on the scene is simple: limits are redefined. Slack and Wise posit that "the interesting thing about limits is that once you conceive of the body as having limits to overcome, you are doomed to never be able to overcome the next. Why? Because you once you overcome a limit, you automatically establish a new limit. A limit, like the horizon, always lurks out there before you, no matter what you accomplish." As long as innovation is continued to be encouraged and resources are plentiful, limits will continue to be surpassed and set again. New generations will be referring to Spotify and Last.fm much like young people today who primarily seek out digital sites talk about vinyl records, radio and eight tracks.

New technological developments are being made, and more limits are getting redefined right here in the San Luis Obispo community. Sean Anderson aims to make the next best thing to forever alter the music listening and discovery undertaking. He and two Cal Poly students are well on their way to spreading the next new medium: Streamus. According to the front page of its website, Streamus is "a Google Chrome extension that makes streaming YouTube refreshingly easy...adding videos to Streamus makes bookmarking YouTube obsolete. Your video collections are accessible from any PC." This puts musical artists, signed and unsigned, everywhere, at the quick and easy access of anyone with the application. When asked about if today's technology works or doesn't work for the music listener, he thinks "change is inevitable. When people start fighting back and say they don't like it because it's different from what happened before, that is them not wanting to adapt their business model in finding a way to make things work for how the world is going today" (Anderson). He asserts that the world will continue to change no matter what, and to be successful, creators and users must accommodate to the changes of their society.

As a student of communication studies, I take on the perspective that technology reflects culture just as much as culture reflects technology. Technological inventions have a direct effect on some aspect of the human experience, yet humans invent technology to better accommodate their dynamic lifestyles. This is not at all to say devices like the record player or the cassette tape are becoming completely irrelevant. I love my Soundcloud account just as much as I love my Crossley Spinnerette portable turntable, but I will turn to each in different instances. It is just as crucial to hold on to staples of the past as it is to look toward developments of the future.

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Appendix

Interview Questions

Interviews were conducted in person, over the phone and via email. Each were asked the same five questions:

1. What role does music play in your life?

2. What is your preferred music listening medium? In other words, how do you usually listen to music?

3. Do you use any music personalization websites (i.e. Spotify, Pandora, Songza, etc.) to listen to music, find music, and post music or to network? If so, how has it affected your music listening habits?

4. How do you think modern music technologies have changed the way individuals interact with music?

5. Do you think modern personalization sites improve or lessen the music listening experience? Why or why not?

Each interviewee filled out a consent form prior to the interview, making sure they know their name will be used along with their commentary. If interviewees do not feel comfortable associating themselves with the answers they are giving and do not sign the consent form, their names will not be mentioned or cited in my paper.

Research Protocol

Informed Consent Form

INFORMED CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH PROJECT, "*A Critical-Cultural Analysis of Evolving Music Technology and Human Communication: Should We Let The Music Do The Talking?"*

Senior Project research on music technology and human communication is being conducted by Erin Warren, a student in the Department of Communication Studies at Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo, under the supervision of Dr. Jnan Blau. The purpose of the study is to discover the communication principles at work in assessing how emerging technologies in music have affected the way individuals listen to, seek out, and interact about music.

You are being asked to take part in this study by briefly answering a few simple, qualitative questions about your music listening methods, and opinions about the effectiveness of different modern day technologies. Your participation will take approximately 10 minutes. Please be aware that you are not required to participate in this research and you may discontinue your participation at any time without penalty. You also do not have to answer any questions you choose not to answer.

There are no risks anticipated with your participation in this research. Your confidentiality will be protected, as you will have the option to have your name included with this Senior Project, as a part of the project itself, and on the Works Cited page for sources. If you wish to have your name incorporated into the paper along with your responses, you will initial next to "I consent to having my name quoted as a source for this project in association with my provided commentary." If you do not wish to have your name incorporated into the paper along with your responses, you can initial next to "I do not consent to having my name quoted as a source for this project in association with my provided commentary. My name will not be used." Potential benefits associated with this project include your name associated with commentary in the project visible to the Cal Poly community, and providing rich answers that will shed light on communication principles at work with music technology.

If you have questions regarding this interview or would like to be informed of the results when the project is completed, please feel free to contact Erin Warren at (818) 336-8020, or Dr. Jnan Blau at (805) 756-2510. If you have concerns regarding the manner in which the study is conducted, you may contact Dr. Steve Davis, Chair of the Cal Poly Human Subjects Committee, at (805) 756-2754, sdavis@calpoly.edu, or Dr. Dean Wendt, Dean of Research, at (805) 756-1508, dwendt@calpoly.edu.

If you agree to voluntarily participate in this research project as described, please indicate your agreement by signing below. Please keep one copy of this form for your reference, and thank you for your participation in this research.

_____ _____
        Signature of Volunteer   Date

_____ _____
        Signature of Researcher   Date

Initial next to one of the following items regarding the confidentiality of your interview responses:

____ I consent to having my name quoted as a source for this project in association with my provided commentary.

____ I do not consent to having my name quoted as a source for this project in association with my provided commentary. My name will not be used.