

# **From independent record shops to the Internet:**

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**Recorded music communities in the Digital Age**

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**Lewis Tennant  
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# Abstract

The Internet has altered notions of space and place. This study examines these changes against the backdrop of the independent brick-and-mortar record shop, a location where the transforming power of music has traditionally brought people together. Ideas, opinions, and histories are shared. Musical projects and friendships are formed; the art form of music critiqued. Globally these stores have decreased in numbers significantly since the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, particularly affected by the 'post-Napster' growth in the online acquisition of music and other media forms. In considering the substantial decline in numbers of brick-and-mortar independent record shops, and in turn what these spaces offer the people who frequent them, this thesis questions how recent technological changes have affected the social interactions of communities that are based on recorded music, also exploring the changing ways in which people engage with recorded music in their everyday lives. In doing so, this study investigates how communities manifest themselves on the Internet, examining in turn what aspects of physical spaces and face-to-face interaction may not be replicated in the online environment. In a series of focus groups and semi-structured interviews, notions of 'space(s)' and 'place(s)' for modern music communities and subcultures are examined in the context of decreasing numbers of physical spaces to congregate. Participants describe a media acquisition and communication environment far more flexible and free than that of the past, though also identify that contemporary interactions with others seem to lack a depth of connection. The study then suggests that the independent brick-and-mortar record shop, or some variation of it, might continue to serve an important function as a space that encourages local face-to-face interactions in an increasingly globally networked world.

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## **Attestation of Authorship**

“I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institute of higher learning”.

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# 1 Introduction and Overview

## 1.1 ‘Background to the research project’: Situating the researcher in the study

The independent brick-and-mortar record shop is a space where the transforming power of music brings people together. Ideas, opinions, and histories are shared. Musical projects and friendships are formed, the art form of music critiqued. Globally, these shops have fallen on hard times, with over 3000 independent record shops having closed in the US for the decade through to 2008 (Toller, 2008), and 90 % having closed in the UK as of 2015 (Ediriwira, 2015). Over the last twenty years in New Zealand the number of specialty music stores has fallen from approximately 300 to about 30 (Rice & Stiven, 2015). Despite these changes, record shops have not ‘died’ as Harris (2003) reported, though their numbers have declined significantly (Benzine & Dosanjh, 2007; Campbell, 2010; McIntyre, 2009; Rice & Stiven, 2015). A combination of a rise in online music retailers, online music piracy, major recording labels trending toward backing blockbuster pop stars rather than developing and nurturing a wider range of artists’ careers, and ‘big box’ retailers such as The Warehouse offering physical music sales for prices smaller retailers cannot compete with, has led to a climate where survival is difficult for independent retailers. It happened to the shop I grew up with in New Zealand, The Soul Mine in Wellington, New Zealand, which shut its doors after over twenty years of trading in 2005. The owner of this shop’s knowledge and passion for his wares (as well as his patience for a ten-year-old boy with a lot of questions) set me off on a lifetime of collecting and critiquing music, also leading to my forming long-term and meaningful friendships with fellow customers and staff of shops I would meet along the way.

## 1.2 ‘On studying recorded music communities’: The purpose and scope of this research

In day-to-day conversation there is a tendency to refer to the sound recording companies who develop and market artists and their cultural products as ‘the music industry’. These companies have historically played a major role in the sector, though the music industry as a whole consists of a range of other sub-sectors. The most significant of these are music

publishing, the music press, music hardware production and sales (including musical instruments), tours and concerts, merchandising, royalties and rights, and recorded music retail (Shuker, 2013). The physical outlets used for the latter are colloquially referred to as 'record shops', despite vinyl records no longer being the primary format for recorded music. These retail spaces have traditionally sold physical manifestations of recorded music, as well as associated artist merchandising and music accessories.

Music retailers have often been absent from most histories of music, and merely mentioned in passing accounts of production and consumption (Fox, 2005). For many store patrons, independent brick-and-mortar record shops provide a socially and culturally relevant retail process, whereby meaningful personal mythologies are constructed in a self-developmental, transactional event, whilst being 'out in the world' (McIntyre, 2009). Record shops can offer a supporting space for different subcultures and audiences, from music collectors in general to fans of specific music genres, providing a meeting space for communities with specific sets of values and interests. Respondents to McIntyre's (2009) study of diminishing active and creative retail spaces suggested frequenting brick-and-mortar independent record shops offered capriciousness in terms of what they might find and who they might meet, refuge from other parts of their lives, credibility in terms of the knowledge of staff and other customers, chance in terms of listening to music or being offered recommendations, and iconography or mythology in regard to musical and cultural history as well as the act of shopping in these stores.

How people shop has considerably changed over the past few decades. This is significant as the changing face of retail potentially affects the community-building aspects of shopping for goods and services in smaller physical environments near to our homes. The rise and success of 'cathedrals of consumption' (Ritzer, 2009) such as The Warehouse in New Zealand and Walmart in the US has had implications for smaller localised retailers and the communities they reside in, both economically and socially. Increasingly individuals who might have opened independent 'neighbourhood' businesses in the past work in the retail outlets of large corporations that now service these same areas, and profits do not always end up back in the community where goods and services are sold. Online retailing has provided an alternative to shopping in traditional stores, with many small traditional



retailers unable to compete with the range of products and pricing points offered by e-commerce stores. In the case of media products like music, online piracy has had a further substantial effect on revenue for retailers. Retail is now arguably less personalised, not only in the transaction process, but in the wider context of smaller localised retailers providing a 'hub' for the communities they reside in.

This subject is significant in light of recent considerable changes in mediated communication, and how this has affected human interaction. Where recorded music fans once predominantly interacted locally in physical spaces like the record shop, they do more so now online, often in private, and are able to connect with a far larger number of fellow audience members globally. In evaluating these changes, where 'screen time' increasingly replaces face-to-face interactions, and communication is no longer limited by geography, this thesis seeks to ascertain how communities that are based on recorded music now function in this environment, and investigates how these changes affect both interpersonal interactions and notions of community.

In examining the social interactions of communities that are based on recorded music, as well as the changing ways in which people acquire and consume music, the role of technology is of immense significance. Assessing people's engagement with changing technologies and products is central to the focus of this research, from the recorded music that the communities examined are based on, to the global system of interconnected mainframe, personal, and wireless computer networks through which many people now interact. Therefore this thesis situates the changing patterns of recorded music communities' interactions within a narrative of rapid technological and industrial change. The beginning of mainstream Internet connectivity and usage fairly well coincides with the release of pioneering music downloading software Napster, around the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Napster's inception spelled the weakening of nearly a century of corporate dominance of the music industry, from production to distribution to consumption. The original service, and the highly prevalent Internet-based music piracy that has followed, have resulted in a substantial drop in revenue throughout the industry. Napster's arrival also sparked the beginning of mass interaction online, in part shaping our current communication environment.

Digitalisation has significantly transformed the music industry. New technologies have altered how music is produced, distributed, and promoted. Artists and producers, as well as audience members, can now choose to bypass record companies if they wish. This has led to significant disintermediation of the music industry, where a number of middlepersons traditionally involved in the business process of connecting artists and audiences are often now no longer needed. In short, there has been a significant shift in long-held power structures within the music industry, and artists and audience members can now assume a more active role in the production, distribution, and consumption process. Audience members are now accustomed to being able to access and consume a greater range of music than ever before, and this music is able to be accessed across a wide range of devices not restricted to specific locations. In light of these changes, this thesis examines not only how interpersonal interaction is changing, but also how people's interaction with recorded music itself is transforming, and what implications this has both for the commodity and the expectations of the audience who engage with it.

Finally, this thesis assesses the long-term survival and relevance of the brick-and-mortar independent record shop. In an environment where elements of what these stores offer patrons might be replicated online, and alternative physical spaces might also satisfy the community-building characteristics brick-and-mortar stores have traditionally satisfied, this thesis questions how stores might adapt or reinvent themselves in order to stay trading. This thesis also explores what social aspects of the store environment and face-to-face communication in general are difficult to emulate elsewhere, examining in turn how communities based on recorded music and social interactions in general manifest themselves in the online environment, before finally exploring the relevance of these spaces in contemporary society.

In summary, by way of examining the substantial decline in numbers of brick-and-mortar independent record shops, and in turn what these spaces offer the people who frequent them, this thesis questions how recent technological changes have affected the social interactions of communities that are based on recorded music, also assessing the changing ways in which people engage with recorded music in their everyday lives. In doing so this study explores how communities manifest themselves on the Internet, examining in turn

what aspects of physical spaces and face-to-face interaction cannot be replicated in the online environment. The study then questions the long-term survival of brick-and-mortar record shops, investigating whether these unique spaces are ultimately still relevant in the contemporary media and communication environment. This study also tracks the significant role technological change plays throughout the main narrative of this work, as well as the significance of the artefacts central to the existence of the communities discussed. As a result, the changing ways in which relevant stakeholders interact with recorded music and each other is scrutinised, as are the changing expectations and values audience members attach to music in their lives.

As of 2015, there has been little academic writing on the social, community, and cultural implications presented by the declining number of independent retailers trading from ‘traditional’ (physical) outlets. In regard to the demise of brick-and-mortar independent record shops in particular, though journalists have written articles (APN News & Media, 2008; Benzine & Dosanjh, 2007; Boehlert, 2000; Bowers & Treanor, 2013; Campbell, 2010; Davie, 2013; Calamar, 2012 #332; Gilbert, n.d.; Grow, 2013; Harris, 2003; Jones, 2009; Matador Records, 2011b; Reid, n.d.; Sachs, 2007; Waters, 2004; Williams, 2006; Youngs, 2011), and a number of independent documentaries have been produced recently (Marino & Toller, 2008; Taylor & Piper, 2012) there is a gap as far as academic research is concerned in regard to examining how recent technological changes have affected the communities of highly engaged music consumers that traditionally congregated in these spaces.

### **1.2.1 ‘Conversations with friends’: How I arrived at the research question**

Before deciding on the research questions, the original inspiration for this research topic came from both my own observations, as well as discussions with friends regarding how our interaction with people, places, and things had changed markedly since digital technology had become enmeshed in our lives. As we all shared a common love of music, these conversations would often be contextualised by way of discussing how accessing music as well as interacting with fellow audience members had changed. Or, we all observed we were ‘going out’ far less, be it to gigs or record shops or even cafes in order to meet up with other people. Though on more than one occasion one of us would suggest ‘I think we are

just getting older' (and there is probably something in that observation), our conversations would also include reflections on how younger people's social activities also appeared to have changed considerably owing to the influence of digital communication technologies in their lives. Around the same time I was having these conversations, I was also considering a range of topics in order to embark on a doctoral dissertation, seeking a research focus that satisfied my interests in changing communication patterns, social and economic power structures, the political economy of the media industry, community and social groupings, and broadly, 'the arts', though in particular 'music'. It was during this gestation process that I attended a reunion for a student radio station I had presented shows on in the 1990s. One particularly involved conversation on the night focussed on the significance of a number of record stores in providing a similar hub for the local music community as the radio station had at the time. The general consensus was that the radio station was now perhaps even more valuable in this regard, as those who still lived in the city in question observed increasingly less localised independent physical spaces in which to congregate. The discussion that evening formed the basis for my more formally mapping out a research plan and focus over the following weeks.

Initially the focus of the research was going to be assessing the long-term survival of independent brick-and-mortar record shops, though I was concerned from the outset that this might be perceived, as well as drafted, as an exercise in nostalgia. This was not only something I had no interest in, but it was also a focus I did not feel was a suitably robust research topic. Still, convinced there was 'something' in exploring the declining number of physical record shops, I went about considering how to better frame the topic from a more social and cultural perspective, rather than the more business or commerce focussed standpoint the original research topic leant itself towards. Ultimately, the independent brick-and-mortar record shop became the contextual setting for an exploration of shifting power structures in the recorded music industry, rapidly changing media acquisition and communication technologies, changing audience behaviours and expectations, and increasingly globalised rather than localised commerce, community, and communication.

Upon deciding to explore how rapidly changing media acquisition and communication technologies have affected the social interactions of communities that are based on

recorded music, as well as the changing ways in which music consumers are engaging with music, the first research delimitation was established. I decided to concentrate on particularly engaged and committed music consumers; eventually referred to as ‘highly engaged music consumers’ throughout this study. That is, though most of the general population engage with recorded music in some way, shape, or form, it is those audience members who place a high value on the influence and involvement of music in their lives that tend to identify and affiliate themselves with music-based communities. These individuals are not only the demographic who traditionally identified with a particular affinity for the independent brick-and-mortar record shop space, they are also the demographic who place a similar emphasis on music in other facets of their lives, and engage in depth with recorded music, recorded music-based information, as well as other likeminded individuals.

The second research delimitation established was to focus on the music industries and audience members of the US, UK, and New Zealand. There are two fundamental reasons for this. Firstly, this research is New Zealand-based, and the trajectory New Zealand popular culture has followed has been heavily influenced by these two larger Western nations. As a result there was a significant amount of literature from the UK and the US that reflected on experiences and phenomena analogous to both the recorded music industry and audience experience in New Zealand. Also, the traditional structure of the recorded music industry in New Zealand (including the brick-and-mortar record shop itself) traces a direct link back to both the UK and the US industries. The second reason for focussing on these three nations is that the experiences and habits of recorded music consumers can be quite different in other parts of the world. A wholly global focus would have had to consider the large local music industries of countries like China, India, and Thailand, all of which produce a vast quantity of music not listed or considered in the global trade directories referenced in this study (which are Western record label and industry-centric). A global focus would also have had to have investigated the culturally-specific audience practices of these nations, foreseeably also presenting the need to compare these to the ‘Western’ experience. Then there are the nations whose dominant music delivery platform is pirated physical format recordings, a vastly different experience to measure (or even accurately track) than that of

observing the general shift from ‘physical spaces and physical copies of music to the Internet and digital files’ that audience members from the countries that form the basis of this research have experienced. In summary, this delimitation was established such that the research could focus on observing a defined set of changing phenomenon, rather than attempting take on the additional exercise of comparing and critiquing a much broader range of cultural structures and experiences.

### **1.3 ‘Introducing the project’: A brief overview of the following chapters**

In order to contextualise a study of how recent technological changes have affected the social interactions of communities that are based on recorded music, as well as the changing ways in which people engage with recorded music in their everyday lives, Chapter Two briefly maps the industrial and technological trajectory of the recorded music industry, before providing a history of brick-and-mortar music retail. The chapter then explores the activities and expectations of both ‘modern’ and ‘traditional’ music consumers (terms chosen to delineate engagement with recorded music before and after widespread Internet use or thereabouts), in order to explore changes in how people both engage with and position recorded music in their lives. The merits of brick-and-mortar record shops are then discussed, before Section Seven presents a discussion about community and interpersonal interaction, comparing face-to-face communication with online communication, and exploring how recorded music communities operate in the modern-day communication environment. Section Eight then evaluates the main studies introduced throughout the chapter, in order to further clarify this research project’s specific focus.

Chapter Three introduces the methods by which the research was conducted. Because the research focused on gaining in-depth insights and understanding of highly engaged music consumers, both in regard to their reflections on how recent technological changes have affected communities that are based on recorded music as well as their perspectives on the changing ways that people engage with recorded music in their everyday lives, a qualitative research method was chosen. Twenty nine highly engaged music consumers engaged in focus groups and one-on-one interviews conducted in Auckland, New Zealand,

with questions organised thematically. The key question themes sought reflections on participants' initial and ongoing engagement with recorded music, what pleasures they seek when consuming music, their engagement with and reflections on changing music and communication technologies, their involvement with and perspectives on recorded music-based communities and social interactions, and finally their reflections on the historical as well as ongoing social and cultural relevance of the independent brick-and-mortar record shop. Data was analysed using grounded theory method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Chapter Four presents, discusses, and analyses findings from the data collected, reflecting on the literature presented in Chapter Two. The chapter seeks to ascertain how recorded music communities now manifest themselves, also investigating what aspects of traditional communication and human interaction cannot be replicated in an online environment, in turn exploring the implications of technological and social change. The chapter also tracks the significance of recorded music in research participants' lives, a core narrative important to contextualising the research topic as a whole. Chapter Five then concludes the body of work, also identifying the limitations of the study, as well as providing suggestions for further research.

A glossary of specialised terms follows the list of references.

## 2 Historical Context & Literature Review

This study primarily examines how recent technological changes have affected the social interactions of communities that are based on recorded music, also assessing the changing ways in which people engage with recorded music in their everyday lives. To provide context, this chapter briefly maps the industrial and technological trajectory of the recorded music industry, seeking to contextualise both the current environment independent brick-and-mortar record shops exist in, as well as the current environment recorded music industry stakeholders exist in. The chapter then compares the activities and aspirations of those who place a particular emphasis on the significance of music in their lives—traditionally regular patrons of brick-and-mortar record shops—with more general or mainstream recorded music audiences. In determining the activities and aspirations of particularly engaged audience members in comparison to others, this discussion aims to provide a clearer understanding of the significance of spaces like the independent record shop in these people's lives, also seeking to ascertain how these spaces may continue to survive in today's media and retail environment. 'Traditional' audience practices are then compared with 'modern' audience practices (terms chosen to delineate engagement with recorded music before and after widespread Internet use or thereabouts) in order to appraise the changing positioning of, and engagement with, recorded music in people's lives. The merits of independent brick-and-mortar record shops are then discussed, before the chapter introduces a discussion about community and human interaction, comparing face-to-face communication with online communication, and exploring how recorded music communities operate in the modern-day communication environment. Finally, Section Eight evaluates the main studies introduced throughout the chapter, in order to further clarify this research project's specific focus.

### 2.1 'The 10011001 revolution': Music distribution and consumption in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

Since the turn of the millennium the recorded music industry has been experiencing major changes, in particular owing to the influence of the Internet on the production—



distribution–consumption model (Cvetkovski, 2004; Dilmperi, King, & Dennis, 2011; Jones, 2002; McIntyre, 2011; Parry, Bustinza, & Vendrell-Herrero, 2012; Warr & Goode, 2011). Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century innovations such as the phonograph and broadcast radio, as well as the ability to purchase pre-recorded music, have been described as an electric revolution which increased the ability to consume music, with networks of record shops developing in tandem (McIntyre, 2011). The most recent ‘electric’ revolution has come in the form of computing innovation, with the creation of software that enables consumers to compress and store music, and the widespread use of the Internet as a platform for distribution of these files, resulting in a change in the supply and demand chain (Dilmperi et al., 2011).

Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> Century the music industry supply chain remained fairly static. Within this supply chain there were three ‘links’ between the artist and the consumer; the record company, the distributor, and the retailer (Graham, Burnes, Lewis, & Langer, 2004). The music industry has experienced global patterns of convergence from which, at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, four multinational corporations controlled approximately 70% of the production of recorded music (Brown, 2008). Production aside, the other key monopoly traditionally held by the major labels is that of distribution, whereby companies concentrate on perfecting moving recorded music from the point of manufacture to the point of sale. The 1980s was a period of increasing vertical integration throughout the entertainment industry, so instead of relying on the media for product exposure (or bribing those who control it with payola), major labels began placing music within and across vertically linked media organisations’ products. Music was cross-promoted in products such as films and video games, and the number of reissues and compilations increased, as did measures to control and enforce global rights and collection mechanisms in the form of copyright (Jones, 2002). Concerns were raised not only about copyright, but other aspects of control including the treatment of cultural products and the implementation of free trade agreements (Jones, 1996).

For the corporations who market and distribute music, there are some challenges unique to ‘selling creativity’. Cultural products are known for their volatility and unpredictability in the marketplace (Brown, 2008; Jones, Thompson, & Warhurst, 2007), and it is idiosyncrasies like these that have necessitated major labels to adopt various stages of production in an

attempt to control the environment of consumption. However despite the major labels' attempts to moderate production, for example by investing heavily in artists it is hoped will appeal to the widest possible demographic, what music consumers eventually purchase often differs from the artists major labels promote, market, and sell. As a result, independent record labels and their often more esoteric artist rosters comprise a significant share of the market (Brown, 2008). Adorno (1990) suggested that popular music had become entirely commodified, homogenous and governed by major labels with well-developed systems of production, distribution and promotion. The tension between the major labels and independents, the latter being far less resourced across all aspects of the production process and arguably offering a less standardised product, raises the 'commercialism versus artistic integrity' debate found in writing about music and cultural forms generally (Blomkamp, 2010; Eikhof & Haunschild, 2007; Jones, 2002; Taylor & Littleton, 2008). Part of this debate raises issues around the control traditionally exercised by major labels; a dominance which has slipped away considerably in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century music industry environment.

The Internet has presented an entirely new economic model for the media and entertainment industries (Anderson, 2008b). The online access and consumption model for popular music replaces limited selection with unlimited selection, geographically enforced copyright with liberated global access and more widespread illegal duplication of recordings ('piracy'), physical format recordings with high quality digital files, and structured pricing and distribution models with more flexible delivery of albums and singles. Artists and producers—as well as consumers of music—can now choose to bypass record companies, and often now it is the artists themselves making decisions as to how they will market and promote their records and their careers (Warr & Goode, 2011), with websites like Bandcamp allowing musicians to promote and sell or give away their music directly to the public. This new model has had implications not only for brick-and-mortar record shops, but the music industry as a whole.

Digitalisation has significantly altered the music industry. Artists have begun recasting their roles. The notion of creativity has expanded to include production, promotion and distribution functions traditionally reserved for those in management positions, and it is

new technologies that have made this possible. New technologies for distribution, communication and promotion have led to some disintermediation, which is essentially the removal of a series of middlepersons in the business process (Jones, 2002). An example is how new artists are discovered and promoted. Prior to the Internet artists had to rely on Artist and Repertoire (A&R) staff from record labels in order to be discovered and promoted. These A&R people visited venues where artists played, meaning the fate of artists rested in the hand of a few, and these few might attend an 'off' show depending on when they chose to attend. Now sites like YouTube, Facebook, Bandcamp, Soundcloud and Twitter allow artists to make their best performances available for free. Though traditional A&R channels still exist, and the major record labels can still offer marketing and promotion outside of most artists' budgets, many popular artists including The Arctic Monkeys and Lily Allen have acknowledged the role played by social media and streaming media sites in breaking them to the general public (Rojek, 2011).

Disintermediation not only redefines the role of the artist but the nature of their products as well. What was once a physical item (such as a CD or record) is now more commonly digitised, as are online transactions for other band and artist products such as t-shirts, memorabilia and concert tickets. Extended to the most extreme form, disintermediation of product and process would result in deindustrialisation, with individual control of all facets of the creative and business process (Jones, 2002). The 21<sup>st</sup> Century music production and distribution environment is, at present, industrialised with a mixture of individually and collectively controlled business models. Rather than total disintermediation, delivery and production mechanisms have begun to change, a process perhaps better described as re-intermediation, whereby control of different elements of the industrial process is shifting (Hawkins, Mansell, & Steinmueller, 1999).

The Internet has eliminated the trade-off between richness and reach of information. Richness of information includes such attributes as the ability to customise information and the ability to interact with information; the more detailed and specific the information is, the richer it is. 'Reach' can be defined as the ability to connect, as well as the number of people connected involved in exchanging information. Before the Internet, reaching large numbers of people with rich information cost significantly more than it does now in terms of

time and money. This is because information could only be exchanged in a physical form, such as a book or compact disc. Therefore costs and physical limitations limited potential audience size both in terms of the information that could be sent and the characteristics of the information itself (Graham et al., 2004). Information that was both rich and with broad reach was costly to produce, and a risky proposition in a marketplace where more general information designed to appeal to a broader audience (music 'hits') are more likely to enjoy commercial success. With the upsurge of connectivity experienced through the Internet, the trade-off between richness and reach is eliminated, and this means large numbers of people can communicate with each other at very little cost, and without restrictions on the richness of information (Evans & Wurster, 1997).

Considering the relatively recent impact of the Internet on the music industry—from approximately 1999 onwards—previous studies have often been speculative, focusing on how the music industry's market might be structured in the future (Bockstedt, Kauffman, & Riggins, 2006; Graham et al., 2004; Lam & Tan, 2001; Mortimer, Nosko, & Sorensen, 2012; Warr & Goode, 2011). Graham et al.'s (2004) study of the music industry suggested that in the future physical distribution would become less important, the stranglehold of the 'Big Five' major record labels (as of 2013 now the 'Big Three' owing to various acquisitions and mergers) would lessen, and the rise of piracy would undermine the industry. Less than a decade later, these predictions came to fruition. The year 2013 marked the first time that digital sales outstripped physical sales globally (Epstein, 2013), while the market share of independent labels has continued to increase globally (CMU Editorial, 2012; Cole, 2012), with independent labels achieving 32.6% market share in the US in 2012 (A2IM, 2013). Music piracy, as well as legally free distribution of albums and tracks, has resulted in a sharp drop in revenue throughout the industry. Recorded Music New Zealand figures released at the beginning of 2015 totalled national sales of physical formats, digital downloads, and music streaming subscriptions at \$53.2 million in 2014 (APRA AMCOS, 2015), down from the \$120.8 million recorded music sales were worth in 2003 (Edmunds, 2012). As early as 2009 the International Federation of the Phonographic Industry (IFPI) reported a 30% global decline in music sales for the period from 2004 (Dilmeri et al., 2011). Perhaps the most problematic finding in previous studies, from the point of view of the industry at least, is

that piracy on the Internet has become increasingly normalised, and is not seen as an illegal act by many of those who engage in the practice (Dilmeri et al., 2011; Nuttall et al., 2011; Warr & Goode, 2011).

## **2.2 'From Commodore to chain stores': A brief history of music retail spaces**

Since the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, there has been a global decline in the number of physical (brick-and-mortar) outlets specialising in selling recorded music, as well as associated band and artist merchandising, concert tickets, and music accessories (Benzine & Dosanjh, 2007; Bowers & Treanor, 2013; Campbell, 2010; Grow, 2013; Harmon, 2011; McIntyre, 2009, 2011; Rice & Stiven, 2015; Sachs, 2007; Waters, 2004; Williams, 2006; Zentner, 2008). However, brick-and-mortar record stores have not completely disappeared as some commentators predicted they would (Boehlert, 2000; Fox, 2004; Harris, 2003; Waters, 2004), with those that have survived adapting to the modern marketplace (Gracon, 2010; Taylor & Piper, 2012). Whether considering the minority of stores that have survived, or the majority that have closed down permanently, the modern music retail climate has been deeply affected by any combination of the growth of illegal downloading, the growth of legitimate online purchasing (of both physical products and digital files), the success of the MP3, the success of the iPod (and similar portable digital media players), the success of music streaming services, the bulk-purchasing deals brokered by larger chain stores, and increasing rent in now gentrified store locations.

Before discussing the relatively recent upheaval independent music retailers have experienced, as well as the historical development of these outlets, a definition of what constitutes an independent brick-and-mortar record shops is necessary. The independent brick-and-mortar record shop may be defined as a privately owned-and-operated business that trades from a physical retail space and that derives the majority of its income from the sale of recorded music, associated band and artist merchandising, concert tickets, and music accessories. In order to survive the radical changes the music industry has undergone in the past decade or so, many independent music stores have adapted their retail focus from the above 'traditional' definition. Some now supplement their physical trading with an online

sales presence, or have branched out into offering a wider range of goods such as clothing, or services such as cafe facilities. These changes will be discussed in greater depth in Subsection 2.6.3

As identified by Gracon (2010), there are three types of independent record stores, though there may be some crossover between each type. The first are generalist stores, which stock a wide variety of titles designed to appeal to a broad range of customers. These are the types of outlet that—before the pressures brought about by mass-market general retailers selling music, as well as the influence of the Digital Age—graced many suburban shopping centres, serving a wide variety of customers and stocking popular titles. Based on my observations it would seem it is these shops that have been most hit by the upheaval experienced in the industry in the past decade, with fewer than five such stores operating in New Zealand as of 2015.

The second type of independent record stores are the niche or specialty stores. These specialise in a particular music genre or genres, and usually have more depth in terms of catalogue and staff knowledge within their area of specialisation. These stores cater to the needs of particular subcultures, as well as general audience members seeking specific titles. Now defunct examples in New Zealand include Beat Merchants (hip hop and reggae), Flipside Records (electronic, dance, and hip hop), and Cyberculture (drum and bass). In the current music retail climate specialist stores tend to offer a wider range of genres, exemplified by Auckland's Conch Records, who specialise in jazz, funk, world, independent hip hop, downbeat, funky techno and dubstep.

The third type of independent record stores are the second-hand stores. These sell pre-owned music and do not have to deal with distributors in order to gain new merchandise, thus having no connection to the major record labels. Stock is typically sourced from customers who sell titles to the store directly, though it may also be acquired at estate sales, auctions, and other second-hand sources. Second-hand stores often stock a variety of formats and genres, and often specialise in vinyl records. New Zealand examples include Real Groovy Records in Auckland, and Slow Boat records in Wellington, though, as is the

case with many independent record shops, both stores cross over, selling second-hand and brand new manifestations of both generalist and specialty stock.

Outside of Calamar and Gallo's (2010) Record Store Days, literature specifically addressing the history of music retail is sparse, particularly for countries outside the US. In late-19<sup>th</sup> Century America, a decade after the invention of the phonograph, sound recordings were made available through stores selling musical instruments and sheet music. By the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, chains of department stores began selling recorded music. In the 1930s, more than 30 years after music was first pressed onto shellac, the first independent stores principally selling recorded music emerged (Shuker, 2013). In 1906 there were 25,000 stores in the US selling records, a number that would drop to 7,500 fifty years later, and to below 3,000 by the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (Calamar & Gallo, 2012).

Following World War One and the Great Depression, the record industry went through a number of changes. Companies experimented with different ways to get as much music released as possible, which led to a substantial amount of music being recorded for posterity. The Wisconsin Chair Company began to make records to give away when customers bought furniture, with music designed to appeal to its customers. These 'race records' would eventually become historically significant as early recordings by blues greats. Musicians of the time began opening record stores, such as the Spikes brothers Sunshine Record Store, which became a hub for black musicians, and was the only place in Los Angeles where records by these artists could be purchased. Throughout the Depression the price of music was consistently lowered, eventually selling for 15 cents at newsstands, and by 1930 major labels were able to sell 500,000 records a week (Calamar & Gallo, 2012).

According to Calamar and Gallo (2010), four stores became models for the modern-day record store; Colony, Commodore, and Sam Goody's in New York, and Wallich's Music City in Los Angeles. Sam Goody's pioneered the sale of LPs (albums on 33rpm vinyl). When this format surfaced in the late 1940s Goody opened an LP only store. He was able to build his business by going to record companies and convincing them to remaster earlier recordings and reissue them on vinyl. Sam Goody's became the first store to turn over multi-millions of dollars in album sales. Sam Goody had originally owned a toy store, until a customer asked

if he had any records; a scenario not dissimilar to how Colony (which was originally a sporting goods store) began. Colony's success owed in part to its location, Broadway, New York, where a specific customer base of musicians, theatregoers and night club patrons frequented the store (Calamar & Gallo, 2012).

Like Sam Goody's and Colony, the Commodore store began life as a radio and speaker store before the owner's son convinced him to stock records. Soon the records were outselling the radios, and in 1934 the store became Commodore Music Shop. Commodore began purchasing out-of-print jazz recordings, which the major record labels had no interest in reissuing. Taking the name of the store, Commodore Records became the first reissue label in the US. Commodore was not only a retailer of music, but a meeting ground for fans and musicians (Calamar & Gallo, 2012). Meanwhile, on the West Coast of the US, Wallich's opened as the largest music retailer in the area. The major record labels of the time, RCA, Columbia and Decca, would not directly sell to Wallich's, forcing the store to purchase from another distributor. At the same time the owner wanted to expand his custom-recording service, launching the now renowned Capitol Records. The store also pioneered the use of listening booths, allowing customers to 'try before you buy'. The booths also became popular hangout spots for high school students (Calamar & Gallo, 2012).

By the 1950s, and the advent of rock and roll, a number of smaller independent shops emerged. Many of these retailers specialised in specific genres, and coexisted alongside chain stores selling records as well as mail order record clubs (Shuker, 2013). According to Wolff (2006) the 'British invasion' brought about by The Beatles in the 1960s hastened the growth of independent record stores in the US, as demand grew for sheet music and 45s, while in the UK stores primarily selling recorded music began to flourish from the late-1960s onwards (Taylor & Piper, 2012). The 1970s saw greater diversity between stores, with some known for knowledgeable staff, some for considerable back catalogue, some for specific genres, and some for stocking accessories for the counter-culture such as alternative magazines and apparatus for smoking cannabis. Stores during this decade continued to grow in size and selection, with Tower Records in Los Angeles branding itself as the largest store in the world. This was the era where early models of 'lifestyle stores' emerged, places



where like-minded people gathered and music, rather than commerce, was the unifying factor (Calamar & Gallo, 2012).

The three most major developments in music retailing throughout the 1980s were the growth of chain stores, the introduction of the compact disc, and the redefinition of a hit (Calamar & Gallo, 2012). Corporate music retailing chains began taking up spaces in the suburban malls being rapidly built throughout the US, whilst independent chains grew as well (Gracon, 2010). Sony and Pioneer unveiled the compact disc and compact disc player, and the major labels largely phased out vinyl by the end of the decade, with consumers returning to stores to replace their vinyl collections. Bruce Springsteen's 'Born in the USA', Prince's 'Purple Rain', and Michael Jackson's 'Thriller' ushered in previously unheard of sales figures, with the latter spending 37 weeks at number one and selling a certified 42 million copies (Calamar & Gallo, 2012).

The 1990s saw a large increase in music sales across the globe (Ogden, Ogden, & Long, 2011), and CDs and cassettes became the dominant formats (Gracon, 2010). In terms of revenue, the decade was the most successful in history, with world market income amounting to \$28.7 billion in 1992, and sales figures remaining similar for the remainder of the decade. CDs and cassettes inspired a new type of retail outlet, the 'lifestyle store' (Gracon, 2010). Many chain stores began using shelf space previously dedicated to music to stock DVDs, accessories, and band merchandise such as posters and t-shirts (Gracon, 2010). The decade saw chain stores consolidating, with many employees not possessing the wealth of knowledge their record buyers had come to know previously. Display space in these stores was purchased by the major labels, leading to little differentiation from outlet to outlet. Independent stores responded by tailoring distinct identities, with grunge, hip hop and metal selling well in tandem with the mainstream pop and chart toppers offered by the chain outlets. The decade also saw a significant shift in where the bulk of music was sold. This occurred when 'big box' general retailers like Walmart and Target in the US and The Warehouse in New Zealand, began to sell recorded music, often as a 'loss leader', a pricing strategy where a product sold at below its market cost to stimulate sales of more profitable items (Calamar & Gallo, 2012). In the UK supermarket chains such as Tesco, Sainsbury's and Asda began selling recorded music in much greater volumes than before, and major

record labels shifted their focus to these few key clients, providing less and less support to smaller music retailers (Jones, 2009; Taylor & Piper, 2012).

### **2.2.1 ‘From Talkeries to today’: The history of the record store in New Zealand**

Written histories of New Zealand music retailing are few, with the most comprehensive record to date contained in Bourke’s (2010) history of New Zealand popular music from 1918 to 1964. Aside from blog posts documenting record stores that have closed down as well as those that remain open (Campbell, 2010; Gilbert, n.d.; Grigg, 2013; McLennan, 2016), and Gleeson’s (2012) book on the music and appliance manufacturers and sellers Begg’s (who also operated ‘record bars’), there is currently no comprehensive written history of music retailing in New Zealand. Anecdotal evidence based on the author’s conversations with local retailers, music buyers, and music journalists—as well as personal observations—suggest New Zealand’s music retail history follows a similar trajectory to that of the US.

Bourke (2010) describes New Zealanders as quick to embrace recorded sound. Following the first demonstration of Edison’s phonograph in 1879, the first years of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century saw a new industry develop, with companies such as Gramophone and Edison distributing players in New Zealand. In 1901 a chain called Talkeries began specialising in selling discs. By the mid-1920s most homes owned a player, and HMV opened a disc pressing plant in Australia, increasing the variety of titles available in New Zealand (Bourke, 2010). Newspapers began publishing weekly music review columns, and advertisements reflected the wide variety of music available. By the 1940s there were stores primarily selling recorded music, including HMV in Wellington, and Marbecks in Auckland. By the late 1950s rock and roll had arrived in New Zealand, and record retailers struggled to keep up with the demand for discs. By this stage the 78 rpm disc was being superseded by the 45 rpm single, with sales of the latter jumping from 125,000 in the first half of 1957, to 589,000 in the second half. In the same year imported sales dropped by two-thirds as local pressing plants were established. The arrival of 45s and LPS had expanded the market, as had the audience for rock and roll, though the retail phenomenon of the following decade was the release of the *My Fair Lady* album in 1965 (Bourke, 2010).

There is no formal record of the history of music retailing in New Zealand from 1965 onwards, but the trajectory followed by the industry here is comparable to what occurred in the US. By the 1970s there were many music retailers throughout the country, with a wide range of specialist stores within the main cities. Examples in Auckland include the Record Warehouse, which had the best 45 (single) collection in New Zealand, and Direction Records which was the first of the alternative stores of the post-hippie era. Professor Longhairs specialised in punk and new wave, and the Record Exchange on Karangahape Road dominated the second-hand market from the mid-1970s until early into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (Grigg, 2013). As was the case in the US, corporate music retailing chains spread throughout the country from the 1980s onward, including Sounds, HMV, EMI, Tower, Tracs and The CD Store. The 1990s saw the advent of ‘big box’ retailers gaining discounts for bulk buying from record companies, enabling chains such as The Warehouse to offer CDs at a retail price independent stores could not realistically match (Campbell, 2010).

Throughout the course of this study the number of independent brick-and-mortar record shops in New Zealand has remained steady, though there have been both stores closing down and new stores opening. McLennan (2016) has regularly updated a blog post (originally published in 2012) that lists independent brick-and-mortar record shops currently trading in New Zealand. The original blog post listed 31 stores trading throughout New Zealand (McLennan, 2012), while the most current iteration lists 29 stores trading throughout New Zealand (McLennan, 2016). This data suggests that, in New Zealand at least, stores are not ‘dying’ (Sachs, 2007), though the number of closures over this period is an indication that surviving in the current media and retail environment is not straightforward. The following is a comparison of McLennan’s (2102) original blog post and the most recent version updated January 28, 2016. Souvenir or book stores that have a tiny selection of music are excluded, and the stores listed are either solely music retailers or at least have a large selection of new music.

**August 17, 2012 (McLennan, 2012):**

**Auckland:**

Rhythm Compact Discs (Ponsonby)

*Closed 2013*

Southbound Records (Mt Eden)

**January 28, 2016 (McLennan, 2016):**

**Auckland:**

Flying Out (Auckland CBD)

*Opened on 18 April 2015, to coincide with Record Store Day. Flying Out started as an online distributor for Flying Nun/Arch Hill in 2013, and this shop grew out of that operation.*

Southbound Records (Symonds Street)

Alien (New Lynn)  
Conch Records (Ponsonby)

Real Groovy (Auckland CBD)  
Marbecks (Brown's Bay)  
Musiquarium (Mt Eden)

**Northland:**

Musicor (Whangarei)  
*Closed 2013, after 46 years of trade*  
Noise Company (Dargaville)

**Central North Island:**

Tracs (Tauranga)  
My Music (Taupo)  
Vinyl Countdown (New Plymouth)  
Just for the Record (Napier)  
Raw Music (Whanganui)

*Closed*

Zinc Records (Taradale)  
Electric City Music (Napier)

**Wellington:**

Rough Peel Music (Wellington CBD)  
Slow Boat Records (Wellington CBD)  
Parsons (Wellington CBD)  
*Closed 2014 after 66 years of trade*  
Evil Genius (Berhampore)  
Lo-Cost Records (Petone)  
Wonderland (Wainuiomata)  
Vinyl Heaven (Masterton)  
*Closed 2013*

**Nelson**

Everyman Records  
*Closed July 2014*

**Christchurch**

Galaxy Records  
Penny Lane

**Dunedin**

Portil  
*Closed January 2015*  
Too Tone  
Disk Den

*Moved premises January 2015*

Alien (New Lynn)  
Conch Kitchen & Bar

*Music retail scaled down in 2014, now primarily trades as a hospitality business*

Real Groovy (Auckland CBD)  
Marbecks (Auckland CBD)  
Musiquarium (Mt Eden)  
Rebel Soul (Auckland CBD)

*Opened July 2015*

Vinyl Destination (Birkenhead)

*Opened in Albany and shifted to Birkenhead in April 2015*

Noise Company (Dargaville)

Tracs (Tauranga)  
My Music (Taupo)  
Vinyl Countdown (New Plymouth)  
Just for the Record (Napier)

Zinc Records (Taradale)  
Electric City Music (Napier)

Rough Peel Music (Wellington CBD)  
Slow Boat Records (Wellington CBD)  
The Revolution (Upper Hutt)  
*Opened 2013*  
Death Ray Records (Newtown, old Evil Genius)  
Lo Cost Records (Petone)  
Wonderland (Wainuiomata)  
Mint Music (Lower Hutt)  
*Opened 2013*

Galaxy Records  
Penny Lane

Relics  
*Opened late 2013*  
Too Tone  
Disk Den

### 2.2.2 'From brick to binary': The declining number of traditional music retail spaces

Throughout the 1990s global sales of recorded music were at an all-time high (Calamar & Gallo, 2012). In this pre-MP3 era these sales were of physical products, be they compact discs, cassette tapes, or vinyl records. The vast majority of these sales took place at brick-and-mortar stores. In 1999 however, the inception of Napster began a process of disintermediation in the music industry brought about predominantly by the Internet, resulting in the state of flux evident across the sector since. Worldwide, revenues for CDs, vinyl, cassettes, and digital downloads have fallen from \$36.9 billion in 2000, to \$14.97 billion (including subscriptions to streaming services) in 2014 (IFPI, 2015). In New Zealand, total sales of recorded music decreased from over \$200 million in 2001 (Fairfax Digital, 2009) to \$53.2 million (including subscriptions to streaming services) in 2014 (APRA AMCOS, 2015). Independent record shops vying for a share of this reduced revenue now compete with online music stores, streaming services, and 'big box' general retailers, all of which now dominate the music sales market.

For the year ending 2014 the largest music retailer in the world exists exclusively online in the form of Apple's iTunes Store (IFPI, 2015). In the US, digital downloads are the largest source of recording industry revenue with a 37% share of the overall market (Solsman, 2015), while general chain and 'big box' retailers comprise 80% of physical format sales (Nielsen, 2016). The situation is similar in the UK, with online retailer Amazon the largest retailer of music with 27% of the market, iTunes second with 26.7% of the market, and HMV third with 15.4% of the market (Ingham, 2015). In New Zealand, sales figures from 2014 show iTunes capturing 80% of the digital sales market and general retailer The Warehouse turning over 50% of physical music sales (Rice & Stiven, 2015). Revenue from music streaming services has been significantly rising in recent years, with International Federation of the Phonographic Industry figures for 2014 indicating streaming revenue rose by 38.6%, making up 23% of digital music turnover globally (IFPI, 2015). In the US figures for 2015 suggested streaming revenue was up by 83% (Nielsen, 2016), while in New Zealand

streaming revenue rose from NZ\$2.2 million to NZ\$35.1 million between 2012 and 2014 (Caddick & Holt, 2015).

Though these figures may look bleak when considering the long-term survival of independent music shops, they are more so where corporate music retail chain stores are concerned. Over the past decade in the UK, chain stores Tower Records, Virgin Megastores, Zavvi, MVC, Music Zone, and Andy's have disappeared, with HMV the last chain still trading (Kollewe, 2015). In the US there are no corporate music retail chains left, with Virgin closing their last store (in Times Square) in 2009 (Plummer, 2011). Since the turn of the millennium, Tower Records, Sam Goody, HMV, Wherehouse Music, Musicland, and Virgin Megastore chains have all permanently ceased trading (McCracken, 2011). In New Zealand what were the last of the corporate chain stores, Sounds Unlimited and The CD and DVD Store, no longer trade (Fairfax Digital, 2009). Since 2008 Australian chain store JB Hi-Fi has operated in NZ, though it is an electronics lifestyle store, selling not only music, but video games, computers, DVDs, and consumer electronics as well.

Since the turn of the millennium, the number of brick-and-mortar record stores in existence has reduced significantly (APN News & Media, 2008; Benzine & Dosanjh, 2007; Calamar & Gallo, 2012; Campbell, 2010; Christman, 2002; Fairfax Digital, 2009; Fletcher, 2012; Gilbert, n.d.; Grow, 2013; Harris, 2003; Marino & Toller, 2008; McCracken, 2011; Rice & Stiven, 2015; Sachs, 2007; Taylor & Piper, 2012; Williams, 2006; Zentner, 2008), in line with a steady decline in general physical media retailing (McCracken, 2011). Though the number of independent record stores trading has significantly reduced—from 2000 to 300 over the past two decades in the UK for example (Sherwin, 2013)—it is corporate music retail chains that have nearly vanished permanently. It has been suggested that, faced with the flux experienced by the music industry as a whole over the past decade, corporate music chains remained too 'general' in a brick-and-mortar retail climate that now favours niches, having stocked too limited a product range, and not adapting suitably or quickly enough to changes occurring throughout the industry (McGuire, 2012; McIntyre, 2009; Reid, n.d.).

Brush (as cited in McGuire, 2012) explains how stocking too general a product range has been to the detriment of corporate music chains, describing their stores as 'Amazon's showroom'. He describes stores with a vast array of general products, which have appeared outmoded with the rise of Internet commerce. Essentially corporate music chains have, unwittingly or otherwise, gone into competition with Internet retailers, whereas the sort of consumers who continue to shop at brick-and-mortar retailers favour outlets that are smaller and stock select or 'niche' content. Similarly, Jack Clothier of label Alcopop Records describes corporate music retailers as being set up to 'stock standard CDs' rather than limited edition packs or packs that come with other merchandise; the type of music sales that have been increasing in recent years (Reid, n.d.).

Stocking a limited range of general content is not reflective of the main demographic of consumers who still frequent brick-and-mortar music stores. Parry et al.'s (2012) study of 5000 music consumers identified four categories of music consumer, one of which, the 'Cautious Consumer' made up 54% of those surveyed. This mainstream audience did not place a high priority on music in their lives, and were financially constrained where it came to buying music. Rich Hughes of Scylla Records observes that if the mainstream music buyer does not give a lot of thought to the artist, the industry, or any notion of the music scene, there is no reason for them to shop at a corporate music chain store—let alone an independent music retailer—when the product range they require is available at their local supermarket, 'big box' retailer, or online (Reid, n.d.). In this regard, predominantly stocking chart music in the current music retail climate has been to the chain stores' detriment. McIntyre (2009) notes that the smaller stores that have survived have done so by targeting specific markets, which is in contrast to corporate stores that are more 'mall oriented' in their operation; focused on heavily mediated price promotions, supposedly fashionable product and display, hi-tech ambiance, large spaces and stock holdings, as well as prime retail sites and heavy company branding.

In discussing the near demise of corporate music retail chains, as well as the closure of many independent brick-and-mortar record shops, a comparison of these outlets to those that have survived suggests success in the modern retail climate is about specialisation and the ability to adapt if necessary. Quirk (as cited in Youngs, 2011) describes record stores

that have survived as those that have morphed into something similarly themed but more diverse. These stores may put gigs on at other venues, have artists play in-store, incorporate a coffee shop, or maintain an online as well as offline presence. Hughes (as cited in Reid, n.d.) notes that such outlets are still true to the record store ethos in that the main thing they are selling is a range of CDs and vinyl, and that their diversification is still focused on music fans with specific tastes, rather than the sale of mobile phones and computers and similar consumer electronics products that many corporate music chains expanded into. The methods brick-and-mortar record shops have used in order to survive in the current retail climate are explored in Subsection 2.6.3.

### **2.3 'Plug it, play it, burn it, rip it': The expectations of modern music consumers**

Broadly speaking, the post-Napster music consumer and audience member has substituted the act of 'going out' to record shops with a computer-based 'stay at home' method of music selection and consumption (McIntyre, 2011). Whether described as a revolution (McIntyre, 2011), an evolution (Nuttall et al., 2011), or a redefinition (Jones, 2002), the modern music consumer's expectations and practices have changed considerably. Napster initiated a network of socially-driven music sharing, relatively unrestricted access to music catalogues, and near borderless interaction en masse. Audience members are now presented with a vast selection of recorded music at an often low or no cost price point, and are able to play this music on a wide array of portable devices. It seems there is increasingly less emphasis on the ownership of recorded music in favour of value-in-use and ease of access, as the increasing popularity of streaming services attests to (Caddick & Holt, 2015; IFPI, 2015; Nielsen, 2016). Where sales of recorded music have waned, many consumers have redeployed their budget, with revenue from live performances increasing (Holt, 2010). Audience attitudes have also changed owing to a set of broader cultural forces that have altered the role of music culturally, arguably downgrading the importance of music to many consumers. In a world where music is now the soundtrack to other forms of entertainment, such as television, film, video games, phone applications and software, music perhaps no longer enjoys the 'stand-alone' cultural



significance it did when fewer media technologies were available (Leyshon, Webb, French, Thrift, & Crewe, 2005).

The advent of the Internet as an exchange point for recorded music has granted more control to the music consumer and audience member. Before the phenomenon of online music sharing, trading, and distribution, the limited selection of recorded music that was sold and broadcast was dictated by companies who held the intellectual property rights to the music and controlled its distribution. New technologies have resulted in disintermediation of the recorded music industry, to some extent replacing the commerce-led vertical authority system with a horizontal system, where audiences share and are able to participate more in the consumption process. As early as 2001, Hill observed that contemporary audiences are using popular music in new, creative ways, positing that the proliferation of digital technology has made consumers as sophisticated as producers. Hill describes consumers as having a portfolio of choices, and less anxiety about conflicting music genres, time periods and value systems. Audience members can switch from The Beatles to The Neptunes because contemporary ideas about the self are more plural, audience members more dexterous (Hill, 2001). Playlists increasingly function as a type of personal expression; online people collect lists rather than objects (McCourt, 2005).

McIntyre's (2011) comparison of Baby Boomer and Generation Y music consumers appraises both negative and positive viewpoints on the 'downloading revolution', affirming that the positive aspects include increased consumer power and control within the distribution chain via technological disintermediation. McIntyre describes this phenomenon as a "creative destruction" (p. 142) of industry frameworks by means of online social sharing and distribution of music through virtual networks. These media interactions simultaneously offer audience members interpersonal values previously unavailable, including usefulness and playfulness, increased convenience, and reduced price benefits. Generation Y participants who took part in McIntyre's study saw downloading and free exchange as a world of choice and consumer-controlled interactions with a network of friends (2011).

The consumer experience has changed, with the audience member now able to take on a more active role in the consumption experience. Parry et al. (2012) suggest that this increases the value of a transaction for the audience member, allowing greater communication and engagement between audiences and the artists and industry. Warr & Goode (2011) identify active audience members as amateurs, Internet peers, and ‘prosumers’ who are tastemakers and can expose artists. In this sense the audience member might now be assuming the role traditionally assigned to the record shop employee. Jones (2002) suggested that the industrialisation of music alienated performers and audiences from one another, and that the Internet is dispelling this; evidenced later in the findings of both Click, Lee, & Holladay’s (2013) study of Lady Gaga’s online presence—where fans are able to engage with Gaga as well as one-and-other, feeling a genuine sense of intimacy and connection—and Beer’s (2008) examination of Jarvis Cocker’s high level of interaction and engagement with fans on the then popular My Space website.

Despite such optimistic accounts of the changing relationship between audience member and artist—and audience member and artwork—some commentators suggest that modern audiences may be being exploited. Echoing earlier studies considering the potentially exploitative aspects of online crowdsourcing for commercial projects (Banks & Humphreys, 2008; Brabham, 2008; Kleemann, Gunter, & Rieder, 2008), Fuchs’ (2014) comprehensive work on social media structures and power relations counter-argues the more emancipatory inclinations of the likes of Jenkins’ discussions concerning participatory culture (Jenkins, 2006). Fuchs (2014) suggests that capitalist forces have adapted to changing technological and informational structures in order to maintain power and profit, and social media corporations capitalise on users’ desire for social, intellectual, and cultural worth. Framed in terms of artist and audience member interacting via a corporate social media website, Fuchs’ (2014) critique identifies that though content, activity, interactions, and communications might provide pleasure for audience members and exposure for artists, all data is ultimately sold to advertisers and other third parties by social media corporations. This is at odds with the democratic potential of the Internet, as well as the more optimistic accounts that suggest modern music audiences are wholly emancipated. However Morris’ (Morris, 2014) study of British musician Imogen Heap and her followers argues that Fuchs’

(2014) critique reduces the complex reasons why people contribute, participate, and spend time and effort on projects to a classical economic measurement. Morris (2014) suggests that fans and followers are motivated by comradery, fandom, compensation other than money, and passion, and that they may not even view their contributions as work or labour.

Nuttall's (2011) study suggests contemporary audience members understand the music industry in which they participate. Nuttall et al. (2011) interviewed four groups of undergraduate students in their late teens, and respondents across all four groups demonstrated a reasonable level of 'industry knowledge', with many participants cynical about the commercial nature of the mainstream record industry. When questioned about accessing free music, many participants stated that though they did so because CDs were expensive, they were also reluctant to give money to 'the middleman'. Some group members stated that the price of CDs is kept artificially high by the music industry, and that major labels cared less about the artists than their own profits. Others suggested that they would be more inclined to pay for less successful artists' work, questioning if major artists needed more income. Many thought that albums offered poor value for money, preferring the ability to customise their musical experience, digitally reconfiguring songs and albums in an aggregation independent of artist or genre.

The contemporary audience member is accustomed to being able to access and consume a vast range of music, with fewer restrictions in place than previously. For many of the first generation of Napster users the appeal was *freed* music not *free* music (Hill, 2013). Freed music is bereft of artificial restrictions. The two main restrictions in place when Napster was launched were record companies holding large back catalogues of recordings not made available to the public, and the inability to buy any track as a single rather than having to purchase a whole album (Hill, 2013). As Napster grew in popularity it became normal to expect a vast user-supplied inventory of songs, spanning many decades and styles. This lack of restriction has since been capitalised on, as Anderson's (2008b) 'Long Tail' describes. The 'hit driven' industry has realised that audience members actively seek out the 'misses' and that these can make money too (Anderson, 2008b). The ability to download single tracks has also become normalised, and today single sales far outstrip album purchases (Berman, 2011; Griggs & Leopold, 2013).

The modern audience member has a wide range of choices when considering how to obtain a single or album, upsetting the 20<sup>th</sup> Century supply model where options were limited and controlled by those with distribution rights. The end user now takes a more active role, and wields more power in the consumption process by means of their decision making method. Gracon (2010) illustrates this by recounting his decision to procure *Repeater*, the album released in 1990 by post-hardcore band Fugazi. Gracon visits an independent store in his neighbourhood, finding the album on CD and vinyl, with other Fugazi albums in stock. The next independent store he visits has the CD, but claims the album is out of stock. The local Walmart does not stock the album, however it has a different Fugazi album that can only be purchased online. Best Buy has the album on CD, as well as a link on its website to Napster (now owned by Best Buy) where the album can be downloaded. Target has the album, though it is available for purchase online only in CD format. *Repeater* can also be ordered directly from the band's record label, either by mail order or through its website. The album can also be downloaded from iTunes and Amazon, or purchased brand new or used from eBay. All the songs from the album can be streamed on YouTube, and the album is available on various streaming sites like Pandora. Gracon also has the option of burning a friend's copy of the album, or downloading it for free from one of many torrent sites.

Today's music consumers are accustomed to fluid pricing, often at low or no cost. Alongside losing their distribution monopoly, the major record labels have also lost their control over the price of recorded music. In the online music marketplace, where neither geographical boundaries or copyrights are an effective form of regulating the movement of music, the music industry has struggled to ascertain by what means and at what point in time payment can be extracted for their products (Jones, 2002). Audience members now have many options as to where to procure music, and pricing now reflects this. The most expensive copy of *Repeater* in Gracon's (2010) quest was US\$11, compared to the cheapest ever average album price before the digital era which was US\$16 (Degusta, 2011). This five dollar difference separates the most expensive option available to Gracon, and the historical low for a pre-digital era hard copy of an album, yet is still a significant amount especially when considering multiples of album sales, or even purchases.

'Free' is the price many audience members now expect to pay. Despite still complying with current copyright laws, the 21<sup>st</sup> Century music consumer might receive a copy of Prince's new album with the purchase of a newspaper, or choose to pay nothing to download a Radiohead album. Sites like Bandcamp offer a forum where artists upload their music with the option to give away tracks or albums. Though audience members are embracing legal 'freeconomics' (Anderson, 2008a), piracy rates remain high, with a 2011 study suggesting 23.8% of worldwide bandwidth is used for infringing content (Resnikoff, 2013), reflecting a paradigm shift where existing laws will probably have to adapt before consumer behaviour does (Winter, 2012). With studies suggesting anywhere from 75% to 95% of music procured online is done so illegally (Dilmeri et al., 2011; IFPI, 2006, 2009; Madden, 2009), piracy is becoming normalised, and is not seen as an illegal act by many whom engage in the practice. When respondents to Dilmeri et al.'s (2011) study of music consumers from a UK university were asked why 77% of the music they downloaded was pirated, they replied "because it is free" (p.137) or variations thereof. Nuttall et al.'s (2011) work with focus groups of music consumers from South-West England explored the notion of guilt when pirating material, revealing that while most of the participants believed that genuine ownership of music related to legal purchase, most were comfortable with obtaining music illegally.

Audience members are now accustomed to being able to access music on a wide variety of playback devices and in a wide variety of locations. Relatively large and often domestic bound playback devices have been replaced by compact and portable digital devices, most famously the Apple iPod. Reflecting further on notions of music ownership, participants in Nuttall et al.'s (2011) study revealed that ownership of music was not a stronger motivating factor to them as accessibility to music, which was seen as crucial. McIntyre's (2011) interviews with Generation Y audience members found these younger consumers tended to focus on speed and convenience, aspects of experience rather than product. Music was associated with being 'out in the world' and a soundtrack to being 'on the move'; a background to other activities. These study participants saw the old 'record store' process as inconvenient in a lifestyle of mobility and convenience. Parry et al. (2012) describe a phenomenon whereby the exchange value in a traditional consumer-producer relationship,

where money is exchanged for a CD or vinyl record, has shifted towards a construction of value-in-use. The value of a downloaded music file is only apparent to a consumer when they listen to it, thus value-in-use is only realised in the process of consumption.

Though technologies that have made the free distribution of music possible have eroded sales, audience members have redeployed their budget for music toward complimentary non-digital goods. In particular, demand and revenue has increased for live concert performances (Holt, 2010; Mortimer et al., 2012). Mortimer et al. (2012) suggest that increased demand for concerts is most pronounced for small artists, perhaps because file sharing of their work stimulates awareness. An article from *The Economist* suggests that attendance at major artists' concerts have not increased, though ticket prices have, and consumers are willing to pay this increase (2010). In both scenarios consumers are showing more interest in spending money on experiences; real-time moments that cannot be downloaded.

## **2.4 'Hear it, see it, touch it, feel it': The expectations of traditional music consumers**

Major changes have taken place in regard to how people consume recorded music in recent years. How the majority of consumers initially acquire recorded music has shifted from purchasing physical products from brick-and-mortar record shops to downloading albums and tracks over the Internet. The Internet affords audiences greater communication between themselves and the artists and wider industry (Jones, 2002; Parry et al., 2012), as well as a higher level of participation in the consumption process in terms of global sharing, borderless interaction, wider choice, ease of access, and more flexible pricing (Anderson, 2008a; Gracon, 2009; Hill, 2013; Hill, 2001; Jones, 2002; Nuttall et al., 2011; Parry et al., 2012; Warr & Goode, 2011). However there are culturally and socially significant benefits in 'traditional' music consumption processes also.

Following the Second World War, the Western World experienced a shift in production from a capitalist system based on how best to allocate limited resources, to a consumption-based model based on deriving pleasure from goods and services (Cvetkovski, 2004). This change coincided with a growth in spending power amongst young people, and increased

access to recorded music and affordable transistor technology, the latter used in radios and turntables and the like. McIntyre (2011) suggests that these changes were supporting factors in a number of youth revolutions—from the rise of rock and roll in the 1950s, to 1970s glam rock, punk, and disco—involving a sense of the communal importance of music as a symbol of changing generational values. This rise of ‘communal materialism’, he further argues, resulted in local record shops becoming significant cultural venues; cognitively mapped spaces of localised ritual consumption for each generation who frequented them.

McIntyre (2011) further elaborates that music’s tribal meanings and associations of generational identity for post-war-pre-Internet music consumers was objectified with 12” vinyl albums and their iconic sleeve (packaging) artwork, that which was displayed in local record shops before being further appreciated by the consumer post-purchase. In examining consumption patterns of consumers in general, Fuat-Firat (1987) states that each product is a bundle of attributes, many of which relate to symbols and meanings indirectly related to the actual physicality of the product. They may represent feelings of belonging, aspirations, achievement, uniqueness, or status. Belk (1988) suggests that consumer behaviour cannot be fully understood without first gaining some understanding of the meanings that consumers attach to possessions, the key to which is recognising that we regard our possessions as an extension of ourselves. The symbolism in buying physical music products can thus be considered in relation to self-defining personal mythologies, including possession choices in relation to valued individual human meaning sets, as well as a group materialist ethic where consumer products facilitate interpersonal relationships with the rest of a community (McIntyre, 2011).

According to Fuat-Firat (1987), relationships that consumers have with each other during consumption, the products acquired in the market, and the market itself become the total life experience of consumers, influencing meanings and values of consumers lives and not just buying behaviours and attitudes. Considering Fuat-Firat’s (1987) sentiments arise from research into general consumer patterns, these aspects are perhaps heightened for patrons of independent music stores owing to the cultural nature of the goods and services these stores offer. McIntyre’s (2009) study of consumers’ record store expectations and experiences is the most comprehensive to date. In it he describes an elaborate

consumption event occurring as part of a socially and culturally relevant retail process, where meaningful personal mythologies are constructed in a self-developmental transactional event that occurs while being ‘out in the world’, noting that technology has reduced the number of similar public socio-cultural spaces.

McIntyre’s (2009) study participants are part of the Baby Boomer post-World War Two generation of music consumers, and he places their descriptions of what record stores provide for them into defined categories. The first, ‘*capaciousness*’ [emphasis in original], is described by participants in terms of being able to find and discover ‘everything’, with some speaking of expecting a level of discomfort in-store, sometimes in cramped spaces, kneeling on the floor, or sorting through titles to find ‘hidden treasures’. This differs to ‘mall-like’ stores, where physical comfort, uniformity and spaciousness are more desired traits. Within these often tight spaces, participants describe seeking ‘*refuge*’ [emphasis in original] (that being a sense of ‘insiderness’ within a sought after enjoyable environment rather than a hiding place from any threat). According to McIntyre (2009), these aspects make up the ‘immersive’ dimension of the record store space.

McIntyre (2009) refers to his next category as making up the ‘interpretive’ dimension—or environmental legibility and integrity—of the record store space to its customers. Participants expect a level of ‘*coherence*’ [emphasis in original] or ‘*credibility*’ [emphasis in original] in terms of store layout, based on the perceived knowledge of the store owner in selecting various scenic-spatial elements related to a niche music-world knowledge base. This need for environmental legibility is also linked to the desire for a complex environment, which when combined served as a cue point for potential exploration within the considered store parameters. These intended parameters are linked to a dominant hope that ‘*chance*’ [emphasis in original] or ‘*serendipity*’ [emphasis in original] will uncover not only current wants but offer unexpected offerings for consideration. Essentially, participants seek a “planned, complex chaos” (p. 471) within the music store space, as opposed to a store where the contents can be read too easily. McIntyre’s (2009) earlier description of record store shopping as a possible form of displaced hunter-gatherer behaviour for males might explain participants’ interest in an ongoing element of unpredictability, related to a ‘*mystery*’ [emphasis in original] element of music shopping, which together with ‘*chance*’



[emphasis in original] and '*serendipity*' [emphasis in original] make up the 'investigative' dimension of the music shop space.

McIntyre refers to the final dimension of the music store space as 'in-the-world'. Participants expressed a desire for reassuring visual forms of personally relevant '*iconography/mythology*' [emphasis in original], such as symbolic socio-political images relating to a shared life music-world. This could be through any combination of product on display, visuals on the walls, or promotional displays. The covers of albums, band t-shirts, books, and memorabilia also seem to have great significance, with all visual elements acknowledged to form a part of a cultural life-world of "music related self-absorption and mythological construction" (p. 471). The last attribute McIntyre (2009) considers as 'In-the-world', he calls '*age*' [emphasis in original]. Age is described as sought-after reliable destinations as part of an overall mental map of an area for the involved music consumer, with many participants saddened when they recalled recent or pending permanent closures of such stores.

The desired attributes of the record shop for McIntyre's (2009) study participants seemed to be a physical manifestation of their cultural music world, within which they may investigate and further construct their "personal music-life world, symbolic and mythological, whilst being out in the world socially" (p. 472). In regard to 'being out in the world socially' participants alluded to adhering to a set of community values with other initiates. Those McIntyre (2009) describes as 'highly evolved' record shop customers actively seek out and cognitively map extended networks of record stores, and have a shared understanding of what makes a positive store experience. These customers' 'brain maps' of record stores in their locality affects their navigational perspective of certain areas, orienting and distorting the world around them to suit their environmental wants and needs.

Participants in McIntyre's (2009) study considered physical manifestations of recorded music, particularly the 12" vinyl format, to be superior to digital file formats. This is a sentiment often echoed in popular and academic writing that compares digital and physical formats (Brown, 2012; Calamar & Gallo, 2012; Gracon, 2010; Hornby, 1996; Matador

Records, 2012g; McCourt, 2005; McIntyre, 2011), despite the technical, social and cultural merits of the MP3, which will be discussed further in Section 2.5. In nearly every interview, participants believed the introduction of the compact disc signalled the beginning of more ‘uninvolved’ formats, seeing vinyl’s superiority in terms of it being more than a commercial product. From the sleeve artwork to the smell, feel, and apparently superior audio quality, respondents felt vinyl something more akin to a “user-involved, socially creative artistic artefact” (p. 472), noting downloading promoted a breadth of listening, rather than the depth of listening vinyl albums encourage. Similarly McCourt (2005) maintains that as recordings shed their mass and physicality, listeners’ physical interaction is lessened, affording music an increasingly ambient status.

Outside of McIntyre’s (2009, 2011) examinations of record stores and generational music consumption habits, there is currently very little literature specifically addressing what ‘traditional’ music consumers expect (or maybe expected) from the music retail process. Nonetheless, an article from *The Economist* (2010) discusses traditional consumers’ expectation that music be purchased, noting that this expectation particularly pertains to older audience members with more mainstream tastes. In 2002, 12 to 19 year olds accounted for 16.4% of spending on albums in Britain, almost double the share of those aged 60 or over. By 2010 the two groups had switched positions. The over-60s not only spend more on albums than teenagers, they spend more on popular music titles. As a consequence, the US’ bestselling album since 2000 is a collection of Beatles hits from the 1960s, while the biggest selling album in 2009 was *I Dreamed a Dream* by Susan Boyle. In the same year Britain’s main supermarkets accounted for 24% of all music sales in the country, whilst iTunes sold only 11%. The majority of these supermarket sales are to those aged 60 and over, and because supermarkets are mass-market general retailers, they tend to stock mainstream music (*The Economist*, 2010).

## **2.5 ‘A hard-drive stash of pirated musical booty’: A case study of collectors**

Section 2.2 introduced four different categories of audience members, the largest of which—the Cautious Consumer—has mainstream tastes and does not place a high priority

on music in their lives (Parry et al., 2012). Accounting for 54% of those surveyed, the Cautious Consumer currently has little reason to frequent independent music stores. The product they require is easily available online, or at their local supermarket or 'big box' retailer, more often than not at a cheaper price point than independent stores can offer. As a result, the current independent brick-and-mortar music retail climate is one that favours niche customers, such as Parry et al.'s (2012) other three categories of consumer. These are the Early Adopter, the Band Fan, and the Explorative Consumer, all of whom arguably place a greater value on music in their lives than the Cautious Consumer does. Those who collect music may fall into any or all of these three categories, and a case study of these record collectors forms the basis for this chapter's discussion of music consumer typologies, debates concerning the superiority or otherwise of digital and physical formats, and debates regarding the legitimacy of online music collecting, consuming, and community.

Most, if not all of the literature concerning the current or long term survival of brick-and-mortar music retailers suggests the mainstream music listener and buyer—Parry et al.'s Cautious Consumer (2012)—is now well catered for in other distribution environments, and that independent stores are now more than ever about targeting niche audiences (Gracon, 2010; Marino & Toller, 2008; Matador Records, 2012g; McGuire, 2012; McIntyre, 2009; Reid, n.d.; Youngs, 2011). Alternatively referred to by Nuttall et al. (2011) as Conventionalists, this majority of audience members tend to confine their listening and music consumption to mainstream artists, and depend on information sources such as commercial radio, Billboard charts, and friends to inform them of their music choices. In not placing a high priority on music in their lives, in possessing less knowledge about music than other audience groups, and in being highly influenced by others' opinions rather than their own research, it is therefore unsurprising that larger and far more general retailers have captured this mainstream market. It is more likely that Nuttall et al.'s Loyalists, Experience Seekers, Preachers and Revolutionists (2011), or Parry et al.'s (2012) Band Fans, Early Adopters and Explorative Consumers might continue to frequent brick-and-mortar music retailers, and might also be serious collectors of music and associated memorabilia.

Most music consumers acquire 'records', whether they be physical or digital formats, in a limited and fairly haphazard fashion. Record collectors however demonstrate a more

measured version of the practice. Record collecting is primarily about collecting sound recordings, though these may include concert bootlegs, demos, or radio broadcasts. Some collectors might also collect music memorabilia. The focus of a collection may comprise particular artists or producers, genres or sub-genres, record labels, eras or scenes, or particular formats such as vinyl or cassettes. According to Shuker (2010) preferences for particular formats are related to the age of the collector, and associated concepts of nostalgia, memory, and authenticity; though vinyl remains synonymous with contemporary record collecting. Collecting in general is linked to possessive individualism, historically present since Ancient Greece, but since more widespread under contemporary capitalism (Shuker, 2004). During the mid to late-19<sup>th</sup> Century a mix of capitalism, consumerism, and increased leisure time and disposable income made collecting a significant pastime for the new middle classes (Shuker, 2004). Collecting is very common in the Western capitalist world, with a third of adults identifying themselves as collectors of some kind (Shuker, 2004).

The stereotypical representation of the record collector is one of an obsessive male whose drive for collecting is often supposed to be a substitute for genuine relationships (Shuker, 2004), the most famous of which is represented in Nick Hornby's novel *High Fidelity* (1996) and the subsequent film adaptation of the same name (Bevan & Frears, 2000). Shuker observes that though this stereotype shares commonalities with some academic discussion of collectors, other personality traits include "a love of music, obsessive compulsive behaviour, accumulation and completism, selectivity and discrimination, and a desire for self-education and scholarship" (2004, p. 311). Wright's (2008) examination of comic book collectors suggests the collector is constructing an internal world, possibly crucial to his or her psychological identity. This world is seldom complete, with the collector who finishes the pursuit of one comic title often embarking upon the pursuit of another. Baudrillard (1994) suggests this constructed world might be an elemental way to exert some control over the wider world, whilst Straw (1997) suggests it might provide refuge from, rather than control over the collector's wider environment. Each of these assertions suggests collecting is not just an activity about accumulating objects; it also appears to provide psychological benefits for the collector.

Contemporary discussions regarding collecting often concern the legitimacy or otherwise of collecting purely digital formats, in particular MP3s. McCourt (2005) claims that owing to a lack of tactility digital files lack potential emotional contexts altogether. Similarly, participants in McIntyre's (2009) study believed the introduction of the compact disc signalled the beginning of formats requiring less engagement than vinyl records. Conversely, Everett's (2007) study asserts that listening to MP3s and engaging online may actually be a more intimate, interactive, and sociable practice than an offline environment offers. Wright's (2008) study of comic book collecting raises questions as to whether the disc or the electronic files it holds are the collection, and what this means for the comic book industry and the act of collecting as comics increasingly move into the Digital Age.

Despite McCourt's (2005) initial misgivings about digital files, he ultimately finds that the ability to customise or personalise the individual listening experience is a valuable aspect of collecting digital musical artefacts. He states that though the listener's physical and tactile interaction with the music is lessened, digital files and players allow 'flow' to be determined by the user. With vinyl and compact discs the album as a whole must be engaged with on the creator's terms. However with an iPod engagement is determined by the user. McCourt (2005) describes examining a vinyl collection as emotionally gratifying, visual and tactile at the same time, while digital files lack these contexts altogether. Unless they are burned onto a compact disc, they appear to have less value. The result, he argues, is that the world of physical commodities versus the world of abstract things continues to challenge our notion of value. McCourt (2005) ultimately sees the collecting of digital files as being a more intense and intimate experience than owning physical recordings based on digital content not being static or universally commodifiable. Instead the user engages in multiple dialogues with the work, altering or recontextualising the artefact in a fluid manner.

Everett (2007) challenges what he identifies as a preconceived notion that digital files are inferior to traditional music media, and (by association) that a collection of digital files is "nothing more than a hard-drive stash of pirated musical booty rather than a valued and worthwhile artefact in its own right" (p. 1). He describes two perspectives on this notion, the first of which he terms the egocasting fallacy. This relates to concerns that by allowing

users to select only what they want to hear, audience members shield out unwanted music, creating intolerance for challenging music, and a cheapening of the art-form. The second he describes as the lament of the audiophile, regarding concerns that 'degraded' digital audio formats reduce the consumption experience to digital binary, and also provide an inferior listening experience. Everett (2007) suggests audiences have been sold the idea that physical music products are uncompressed and thus pure, and suggests that only true audiophiles would hear the difference between an MP3 and an uncompressed format, before he questions if judging sound quality is the best way to judge the legitimacy of a musical artefact.

Discussions on traditional music collecting describe collectors as having an interest in certain sound recordings as significant cultural artefacts, the pastime itself being a commodity pursuit linked to 'the thrill of the chase', obsession, accumulation and the desire to complete, combined at times with a preoccupation with rarity and economic value (Gracon, 2010; Shuker, 2004). Aspects of the latter part of this definition become problematic when describing those who collect digital music files, as MP3s are able to be duplicated an infinite number of times. A digital song or album might be rare in terms of initially sourcing more obscure titles, though once a copy is found its existence is not finite as a first pressing of a vinyl album is. This ability to infinitely duplicate digital music also redefines notions of the economic value of collections, with the MP3 occupying a peculiar realm as a valuable cultural object which circulates outside the channels of the traditional value economy (Sterne, 2006; Sterne, 2012).

Music collecting might also be defined as being 'hands on' work, perhaps a problematic description when considering the acquisition and curation of digital music files. Gracon (2010) suggests maintaining and owning a physical format music collection requires dedication, as records have to be stored the correct way, cleaned and handled with care, which he describes as part of the ritual. Wright's (2008) discussion of comic book collectors suggests anyone who collects comic books also has to deal with materiality. Similar to the tasks physical format music collectors face, comic book collectors can spend years visiting markets, garage sales, used bookstores, comic conventions, and comic book stores among other places in order to find all issues of a particular series. Wright (2008) then suggests

that most of the social practices of comic book collecting are based around the material nature of comic books. Though Gracon's (2010) observations regarding storage and cleaning are not immediately transferable to digital collecting (save maintaining a hard drive properly or similar), there is dedication needed to properly curate and maintain an electronic collection, and though MP3s are software people tend to perceive them as objects (Sterne, 2006; Sterne, 2012). Correctly labelling and cataloguing digital files requires commitment and time, as does researching and sourcing particular releases online. Online research and sourcing is a similar process to that which Wright (2008) describes comic book collectors engaging in as they attempt to track down particular titles.

As there is little literature comparing physical and digital music collecting, Wright's (2008) study of comic book collecting in the Digital Age offers some similar analogies. Wright (2008) questioned whether purchasing 40 years of *Uncanny X Men* on one digital disc is the same as accumulating the print version over many years, and whether the original print versions will hold the same value alongside the newer digital format. Wright (2008) also sought to ascertain whether a digital version of a comic book has the same effect on readers as it does in print. In order to answer these questions, Wright (2008) distributed a brief survey regarding digital and physical collecting at his local comic shop, receiving 28 responses. One respondent separated collecting from mere ownership, suggesting a collection is what you discover and accumulate over an extended period of time. Another proposed that finding a comic in good condition is part of the collecting experience, as is the rarity of some titles, and that these elements are missing from electronic formats. The minority of respondents who viewed electronic files as legitimate collections stated that it is the comic art form that matters, not the physical vessel that carries them. In the minds of this minority collecting is about the art, engaging with the artists if possible, and engaging others in the community. Comics, one respondent suggested, are ultimately about human experience, not pieces of paper.

One respondent in Wright's (2008) study took a negotiated stance, proposing that both physical and digital format accumulations might be collections, though in different senses. The respondent suggested that digital files might form a collection, but not in the same way that boxes of comics do. Though files might not be able to be physically engaged with,

collectors will still search out certain issues and organise the files on their computer. Collectors most interested in reading the comics and appreciating the artwork rather than other aspects of collecting might welcome not having to bother with the tasks of organising, archiving and storing physical copies. For those who missed certain issues of comics, these might become accessible again from publishers, or stay available for longer from their initial release date. So, from the point of view of comic book or recorded music collectors who embrace digital manifestations of artworks, digital distribution might be seen to engage a wider audience, though from the point of view of those collecting physical copies partly owing to rarity and economic value, this might be perceived as problematic.

To date, the most extensive study comparing physical and digital music collecting is Everett's (2007) examination of indie music collecting in the digital realm. Commencing with a counter-argument to claims made that digital music files are not as legitimate as physical formats, the author then discusses the contemporary indie music scene to explore how recent developments in technology—such as portable audio devices, online downloading services and social networking sites—have linked music collectors to social communities. It is suggested that what were once private experiences are now public affairs, and that traditional collecting practices such as connoisseurship and canonism are being preserved by engagement with digital technologies.

Collecting digital format music possesses many similar attributes to collecting physical format releases. The collector might research and source particular music according to taste and specialty interests (connoisseurship and canonism), possessing the same personality traits “a love of music, obsessive compulsive behaviour, accumulation and completism, selectivity and discrimination, and a desire for self-education and scholarship” defined by Shuker (2004, p. 311). Everett (2007) proposes that in the same way MP3s have revolutionised music media by allowing recordings to be compressed and shared so easily, digital technology in general has done the same to the practice of music collecting as well. Collecting is now more immediate, and collections are now more easily shared and customised.



Addressing Rosen's (2005) idea of 'egocasting', where she suggests that digital files and players lead listeners to select only what they want to hear, filtering out unwanted music and developing intolerance for challenging music, Everett (2007) contends that such technologies in fact facilitate a greater interest in exploring musical possibilities. It is suggested that collectors of digital audio files do not spend thousands of hours researching, acquiring, and sorting music to limit themselves with preferences. Rather, portable technology capable of storing vast amounts of music is turning collecting into a more flexible, unrestricted, and involving form of artistic appreciation. Indeed Rosen's (2005) notion of 'egocasting', where she argues that since the 1950s broadcasting power has shifted to the individual listener leading to selective avoidance, might in fact be applied to the traditional music collector. Traditional collectors often value their collections based on rarity, and generally store these collections in private spaces, where access is granted only by them. Everett (2007) questions the extent to which a person's control over their physical record collection translates into an egocentric sanctuary, suggesting that collections of digital audio files should not be judged by their egotistical attributes, but by their ability to connect people and music in ways not possible before.

Everett (2007) observes that digital audio devices, online downloading services, blogs, and social networking software have changed the once private practice of collecting into a more public one, where music collectors are linked to social communities where their collections may be both accessed and judged. As a result, traditional collecting practices such as connoisseurship and canonism are preserved by digital technologies. McCourt (2005) suggests that when the focus is not on tangible commodities, the online community itself becomes the commodity. Collecting thus becomes as much about the linking of individuals to others as the linking of individuals to objects. In this regard what was once a private collection becomes more like a public library. Unrestricted by geography, the Internet links people with similar tastes together, and enables many 'public libraries' to be shared. Within these virtual communities, collecting, connoisseurship and canonism have been found to thrive (Everett, 2007). From music criticism sites that attract millions of viewers weekly to quality-regulated download communities and customisable friend

networks, music collecting, sharing and critiquing is tied to self-identity, selectivity and discrimination (Everrett, 2007) much like private collecting is (Shuker, 2004).

When considering face-to-face environments like the independent record shop, virtual communications supplement rather than replace traditional offline spaces and forms of communication. The distinction between 'virtual' and 'real' worlds is blurred, and rather than being a separate cultural space, the Internet is just another cultural resource that is used in a preexisting social context (Bennett, 2004). Indeed Everett's (2007) case study of website Pitchfork suggests audiences exist neither on or offline exclusively, rather they reside in both spaces simultaneously. Pitchfork is a daily Internet publication devoted to music criticism and commentary, music news, and artist interviews, with a focus on independent music. Pitchfork is known as a taste arbiter and barometer of the indie music scene, and the effect its journalism can have on the independent music scene as a whole is known as 'The Pitchfork Effect' (Itzkoff, 2006). Essentially, 'The Pitchfork Effect' describes the influence the website has not just in the online context, but the offline context as well. Bands and record labels notice an almost instant increase or decrease in the ability to sell records, book gigs, have people turn up to gigs, or even relate with their audiences depending on what Pitchfork has written about them (Everrett, 2007; Itzkoff, 2006). Although the stereotype of the online fan might be someone sitting at home alone in the dark for hours on end reading and downloading material, it appears that audiences are using online resources to gauge what is worth collecting, what events are worth attending and what artists demand a following. Internet usage is thus complementary to traditional audience practices rather than 'online' and 'offline' audiences being mutually exclusive; a point that is explored further in subsection 2.7.2.

## **2.6 'Music for your plants': The value of independent record shops**

As contextualised in Sections 2.1 and 2.2, the days of the music industry of old are over. The consumer in the post-Napster environment of music distribution and acquisition enjoys a near unlimited selection of titles as opposed to the limited selection on offer before Napster. The cost of purchasing music has dropped, increasingly legally offered for free.

Contemporary consumers have access to extensive portable libraries of music, and the ability to share these libraries easily with others. These audience members are able to assume a more active role in the consumption process, with communication and engagement between them and other stakeholders (namely the artists and the wider industry) made easier in the globalised online world. Warr & Goode (2011) suggest active audience members may be 'prosumers' and tastemakers, able to promote artists much like the traditional record shop employee. Independent brick-and-mortar retailers are currently affected not only by these changes in how people engage with music, but also the actions of larger general retailers and the major record labels.

As discussed in subection 2.5.2, from the late-1990s there has been a significant shift in where the majority of physical copies of recorded music are sold. Of the four largest music retailers in the US—iTunes, Amazon, Walmart, and Target—the two that are not exclusively online retailers are 'big box' general retailers (Danton, 2013). The UK's music retail landscape is similar, with online retailer Amazon the largest retailer of music with 27% of the market, iTunes second with 26.7% of the market, and HMV third with 15.4% of the market (Ingham, 2015). Alongside iTunes, Amazon, and HMV, supermarkets Tesco, Sainsbury's, and Asda capture a further 17% of music sales (Ingham, 2015). Though 51% of music sold in New Zealand is now digital (Stuff, 2014), New Zealand's largest retailer The Warehouse continues to dominate physical music sales (Rice & Stiven, 2015). As a result, since the late-1990s many independent retailers have felt less supported by the major record labels, which have shifted their focus to a handful of major retailers selling substantial quantities of a limited range of titles (Jones, 2009; Taylor & Piper, 2012).

The major labels' long-term control of pricing and formats has also affected the brick-and-mortar retail music market. Outside of the public relations disaster caused by their suing their customers in the wake of Napster, and their failing to adapt quickly enough to the large scale changes in the industry brought about by Internet, the major labels have kept their pricing of physical formats exaggeratedly high, particularly where the CD is concerned (Jones, 2009). Sites like iTunes have created a new expected price point for music, which is significantly lower than a CD costs to purchase, while the buying power of retail outlets like Walmart, Tesco, or The Warehouse allows them to secure significant

discounts from the major labels, then pricing their stock at a price that independent stores simply cannot compete with. A store owner in Taylor & Piper's (2012) film on independent record stores in the UK describes how purchasing chart products from Tesco at retail price to sell in his own store is often cheaper than the wholesale price he is offered from the record label. As 'big box' retailers often use recorded music as a loss-leader, independent stores simply cannot compete with similar pricing as recorded music is their main product focus. It has been difficult for independent brick-and-mortar retailers to compete both with online and 'big box' retailers when the wholesale (and subsequent retail) price point for CDs is kept higher than the price of other music purchase options. The price of the major labels' products has led to further fallout with audiences, demonstrated in Condry's (2004) study of US and Japanese consumers. Both Japanese and US participants in the study said that they felt CD prices were kept artificially high by the music industry, and that they were unwilling to give money to industry middlemen. Many felt CDs offered poor value for money compared with other formats.

Record shops face a retail environment with increased competition both on and offline. Shops not only face competition with regard to alternative delivery and pricing options for recorded music, they also compete with a greater number of media options than were available in the past. The video game industry was worth \$93 billion in 2013 (Gartner, 2013), and music is a part of the soundtrack to games, rather than the central focus. Music as a stand-alone cultural entity now competes with video games, social media, phone applications, other software, film, and television. Kusek and Leonhard (2005) evaluated the cost of a CD in this environment, where a DVD or video game is a similar price yet offers many extra features. They argued that the consumer's perception is that you get a lot more value on a DVD or video game when comparing them to 45 to 70 minutes of music offered on a CD. Their observation is that the music industry has failed to add value to its product as other media industries have, at the same time holding prices relatively steady and refusing to embrace change (Kusek & Leonhard, 2005).

As for the artists that produce the products that record stores sell, many have shifted their primary focus from selling albums and singles to deriving their main income from playing live shows. When artists are still selling recorded music, sites like Bandcamp offer

an alternative to major label signing and distribution, affording artists greater independence and control over their careers and revenue. New technologies for the distribution and promotion of recorded music have led to the disintermediation of the supply chain. It is therefore questionable in this retail, business, and artistic environment whether record stores will continue to be relevant or sustainable.

### **2.6.1 'Selling stories': The social and cultural relevance of independent record shops**

Independent record stores can provide socially and culturally relevant spaces (Simpson, 2000), where the economic transaction is often not central to the stores' existence (albeit crucial to its survival). In a world where both mainstream cultural products and business spaces are increasingly homogenised (Coca-Stefaniak, Rees, & Parker, 2010; Gracon, 2009, 2010; McIntyre, 2009; Simpson, 2000), independent record stores offer much greater cultural variety than 'big box' retailers (Fullington, 2008; Gracon, 2010), doing so in unique local spaces which counter the standardisation or 'McDonaldization' (Ritzer, 1993) of the cultural landscape. Although sites like iTunes offer a multitude of titles as well as automated recommendations based on previous searches and purchases, independent record stores offer potential face-to-face recommendations and human interaction in an environment where like-minded people can congregate locally.

Up until early in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century the record store held a key position in the music buying experience, offering a local space for shared subcultural practices situated around material music products. The stores remained significant despite the advent of the easily mailed CD in the 1980s, though from this period onwards independent stores faced competition from larger and more centralised corporate music sellers or 'chain stores' as well as supermarkets, 'big box' retailers, mall or high street-based entertainment megastores, and the Internet (McIntyre, 2011). A decrease in the number of independent record stores means there are fewer collective lifestyle spaces of value to local communities, as well as less local entrepreneurialism. Considering the important function these stores play within their communities there has been little research into what the record store experience offers (McIntyre, 2011). The rest of this section is devoted to elaborating on the roles that independent record stores play in local music communities, before the end of this section

examines how these stores might continue to survive in the current music industry and retail climate.

From late 2011 to late 2012, independent record label Matador Records ran a series of blog entries on their website under the title 'Get to know your local independent music retailer' (Matador Records, 2012g). Each blog entry featured the owner of a different independent record store asked the same series of questions, including 'why do we need record stores?' Responses included:

Record stores used to be community centres. Many still are but to a lesser extent. When you go to a good record store, you are going to get turned on to music you did not even know existed. You browse on the internet, you read magazines, but record store employees that you connect with can make your day... and for shopping vinyl, especially used, you have a chance to find those coveted pieces you have been looking for for years... or just a fun piece like a *How To Bowl* record or *Music For Your Plants* record. (Matador Records, 2011b, para. 6)

Like a good bookstore, it's a breeding ground for culture I believe. Friends are made in the record store, connections are made in the record store, networking is done in the record store, and a sense of community is felt in the record store... there are still a bunch of new bands being formed every day who still say they're influenced by hanging out in their local record stores. (Matador Records, 2012b, para. 9)

Today, you can have access to everything, and listen to it instantly (and gratis) via the web. I think the web is a fabulous tool, but it doesn't compare to flipping through cases of records and visually contemplating cover art enthroned on the walls of a record store – or swapping suggestions with store owners and friends. A record store really is a singular place where you can exchange, interact and forget about the worries of the day – a place of comfort really. It also true that record stores contribute greatly to the quality of local life. (Matador Records, 2012c, para. 8)

Without record stores, we would all be like the amorphous blobs in *Wall-E*, scooting around on our little hover chairs, listening to music in our headphones and interacting with the rest of the world on a touchscreen... imagine that world and imagine not having

the ability to go somewhere and interact with a human being. That's scary! And yeah, I referenced *Wall-E*. (Matador Records, 2012f, para. 8)

Though some of the comments regarding the validity of the online experience are questionable, this small sample of the responses to the question posed reveal common themes as to the perceived value of the independent record shop beyond that of being a facility to purchase music. For the respondents, independent record stores provide an environment that fosters community, discovery, education, interpersonal connection, friendships, culture, creativity, diversity, growth and development, as well as providing an amorphous blob-free place of refuge and relaxation. Independent record stores, it seems, can transcend the economic act of exchanging money for goods and services.

Gracon's (2010) cultural, political and economic analysis of the independent record store situates independent record stores in an environment where the dominant force is characterised by extreme market concentration in terms of the major record labels. These labels exert control over the type of music that is produced, released and stocked in major outlets across the globe. Most of this music is designed to appeal to the widest possible audience, with the principle agenda being to maximise profits. As a result, the dominant music culture is largely determined by corporate music structures. Gracon (2010) posits that independent record stores offer an alternative to this mainstream media machine. Independent stores offer much greater cultural variety in terms of music, and what is considered popular at mainstream retail outlets is generally not of interest at the independent store. Independent stores often specialise in independent label and back-catalogue offerings not generally stocked at chain stores, 'big box' retailers or supermarkets. Owners and staff at independent stores typically have far greater product knowledge than their mainstream retail counterparts. Independent stores stock the obscure and the unexpected, as well as the local, from self-produced hand-decorated cassette tapes to local hip hop deejay mixes. They carry releases that are out-of-print or available only on vinyl. Independent stores counter the claim that everything is available on the Internet by stocking music not available to download. Most independent stores, particularly niche and second-hand outlets, only have one brick-and-mortar location and are often modest

operations with a small number of employees. Many independent store owners are overwhelmingly passionate about the product they sell (Gracon, 2010).

Independent record stores can function as educational spaces (Everrett, 2007; Fullington, 2008; Gracon, 2009, 2010; Jones, 2009; Marino & Toller, 2008; Taylor & Piper, 2012). Everett (2007) identifies this function of independent record stores as responsible for the creation and fostering of the indie rock music scene. Indie rock is a post-punk genre that can be traced back to the late 1970s, though its roots in terms of musical influences go back further to experimental artists like The Velvet Underground, Captain Beefheart and Tangerine Dream (Bannister, 2006). According to Everett (2007), the youth culture of the 1970s was looking for bands outside of the mainstream, and it was second-hand record store owners who pointed young people in the direction of these older bands. Owners of second-hand record stores educated their customers on music history, re-establishing largely forgotten recordings of the past and helping to foster the indie rock sound that followed when some of these customers went on to form bands of their own (Everett, 2007).

The education independent record stores offer might be described as counter-hegemonic, providing spaces where viewpoints alternative to what the mainstream media espouses may be aired. Gracon (2009) describes the store he grew up near, Home of the Hits in Buffalo, New York, as the place that changed his outlook from the one he nurtured in the “homogenous suburbs”:

It was here that I discovered a variety of political views with the aid of various punk and indie bands, independent fanzines, and a store atmosphere critical of all things mainstream. The store was more than a place of commodity exchange as it reinforced an independent spirit, and it taught me to look beyond the mainstream media outlets in terms of music, culture and politics – which are ideals which continue to this day. It was a store that provided a cultural difference, and people could learn to think differently about music and culture because the overall orientation of the store was built around independence and independent thinking (p. 205).

My own experiences in this regard were very similar to Gracon’s (2009). I began to more regularly visit record stores while I was an undergraduate student. As I completed this



formal education I was also gaining knowledge at the record stores I frequented. Here I began learning more about not only the music I had initially enjoyed purely on an auditory level, but also the often serious issues and events surrounding the music's production. For example, a love of Jamaican reggae music and the UK-based genres that followed it led to an ongoing interest in and awareness of Afro-Caribbean cultural and political issues.

Customers in independent stores place trust in the recommendations and advice of store employees (Gracon, 2010; McIntyre, 2009), and sometimes customers might recommend music to staff, owing to the music-based vernacular in independent stores. This vernacular includes knowledge of music history and the more esoteric areas of music culture, as well as knowing about particular releases and the labels that put them out. There is often a mutual understanding and depth in terms of knowledge of different musical genres (Gracon, 2010). Information shared regarding music is perceived as being authentic, as recommendations are free from corporate influence and sponsorship. Corporate chain stores, 'big box' retailers and supermarkets are not oriented around learning about music culture, or assembling to discuss any other issues of the day, nor are their staff hired based on their knowledge of music (Gracon, 2010). In this regard independent record stores might be thought of as library-like spaces, where people congregate and learn, as well as acquire cultural objects (Burkart, 2008).

Independent record stores also function as local narrative spaces. McIntyre's (2009, 2011) studies of changing music consumption patterns (2009, 2011) describe independent brick-and-mortar record stores as social-cultural hangout destinations that exist in the physical and cognitive maps of successive generations within local communities. Simpson's (2000) interpretive ethnography of young people's uses of spaces in Ybor City, Florida depicts the local record store, Blue Chair, as a narrative place for the lifestyle enclave that frequents it. A homology of alternative, authenticity, and youth define the collective identity at Blue Chair. According to Simpson (2000), this collective identity is reinforced by the flyers and posters on the walls and counter, the overall image Blue Chair projects about itself, and the wider world of alternative culture. Blue Chair as a local narrative space produces a developmental identity organised around display of difference and memory of this display. Old clothing, records, flyers, magazines and photographs shift from being

cultural waste to being meaningful. Patrons of Blue Chair are immersed in pieces of the past in the present, the past displayed before them suggesting the possibilities of the future (Simpson, 2000). Discussing the local narrative of a space might also be about preserving elements of the past. 'Greg', an employee of House of Records—the store that is the focus of Gracon's (2010) study—claims that modern society has a preference for the new over the old, and that old buildings like the one that House of Records is situated in should be conserved. He further frames this in regard to the business itself also being in the business of preserving historical artefacts, and making sure that they endure for as long as they possibly can.

Davie's (2013) blog on the shrinking number of brick-and-mortar retail outlets selling physical media, from books to DVDs to magazines to music, suggests that the number of media products disappearing from our physical retail environment matters because "every time we step outside to walk through the world, we reproduce that world in our heads" (para. 13). Davie (2013) further proposes that in a physical world where increasingly all we see in stores are clothing, pepper grinders, moisturisers and mobile phones, there are no 'stories' in physical locations anymore. The physical manifestations of these 'stories', he argues, need preserving on the high street as they are increasingly hidden away from us.

Independent record stores foster a sense of community for many patrons, a theme that has been discussed in studies of independent brick-and-mortar retailers in general (Brennan, 2000; Clarke & Banga, 2010; Coca-Stefaniak et al., 2010; Hare, Kirk, & Lang, 2001; Jen, 2010). Clarke & Banga's (2010) research into the declining number of small general stores in the UK, caused by corporate retailers like Tesco rapidly expanding into the convenience store market, suggests that small and independent stores are vital for the socioeconomic health of local areas. Local independent stores provide a 'hub' for community members to interact, in comparison to more generic store formats that are designed and executed to succeed in a variety of locations. Independent stores adapt to meet needs specific to the local community, providing services and product ranges tailored to the area. Local stores encourage interaction, support and promote local events and heritage, develop familiarity, and build relationships as well as emotional connections (Clarke & Banga, 2010). In some cases the service provided might be the emotional

connection itself; female retailers who participated in Coca-Stefaniak et al.'s (2010) study described themselves as informal counsellors to regular customers. The closure of small community shops has been shown to reduce social contact (Hare et al., 2001), their existence contributing significantly to the preservation of local districts (Pickering, 1998). Economically, there is a tendency for local independent retailers to engage in local sources of goods and services supply, rather than on a national level supply chain structured for corporate operations. In other words, independent local retailers support other independent local retailers, strengthening local economies and communities (Clarke & Banga, 2010).

Independent record stores cultivate a similar sense of community, albeit revolving around music, music-based subcultures, and the economic product that is recorded music (Fullington, 2008; Gracon, 2009, 2010; Jones, 2009; Taylor & Piper, 2012). Munsell's (2011) study of the punk rock subculture recognises music as being an art form closely aligned with the society it exists within, able therefore to act as an agent for social connection in the form of shared experiences. An affinity for music attracts like-minded individuals to the independent record store, providing an informal space where individuals may congregate (Gracon, 2009, 2010; McIntyre, 2009; Munsell, 2011). Gracon's (2009) study of House of Records described the store as a place "where other like-minded artists, musicians, and audiophiles congregate and spend time leafing through and discussing music. Customers form relationships with other customers based on their shared interest in music culture" (p. 214).

To date, Gracon's (2010) research offers the most detailed and direct examination of the community-building aspects of independent brick-and-mortar record stores. Gracon posits that independent record stores foster social interaction, and offer a form of community and a space where subcultures can connect. For those wanting to meet like-minded people, independent record stores offer a place to talk and learn about music, build friendships, meet other people in the community, and potentially form new projects such as bands and other creative collaborations. During Gracon's (2010) field research at House of Records, a customer suggests that if the store was in a different country it might be called a marketplace, a place where people not only buy and sell goods but socialise, mix, and meet.

In contrast, a discussion with a manager from 'big box' retailer Target reveals a shopping experience that is hurried and isolating, with conversation between customers uncommon (Gracon, 2010). Despite these positive descriptions of the communities that form around independent record stores, Gracon (2010) notes that this community can seem exclusive or alien to others. Some might feel intimidated by the 'quirkiness' or 'funkiness', whilst others may have experienced store workers making cynical comments about supposedly less knowledgeable or involved customers. Certain participants Gracon interviewed described feeling intimidated by the knowledge and attitude of the staff (2010). In this regard perhaps part of the community identity formed around record stores involves shunning 'outsiders', or at least clearly defining 'insider' from 'outsider' (Gracon, 2010; Munsell, 2011; Simpson, 2000).

The sense of community in many independent record stores involves a shared group identity. This identity may be cultivated by shared language, stories, and ideas, an example of which is the tale of a local venue cancelling bands overheard during Simpson's (2000) study of Blue Chair, or the philosophies and ideas heard about issues outside of music during Gracon's (2009) study of House of Records. This sense of identity may also be cultivated by visual signs and symbols, such as posters and flyers advertising local bands and reinforcing wider community activities outside the store (Gracon, 2010). Group identity might also come from members having a perceived 'cultural edge', as participants in Gracon's (2009) study noted. Most of the store customers interviewed in Gracon's (2009) study highlighted the importance of having knowledgeable conversations with staff, also wanting to create some kind of relationship with these staff as opposed to participating in an anonymous consumption event. Group identity, it seems, is linked to a sense of exclusivity and 'inside knowledge'. Language and symbols contribute to group feelings of possessing a 'cultural edge', not dissimilar to French philosopher Bourdieu's (1986) notion of cultural capital whereby possessing forms of knowledge, skills, and education arguably grants people a higher status in society, or Shuker's (2010) discussion around 'taste' and certain cultural texts, activities, and practices having acquired a higher status than others.

Many studies that have discussed community in relation to brick-and-mortar independent retail have examined the 'general store' (Brennan, 2000; Clarke & Banga, 2010;

Coca-Stefaniak et al., 2010; Hare et al., 2001; Jen, 2010) , an environment where the products sold do not appear to be the focus of the community-building aspects of the business. In this regard the independent music retailer is different. Ultimately communities grow in these stores based on an affinity for the principal product, recorded music. Recorded music is what Bourdieu (1985) referred to as a symbolic good. Symbolic goods are objects that, alongside having a commercial value, have a specific cultural value attached to them. Bourdieu (1984) hypothesised that symbolic goods are enmeshed in class distinction, marking the differences between the classes and providing in particular a point of distinction for the dominating class. Though frequent patrons of independent record stores are probably unlikely to be seeking to demonstrate their social class, those who identify with the communities that form around these stores often do distinguish themselves from other people; those who engage with mainstream culture.

### **2.6.2 ‘The McDonalds effect’: Cultural standardisation, globalisation, and localisation**

Independent record stores often operate as an oppositional space to dominant culture. Gracon (2009) frames this oppositional aspect around Ritzer’s (1993) concept of ‘McDonaldization’. McDonaldization refers to processes of cultural standardisation that occur when practices of economic rationalisation have come to govern many sectors and routines of everyday society. Considerations of efficiency take precedence over motivations derived from traditions, customs, or emotions, and standardisation results in predictability (Ritzer, 1993). Conversely, the independent spirit, non-corporate attitude, unique aesthetic and cultural variety offered by many independent record stores promote an alternative kind of human interaction and community based on a belief system incorporating independence, corporate resistance, and the uniquely local, which Gracon terms anti-McDonaldization (2009). Just as the members of punk rock communities in Munsell’s (2011) study identified with a communal sense of otherness and non-conformity to social norms, and members of modern subcultures in general oppose perceived banalities inherent in mass cultural forms (Gelder, 2007), patrons of House of Records in Gracon’s (2009) study bond in their shunning of the McDonaldized world.

One expression of anti-McDonaldization is the favouring of localisation over globalisation. Localisation is a relatively new term which has developed to directly oppose the increasing globalisation of businesses (Coca-Stefaniak et al., 2010). Localisation incorporates word-of-mouth, customer-to-customer marketing, customer service beyond simple product advice, community membership, and informal yet significant interpersonal exchanges between shop proprietors and customers (Coca-Stefaniak et al., 2010). During their investigation of small retailers in Seville, Spain and Perth, Scotland, Coca-Stefaniak et al. (2010) found that local shops supported other stakeholders in the local economy through their use of other services, such as local accountants. Retailers in Perth and Seville provided a source of local employment, entrepreneurial opportunities for others, and diversity in contrast to the homogenous nature of global chains.

Gracon (2010) framed localisation as “vernacular culture” and globalisation as “mall culture” (p. 139). He stated that, while malls are popular in terms of shopping destinations, they are in a large part responsible for the destruction of traditional downtown areas. In this regard, vernacular culture is threatened by mall culture, Gracon (2010) suggesting this leads to towns and cities characterised by a kind of nothingness, where buildings and spaces have no real connection to each other and there is no regional distinction. Gracon (2010) further argues that independent record shop cultures counter mall culture through expressing elements of vernacular culture. Vernacular culture expresses localness and encourages cultural forms made and organised by everyday people for their own pleasure. This culture is typically engaged in on a non-profit and voluntary basis, and is often associated with well-organised subcultures or religious groups. Vernacular culture is culture that has been developed *by* a people to express themselves to others, in a world where culture is increasingly developed *for* a people. According to Gracon (2010) this top-down structure results in commercial saturation, and, while independent record shops exist to turn a profit, they are characterised by a local and individual vernacular culture. This can manifest itself as the sale of local music, hand-drawn signage within the store, hand-made drawings and decorations adorning the walls, the unique layouts of stores, listening parties, film screenings, in-store performances, and the kind of talk that occurs in these spaces. Contrastingly, branding in chain stores is unified across branches, and generally flyers

cannot be left for customers. 'Big box' stores such as Target as well as the chain stores typically found in malls thus exert a hegemonic control over what information is available across all outlets.

McDonaldization results in the homogenisation of the physical retail landscape. As Steele (1981) observed, industrialisation has led to settings that have no distinguishing features or spirit, which in turn has led to few regional differences in architecture and building materials. Simpson (2000) describes how different people derive different narratives from communal spaces, but developers and council planners often only consider their own narratives when in control of such locations. Under this ownership and control model, heterogeneous or multiple interpretations and uses of spaces are replaced by more limited offerings. Coca-Stefaniak (2010) describes large retail corporations that exist on a global scale as operating with resolute consistency as if the different parts of the planet they operate in are a single entity, selling the same items in the same spaces the same way everywhere. McIntyre (2009) describes malls and 'big box' retailers as constructed and controlled myths, limited in their offerings though large in scale. Speaking to Gracon (2010), Marc Hossler of the band Negativland describes the proliferation of 'big box' stores and corporate brands as a monoculture. He posits that regional distinctions in the US have been lost, remembering a time where different brands were particular to different parts of the country, whereas now "a lot of that stuff is just getting more flattened out" (p. 344).

McDonaldization also results in the homogenisation of the cultural landscape. Chain stores, supermarkets and 'big box' stores generally stock predictable and standardised recorded music products. Patrons know what to expect, in the form of a limited selection of titles that have been promoted through commercial radio, music television, and the 'Top 40' charts, and are in turn heavily promoted by the retailer (Gracon, 2010; Shuker, 2013). Homogenisation extends to the limited availability of physical formats, with CDs often the only format on offer (Fox, 2005; Gracon, 2009). Workers in these stores wear uniforms and are trained to work in predetermined ways, and the stores feature the same aesthetic and displays. For those interested in independent music culture, these McDonaldized spaces are not desirable to be in (Gracon, 2009).

Independent record shops offer spaces that are unique from one another, stocking a wide range of recorded music from store to store, from the popular to the obscure. Generally music stocked is not dictated by any form of censorship. Framed in terms of Gracon's (2009) anti-McDonaldization, these spaces challenge the standardisation that occurs with generic corporate retail. Music stocked might be swayed by particular demands from local customers, or the particular content chosen by shop proprietors and their employees. In this regard independent shops challenge cultural predictability by offering a diverse selection, differing in some way from store to store. Gracon (2009) argues that the resulting environment in independent shops is more humanising, as opposed to purchasing music from a standardised 'big box' chain. McIntyre (2009) suggests that the disappearance of independent spaces from retail environments would spell the end of a specific type of consumer satisfaction and value, also reducing the variety of available retail experiences. Similarly Gracon (2009) states that if independent record shops ceased to exist there would be less cultural variety, less availability of alternative and obscure media, and fewer independent spaces for people to gather.

Independent record shops often function as informal spaces for civic engagement. In this regard they might be considered as physical manifestations of Habermas' (1996) 'public sphere'; areas in social life where the public can come together to discuss the political and social issues of the day unhindered by hegemonic influences. According to Putnam (2000), civic engagement has radically declined over the past few decades, having become McDonaldized in terms of how people participate in culture. Putnam further suggests that less engagement with civil life starts with television, where representations of people have replaced interacting with real people during the already isolating activity of watching the screen. Gracon (2010) elaborates on Putnam's notion by suggesting people are now "mail order activists" (p. 140), forsaking social bonds formed through meeting and debating social issues in person with activities such as pledging money from afar to help support causes. Though the Internet does provide opportunities for healthy discourse, the fact that the majority of consumers now procure music online alters the nature of civic engagement, particularly on a local level. There are seemingly fewer and fewer physical spaces where



local-level civic engagement can occur in an environment where consumers increasingly shop online and brick-and-mortar retail is further McDonaldized.

Now that the majority of music consumers procure music online, the nature of civic engagement and human interaction occurring during this process has changed. Though the majority of commentary concerning the shift from brick-and-mortar music retail to online acquisition of music concentrates on the economic ramifications (APN News & Media, 2008; Arditi, 2013; Benzine & Dosanjh, 2007; Bockstedt et al., 2006; Boehlert, 2000; Bowers & Treanor, 2013; Burkart, 2008; Campbell, 2010; Christman, 2002; Epstein, 2013; Fairfax Digital, 2009; Fletcher, 2012; Fox, 2004; Graham et al., 2004; Harmon, 2011; Lam & Tan, 2001; Parry et al., 2012; Plummer, 2011; Sachs, 2007; Warr & Goode, 2011; Youngs, 2011; Zentner, 2008), there has been less exploration of the interpersonal ramifications of this change in audience behaviour. According to McIntyre (2009, 2011), downloading behaviours are individualistic and divorce consumers from local community involvement associated with shopping in brick-and-mortar stores. This loss of “retail social capital” (McIntyre, 2011, p. 148) encourages less communal care and less investment in people, product, and space; resulting in a kind of “individualistic solipsism” (McIntyre, 2011, p. 148). Gracon (2009, 2010) frames online music acquisition similarly, suggesting downloading is a solitary and isolating activity.

As discussed in Section 2.1, less pessimistic accounts of shifting music consumption patterns suggest the online environment allows for greater communication between audience and artist (Jones, 2002; Parry et al., 2012), as well as opportunities for audience members to be ‘prosumers’; tastemakers who expose artists to their peers. Rather than expressing feelings of isolation, Generation Y participants who took part in McIntyre’s (2011) study saw downloading music on the Internet as a world of choice and consumer-controlled interactions with a network of friends. Everett (2007) suggests that music-based communities use online environments as a means of supplementing rather than replacing more traditional forms of offline communication. The nature of civic engagement and human interaction in on and offline settings is a key theme that will be further explored in the research findings and analysis chapter of this work.

In summary, despite the paradigm shift that has occurred in the music industry since the late-1990s, independent brick-and-mortar record shops still appear to provide a unique environment centred around, yet not necessarily exclusively focussed on, the consumption of recorded music. These stores provide lifestyle spaces that aid in fostering music-based subcultures, scenes and communities. Independent shops might be described as counter-hegemonic, stocking a wider variety of products than available from the mainstream media machine. They can also function as educational spaces not only where music is concerned, but also in regard to the wider issues of the day. In this regard there is counter-hegemony too, with these spaces often fostering alternative viewpoints to the mainstream media messages of the day. Independent shops can foster a sense of community for patrons and staff, encouraging social interaction between like-minded people. These interactions sometimes result in new projects, such as the formation of bands or collaborations on other creative endeavours. The sense of community felt in many independent shops involves a collective group identity, cultivated by shared interests, language, visual symbols and ideas. This group identity also appears to be linked to members perceiving themselves as being in possession of a 'cultural edge'. This sense of 'otherness' often extends to a wider disregard for dominant culture, or anti-McDonaldization (where McDonaldization is the process of cultural standardisation that has occurred over the past few decades). Anti-McDonaldization manifests itself through each independent shop being unique in its layout and decor, as well in what products are stocked. Predictability and standardisation is rejected in favour of individuality, diversity, and localisation.

### **2.6.3 'Adapt or die': The future of the brick-and-mortar record shop**

As discussed in subsection 2.2.2, brick-and-mortar record shops now attract a niche market, rather than the 'Cautious Consumer' (Parry, 2012) or mainstream music buyer, who is now well catered for online, in supermarkets, and in 'big box' retailers (Reid, n.d.). As McIntyre (2009) noted, the independent shops that have survived have done so by targeting a specific market, rather than trying to appeal to the masses with a 'mall oriented' operation focussed on heavily discounted pricing in prime retail spaces. Considering the near demise of corporate music retail chains, as well as the independent stores that have closed, survival in the modern retail environment appears to be about specialisation (or, 'playing to

strengths'), and the skills and foresight to adapt if necessary. There are two other phenomenon currently of significance to the ongoing survival of independent brick-and-mortar record shops. Firstly, Record Store Day, an annual event celebrating the culture of the independent record store, and secondly the renaissance of vinyl record sales.

Three key themes emerge from discussions with store owners concerning the continued relevance and survival of the brick-and-mortar record shop. The first theme, 'adaptation', relates to the need for many shops to alter their business practice, focus, or inventory in response to the changes that have occurred in the music industry in recent years. The ability to adapt, and in turn diversify if necessary, is a theme linked in turn to shops that have ceased trading, in that some of these closures might be attributed to stakeholders not making requisite changes to the store's day-to-day operation and focus in order to stay viable. The second theme, 'identity', is linked to the first in terms of store owners and staff paying particular attention to their business's strengths, as well as intimately knowing the product they sell as well as their customers. The final theme that emerges, 'community', relates to the second in regard to not only having a good rapport with customers, but also recognising the social element of frequenting stores is a desirable (and marketable) point of difference from many contemporary retail experiences.

As Kusek & Leonhard (2005) suggested, stakeholders in the modern music industry have to "adapt or die" (p. 125). Similarly, journalistic pieces canvassing independent brick-and-mortar shop owners and staff demonstrate the importance of 'adaptation' to stores surviving in the contemporary environment (Brown, 2012; Campbell, 2010, 2011; Lindvall, 2013; Matador Records, 2012g). Participants in Matador Records' 'Get to know your local independent retailer' blog (Matador Records, 2012g) described being "techy and responsive to change and suggestions", perhaps adding "an event space, as well as a coffee bar and tables" (Matador Records, 2012d, para. 6), having to "do way more than just be a shop", including "being a distro [distributor], putting on gigs, or whatever" (Matador Records, 2012i, para. 9), or selling "new and used turntables, receivers and other audio equipment" (Matador Records, 2012a, para. 2). An article asking similarly themed questions to UK-based record store owners garnered similar responses, suggesting that for shops to be successful in the modern age "they need to provide something a little extra" (Reid, n.d.,

para. 40), such as running affiliated club nights in other locations, putting on gigs in-store, and “just trying to enforce the link between live music and buying records” (Reid, n.d., para. 40). For Paul Higgins of Rough Peel Records, diversifying meant stocking a greater range of inventory not commonly affected by piracy, like t-shirts and vinyl (Brown, 2012). The requirement to tailor a brick-and-mortar record shop to the contemporary media and market environment is a response to the substantial changes that have occurred ‘post-Napster’, evidenced by Dave House of Banquet Records’ comment that “there’s been a record shop on this site for almost 40 years. If we ran the shop how it was run for 35 of those years... I don’t think we’d be around for more than a few months” (Reid, n.d., para. 41)

‘Identity’ is the second key theme that emerges from store owners discussing the continued relevance and survival of the brick-and-mortar record shop (Campbell, 2010; Fact Team, 2012; Lindvall, 2013; Matador Records, 2012g; Reid, n.d.). Alongside the foresight to adapt and diversify where necessary, identifying and then placing particular emphasis on already established business strengths was seen as crucial. Recognising that “mainstream chains such as Sounds and EMI have fallen by the wayside too, resulting in a market that is now split between non-specialist bulk retailers at one end and a diminishing number of specialised niche stores” (Du Fresne, 2013, para. 7), shops appear now better served to concentrate on these niches than attempt to satisfy a market somewhere in the middle, as “the ones that fall in-between fail” (Godfroy, as cited in Lindvall, 2013, para. 3). The proprietors of London’s Love Vinyl described informed stock choices, “hand-picked by us... we’d never carry a record we did not believe in... there are certain genres we try and stock... because that’s where our own taste and knowledge lies” (Fact Team, 2012, para. 10)

Possessing and utilising requisite knowledge appeared to be a key part of identity for many stores, illustrated by Dennis O’Brien of Slow Boat Records (Wellington, NZ’s longest-trading independent store) identifying knowledgeable staff as a key factor to the store’s success (Campbell, 2010). Similarly, a store owner in Reid’s (n.d.) article described “knowing who they are selling to and being able to sell to those people”, adding “knowledgeable music staff are invaluable and act as a great filter between bullshit music and great music” (para. 6). Knowledge of music and customers was also a key theme in Matador Record’s

(2012) blog, participants describing the value of “taste, knowledge, and friendliness” (Matador Records, 2012h, para. 6) and “a wild passion for music itself” (Matador Records, 2012b, para. 7). One participant suggested his store was “very much like a gourmet market of music” (Matador Records, 2012c, para. 6), while another acknowledged that “100% of our [sic] stock is available for free online, so we have [sic] to really work at giving people a real reason to come in” (Matador Records, 2012b, para. 7).

The final theme, or ‘reason to come in’, that emerges from interviews with brick-and-mortar record store owners is the continued potential for these spaces for fostering and maintaining local communities (Campbell, 2010, 2011; Fact Team, 2012; Matador Records, 2012g; Reid, n.d.). Linked to identity, as well as the need to recognise and play to the unique strengths of individual stores, respondents to Matador Record’s (2012) blog suggested “record stores have to make more of an effort these days to remain relevant as cultural centres, not just retail stores” (Matador Records, 2012f, para. 7), “spaces where people can gather and appreciate art and music” (Matador Records, 2012f, para. 7), that encourage “community involvement” (Matador Records, 2012e, para. 5), and that might “inspire others within the community to create their own cultural exchange, no matter what form it comes in” (Matador Records, 2011a, p. para. 7). For Origami Vinyl proprietor Neil Schield, fostering community extended beyond the shop floor, where he suggested “it is extremely important to get involved with local non-profit organisations, support local education institutions, work with other local retailers and the chambers of commerce, and DJ at local venues and bars” (Matador Records, 2011c, para. 8).

Of these responses, some of the more emotive sentiments evoke Miller’s (2006) description of independent booksellers as ‘reluctant capitalists’. Though it is safe to assume that independent stores surviving is first and foremost linked to turnover and the ability to pay staff and suppliers, the responses of these store owners indicates that for them long-term viability and relevance is not so much about concentrating on the fiscal aspects of the business as fostering the social and cultural appeal of these stores that in turn encourages trade. Notwithstanding the attention already paid to the social and cultural value of independent brick-and-mortar record stores in Section 2.6 (Coca-Stefaniak et al., 2010; Fullington, 2008; Gracon, 2009, 2010; Jones, 2009; Marino & Toller, 2008; McIntyre, 2009,

2011; Simpson, 2000; Taylor & Piper, 2012), specific to survival, the responses of store owners echo what Lam & Tan (2001) identified as the sociopsychological aspect of physical record stores that cannot be replicated on the Internet. Though the unmitigated claim that the Internet cannot provide sociopsychological pleasures similar to those found in store environments might seem dated, what Lam & Tan (2001) did predict is that brick-and-mortar stores might best maintain relevance as “social gathering places where music lovers congregate to interact in relaxed settings” (p. 65). Similarly, Kusek & Leonhard (2005) advocated that brick-and-mortar record shops would become “‘lifestyle zones’ or ‘music arcades where people go to meet a likeminded crowd and check out all sorts of products that are related to music and other particular cultural preferences” (p. 89).

Store owners’ responses are similar to the findings of Coca-Stefaniak et al.’s (2010) study of independent grocery retailers in Seville, Spain and Perth, Scotland, as well as Jen’s (2010) study of independent book shops in Sydney, Australia. Despite the dominance of a few large players in the European grocery sector, participants in Coca-Stefaniak et al.’s (2010) research continued to trade in the independent retail sector. The key to their survival is what Stefaniak et al. (2010) terms ‘localism’, whereby store owners have a deep understanding of their local socio-economic environment, retain customer loyalty through personalised service, and enjoy word-of-mouth promotion from customers owing to the business’ embeddedness in the local community. Coca-Stefaniak et al. (2010) suggest ‘localism’ offers these retailers a sustained competitive advantage, utilising emotional proximity, providing spaces offering more localised goods and services than the more homogenous offerings of larger chain stores, developing a reputation for a specific type of trade or experience, and maintaining strong social links within a local community. Respondents to Stefaniak et al.’s (2010) study cited the significance of genuine interpersonal relationships between many customers and shop owners. Jen’s (2010) article found that independent bookshops in Sydney have learned to find a niche, provide personalised service, not trade from a shopping centre as potential customers perceive such spaces as mass consumerist and globally homogenous, and not focus on ‘anti-books’ (bestseller titles), rather aiming to promote higher culture. Customer service was also identified as crucial,

particularly where building rapport, sourcing obscure titles, and providing knowledge and recommendations are concerned.

Similarly, two studies of the impact of 'big box' stores on small US towns suggested smaller independent retailers might survive alongside these stores by providing a distinctly different retail experience. Brennan's (2000) research on the impact of six large discount stores opening in five small Minnesota towns found that consumers shop at larger discounters for low prices and a large variety of goods, and specialty stores for items they cannot find elsewhere. The study also found that locals were shopping more at large discount stores, and existing smaller independent retailers less, in turn suggesting independent stores need to differentiate themselves from 'big box' retailers by increasing product assortments in the key categories carried, upgrading branded merchandise not available to 'big box' discounters, and maintaining stock carried. Fox's (2005) critique of Wal-Mart's music retailing similarly suggested that in order to stay viable, independent record stores should broaden specialist product options, focusing on genres Wal-Mart do not stock, as well as more difficult to source recordings. Considering Brennan (2000) and Fox's (2005) findings, as well as Fox (2005) identifying the need for small retailers to attract customers who are not price-sensitive, it would seem that the emphasis many surviving independent brick-and-mortar record stores have placed on adapting, diversifying, identity, knowledge, specialisation, and fostering and supporting community is effective as the spaces appeal to patrons who are experience-driven, rather than price-driven.

Another factor often attributed to the continued and future survival of independent brick-and-mortar record shops is the resurgence of the vinyl record. Figures from the International Federation of the Phonographic Industry claim that vinyl sales rose 54.7% globally in 2014 (IFPI, 2015), while Nielsen's 2015 end of year report suggested 12 million vinyl records were sold in the US that year, marking the tenth straight year of sales growth, surpassing the previous year's record of 2.8 million units (Nielsen, 2016). A Recording Industry of America report placed vinyl sales in 2014 at US\$315 million, also noting that 2014 was the first year since 1987 that vinyl records comprised a double digit percentage of the physical sales market (Friedlander, 2015). In New Zealand, trade association Recorded Music New Zealand reported vinyl sales up by 200% in 2014 (Rice & Stiven, 2015). Specific

to independent brick-and-mortar record shops, US trade figures show 45% of vinyl sales in 2015 occurred at independent stores (Nielsen, 2016), while in the UK a 2013 report indicated over 50% of vinyl sales occurred in independent stores (Sherwin, 2013). Though there has been no official trade figures released, media coverage in New Zealand also suggests increases vinyl sales have similarly increased turnover at independent brick-and-mortar record shops (Flying Out, 2015; Stewart, 2012)

Though there is no quantitative data available to establish a definitive link, there is some evidence to suggest a causal relationship between increasing vinyl sales and the implementation of Record Store Day in 2007 (BBC News, 2014; Conte, 2014; Gundersen, 2013; Sherwin, 2013; Tardio, 2014; Tuffrey, 2012). Established as a response to industry stakeholders believing negative press was leading the public to believe all independent brick-and-mortar stores were failing (Hendricks, 2015), Record Store Day occurs in independent record shops across the globe on the third Saturday of April each year, aiming to celebrate the culture of the independently owned record store, as well as raise the profile of these spaces. The organisers of Record Store Day provide promotions, marketing, and other opportunities for stores throughout the year, maintaining an Internet and press presence that publicises the value of independent record stores, while individual stores host live performances, special promotions, and one-off record releases on the day. The founders of the event initially observed that store survival was embedded in embracing local culture and courting niche markets, but also that many independent traders were disadvantaged in the marketplace by their very independence. In other words, Record Store Day is not just about celebrating the independent record store ethos, but more tactically retailers collaborating on a global awareness campaign in order to raise the profile of individual stores (Hendricks, 2015).

Despite the best intentions of Record Store Day organisers, the event has drawn some criticism (Clark, 2015; Fact, 2015), as have reports suggesting that the growth of vinyl sales has significantly contributed to the prosperity of independent brick-and-mortar retailers (Brewster, 2015; Gibsone, 2015; Hann, 2014). A number of independent record labels have claimed that the success and profile of Record Store Day has led to the major record labels capitalising on the event, in turn creating a backlog of mainstream records to be pressed at



the limited number of pressing plants that still exist, which means smaller run releases on independent labels are then excluded, undermining the ethos of the event (Clark, 2015; Fact, 2015). Such criticism relates to concerns regarding attributing the significant growth in vinyl sales with greater patronage and support of independent traders (Brewster, 2015; Gibsone, 2015; Hann, 2014), as some major retailers now stock vinyl again and, despite the range of titles they offer being limited, their share of the market is significant. In the US, Amazon is the largest seller of vinyl with about 12.3% market share, followed by Urban Outfitters who have an 8.1% market share (Rettig, 2014). In the UK, Tesco, Wilko, BHS and Matalan all stock vinyl (Brewster, 2015; Gibsone, 2015), while in New Zealand, The Warehouse recently started selling records for the first time (Gates, 2015). Critique of major retailers' contribution to rising vinyl sales extends to the limited range of mainstream titles they sell on the format, which is at odds with the independent store ethos and business model (Beaumont-Thomas, 2014; Brewster, 2015; Gibsone, 2015).

Whether or not Record Store Day continues in the long-term as an event, the wider reasoning behind its inception is an important consideration when considering the long-term survival and relevance of the independent brick-and-mortar record shop. Essentially a wider public relations campaign in response to negative press suggesting brick-and-mortar record shops were no longer a viable entity (Campbell, 2010; Harris, 2003; Williams, 2006), Record Store Day has created a unified front where once a number of relatively small and geographically isolated local businesses competed for exposure in a media and economic environment where much larger companies are able to deploy large-scale advertising campaigns, promotions, and press releases at a national or even global level. Record Store Day has instigated a narrative in media coverage of independent brick-and-mortar record shops that counters press reports that record stores are 'graying' (Williams, 2006) or 'dying' (Harris, 2003), instead celebrating and promoting shops as still-surviving niche retailers providing an experience unique to the prevailing contemporary recorded music marketplace.

Whatever the records being pressed, and wherever they are being sold, overall sales figures for the recorded music industry suggest independent brick-and-mortar stores need to continue to attract a dedicated base of niche customers in order to survive (Gracon,

2009). While vinyl sales continue to rise, at the same time overall sales of physical format recordings continue to decrease, and streaming revenue is rising sharply. International Federation of the Phonographic Industry figures for 2014 indicated physical format sales were down by 8.1% globally, and streaming revenue was up by 38.6% (IFPI, 2015), while in the US figures for 2015 suggested physical format sales were down 13.8%, while streaming revenue was up 83% (Nielsen, 2016). In New Zealand, physical music sales grossed NZ\$55.2 million in 2012, down to NZ\$35.1 million in 2014, while over the same time period streaming revenue rose from NZ\$2.2 million to NZ\$35.1 million (Caddick & Holt, 2015)

Based on what these figures indicate—music consumption continuing to increase online while CD sales are falling—brick-and-mortar stores are wise to continue to concentrate on strengthening their relationships with the small but dedicated group of customers who continue to frequent their businesses, as well as championing vinyl, which is their preferred format. It appears customers in these spaces are often experience-driven rather than price-driven, seeking face-to-face interactions, specialist and hard-to-find products, and a space offering more than just the sale of recorded music. Outside of this core customer base, if vinyl sales continue to rise, and the vinyl record continues being the staple product of most independent stores, then despite the range of places consumers may purchase these products, the brick-and-mortar record shop might attract greater numbers of customers. In other words, while the price-driven consumer might purchase a vinyl record on Amazon for cheaper than they would in a smaller local store, the fact that such a pop-culture anachronism is rising in popularity indicates that an increasing number of individuals might be seeking some kind of respite from the ‘digital’ world’, and might find it in the uniquely local combined retail, hospitality, and performance space that is the modern incarnation of the independent brick-and-mortar music retailer.

## **2.7 ‘Pounding away in 24 time zones’: Community and the Internet**

This section examines what social and cultural factors are necessary in order for communities to function, then compares face-to-face interactions with online interactions, before questioning what face-to-face communication can perhaps offer that online

communication cannot. The section concludes with a discussion regarding how on and offline activities and interactions are now often not mutually exclusive, exploring the implications of this hybrid communication environment. This section builds on discussions concerning interpersonal interaction and communities introduced in the last three sections (2.4 to 2.6), principally the reduction in numbers of physical socio-cultural spaces and the value of these spaces (Brennan, 2000; Clarke & Banga, 2010; Coca-Stefaniak et al., 2010; Gracon, 2009, 2010; Hare et al., 2001; Jones, 2009; Marino & Toller, 2008; McIntyre, 2009; Simpson, 2000; Taylor & Piper, 2012), increasing interpersonal interaction online (Davie, 2013; Everett, 2007; Jones, 2002; Matador Records, 2012c; McIntyre, 2011; Parry et al., 2012), and debates concerning the legitimacy and value of both on and offline social environments (Everett, 2007; McIntyre, 2009, 2011; Warr & Goode, 2011). This section also provides further theoretical framework in order to analyse the data presented in Section 4.9 of the Research and Findings chapter, where the changing social practices of communities that are based on recorded music are surveyed in detail.

Studies have suggested that the Internet is not a part of the 'real' world (Borgmann, 1999), that communities do not exist on the Internet (Snyder, as cited in Galston, 2000; Kraut et al., 1998), or that communities do exist but fall significantly short of the criteria that constitute 'true' communities' (Baker & Ward, 2002; Driskell & Lyon, 2002). Borgmann (1999) theorised that the Internet is not objective reality, and that people use it to escape their everyday reality. This alternative reality, he argued, is trivial and glamorised and lacks context. Kraut et al.'s (1998) study of Internet users in Pittsburgh suggested that Internet usage leads to loneliness and depression rather than propagating any sense of community. In 1996 Snyder (as cited in Galston, 2000), sceptical of the claims of Internet enthusiasts, stated:

A community is more than a bunch of people distributed in all 24 time zones, sitting in their dens and pounding away on keyboards about the latest news in alt.music.indigo-girls. That's not a community; it's a fan club. Newsgroups, mailing lists, chat rooms—call them what you will—the Internet's virtual communities are not communities in almost any sense of the word. A community is people who have greater things in common than a fascination with a narrowly defined topic. (p. 196)

Baker and Ward (2002) proposed that online communities struggle to sustain themselves over long periods of time, going so far as to refer to offline groups as ‘real’ communities. The same year Driskell and Lyon (2002) suggested that online relationships lack the intimacy of face-to-face interaction, and are neither emotional and supportive or long term and enduring.

Many of these analyses were published in the initial years of the general public engaging with the Internet, and therefore might be described as speculative in comparison to engaging in similar discussions today. As Galston (2000) observes, if someone in 1952 had organised a conference on the social consequences of television, they would have faced the problem that social and technological reality was moving faster than empirical scholarship. The use of the Internet has increased dramatically since the Millennium. In 2000 it was estimated that 400 million people used the Internet. By 2002 that number had grown to over 600 million users, and by 2006 over one billion people had access to the Internet (Christopherson, 2007). 2015 figures suggest 3.17 billion people now use the Internet (Statista, 2015). Not only has the number of people accessing the Internet increased significantly, but new technology and access speeds have now integrated usage into many users’ daily lives. Web 2.0 has emphasised regular connection to the Internet, as well as increased user-generated content, usability, interaction, and interoperability. Social media websites now link billions of people regularly and on a global scale. In short, digital technology—principally the Internet—is far more embedded in people’s daily lives than it was in the early years that the general public began to engage online.

Each new technological advance in communications over the past 200 years—from the telegraph, to the telephone, radio, motion pictures, and the Internet—has invited discussion as to the implication it will have for community ties (Bargh & McKenna, 2004). This thesis asserts there is no longer a debate as to whether communities exist online, and is more concerned with exploring how online communities might differ to ‘traditional’ (or ‘face-to-face’) communities. The Internet increasingly reconfigures social, educational, economic, and civic activity (Haythornthwaite & Kendall, 2010), allowing people to redefine their roles as citizens of both local and global communities (Dyson, 1997). Correspondingly, the remainder of this section seeks to ascertain how human interactivity might be changing as

people increasingly congregate online. People are now using the Internet in ways that both challenge and reinforce traditionally held notions of community, and transforming both how to define and retain communal identity in both on and offline settings (Haythornthwaite & Kendall, 2010).

Before examining how communities manifest themselves online, some discussion of a definition of community is necessary. As Lyon (1999) and Nieckarz (2005) observe, there is no agreement as to a singular definition of the term. Furthermore, a number of definitions of what constitutes a community were formed before the widespread usage of the Internet (Bender, 1982; Poplin, 1979; Wilkinson, 1991), a medium which has redefined the ability to connect and network with others. Some of these older definitions suggest that community must be bound to a physical locality, and in turn that community members need to live in relative proximity (Poplin, 1979; Wilkinson, 1991). This is arguably a dated concept in the digital communication age. As a result, more recent scholars have argued that communities can and do form around participants' shared interests, irrespective of geographical proximity (Beekhuyzen, Hellens, & Nielsen, 2011; Bennett, 2012; DiMaggio, Hargittai, Neuman, & Robinson, 2001; Everett, 2007; Lingel & Naaman, 2012; Murthy, 2010).

Attempts to define the term community are tied to normative prescription as well as empirical description (Cohen, 1985; Williams, 1976). That is, community is routinely perceived as a 'good thing'; the term attached to a myth of universal egalitarianism (Cohen, 1985). Coen (1985) emphasises that communities can be riddled with power relations, suggesting that though a group may not have leadership, it will still have a means of attributing status or prestige. Coen (1985) also identifies that community identity implies both similarity and difference. That is, community consciousness is derived in part from its boundaries, and these boundaries by definition both include and *exclude* people. A highly problematic example of this is when community identity discriminates and segregates according to ethnicity, as demonstrated in Rex & Moore's (1969) study of the tensions between three distinct communities in Sparkbrook, UK and Eade's (1989) examination of political representation of the Bangladeshi community in East London.

Much of the literature attempting to define the notion of community on the Internet compares online communities with face-to-face communities (Baker & Ward, 2002; Bargh & McKenna, 2004; Borgmann, 1999; DiMaggio et al., 2001; Etzioni, 1999; Everett, 2007; Galston, 2000; Murthy, 2010; Nieckarz, 2005; Okdie, Guadagno, Bernieri, Geers, & McLarney-Vesotski, 2011; Pierce, 2009). Baker and Ward (2002) defined community as a group of individuals who organise themselves around a shared set of interests. They argued that feeling a sense of community need not be linked to geographical space as face-to-face communities are, and that in the absence of this geographical proximity some other factor must draw individuals together. Rather than investigating the catalyst for online communities to form, Wellman and Melina (1999) observed how already established online communities operated, and compared this to face-to-face interactions. They suggested that many of the aspects that define face-to-face communities manifest themselves in online communities, including people establishing supportive relationships with one-and-other, weak and strong bonds, established understandings around reciprocity and conduct, and a diversity of social contacts. Based on Baker and Ward's (2002) observations it would seem a high level of interest in, and involvement with, recorded music and the cultures that surround it is a fertile starting-point for online music communities to form. Wellman and Melina's (1999) investigation of how Internet communities operate once formed is some indication online 'spaces' might socially function similarly to the independent brick-and-mortar record shop.

In Galston's (2000) discussion of whether the Internet strengthens offline community bonds, he referred to Bender's classic definition of community. Penned in 1982, Bender asserted that a community constitutes a limited number of people in a restricted social space or network, held together by shared understandings and a sense of obligation (Bender, 1982). Individuals are bound together by affective emotional ties rather than a sense of individual self-interest. Though he stated that face-to-face relationships are usual in these communities, he also maintained that physical interaction is not crucial to these groups' existence. The aspects he viewed as key to communities operating are limited membership, affective ties, and a sense of mutual obligation (Bender, 1982). Similarly, Etzioni's (1999) comparison of face-to-face and online communities suggested that

irrespective of locality, communities require a measured commitment to a set of shared values, mores, and meanings, as well as a shared historical identity; in other words, a culture. Finally Parrish (2002) suggested that directly applying traditional definitions of community to online communities is problematic. He advocated for an advanced definition of community that addresses the core of traditional definitions yet does not exclude online communities from analysis. Parrish (2002) thus defined community as a group of people who interact and have shared goals, interests, feel a sustained bond and connection, cooperate, and support one-and-other.

Wellman (2001) suggests people find community in networks, not groups, and that the Internet encourages what he terms “networked individualism” (p. 238). Most people exist in multiple, sometimes connected communities in their day-to-day lives, from family to workmates to friends and other social groupings. Wellman (2001) highlights that though complex social networks have always existed, the Internet has given rise to these being the dominant form of social organisation. Computer-mediated networked individualism dictates that place does not matter and the person is the portal. Interacting online allows for personally tailored communities that provide sociability, information, and a sense of belonging; a phenomenon Wellman (2001) terms “communities of choice” (p.238).

Whether online recorded music communities function in the ways suggested above will be explored when examining the responses of research participants who contributed to the Findings and Analysis chapter of this work. Some studies of online music communities (Beekhuyzen et al., 2011; Bennett, 2012; Lingel & Naaman, 2012; Nieckarz, 2005) do suggest the members of different groups studied possess shared understandings and a sense of obligation (Bender, 1982), shared values and meanings and a sense of historical identity (Etzioni & Etzioni 1999), as well as shared goals and interests and a sustained bond and connection (Parrish, 2002). Nieckarz’ (2005) investigation of online tape (recordings of live music performance) traders on the Internet suggests a sense of community exists around the pursuit. The tape trading community regularly interacts, has a negotiated order (including socialising new members as to community etiquette), as well as a sense of belonging, identity, and social status. There is personal commitment from group members to the preservation of the community, and an adherence to shared goals and values,

including that group members do not profit from trades, re-share recordings they are given, be courteous and reliable, and help each other. Group members who do not adhere to the common ethos and rules of the group are marginalised, whereas those who do adhere gain status and trust within the community. Similarly Beekhuyzen et al.'s (2011) exploration of underground online music communities found groups orderly in nature, with strict rules in place for obtaining an invite to join. Members of the communities in Beekhuyzen et al.'s study describe a connectedness where individuals were motivated not only by the ability to trade music files, but also the chance to interact with like-minded people, not only in terms of musical taste, but often political and social ideologies. Interacting and talking about music was identified as an important part of the file sharing experience, and these communities were found to facilitate such interactions.

Past studies of online music communities have described the ability to rapidly exchange knowledge collectively as being essential to the group's appeal. Lingel & Naaman's (2012) study of the phenomenon of taking videos of live music events and posting them on YouTube found communities that have formed around a kind of collaborative archiving. Once a video is posted by a user, others comment and name the songs performed during the concert. In addition to using YouTube as a means of connection between fans, online forums have been found to play a significant role in these communities. Again, participants in the study described these sites as an exchange of information, where video clips, music files, and pictures are posted into "a big pool of sharing" (Lingel & Naaman, 2012, p. 341). According to Lingel & Naaman (2012) this sharing facilitates relationships, where media shared between fans establishes contact and collaboration between music enthusiasts. Similarly Bennett's (2012) investigation of concert attendees who connect with each other using technology, as well tweeting concert concert-set lists and other information in real time, found a community formed around the cultural capital of knowledge. Concert 'freak out threads' (Bennett, 2012), during which both fans attending shows and fans not in attendance discuss the concert, are described as a ritualistic sharing and display of knowledge and information between fans from across the globe. Both attendees and non-attendees contribute from different time zones, not only during the show but leading up to it and in the aftermath. Fans commune in collective anticipation, before the interaction



during the show creates a rapid exchange of fan knowledge, followed by a 'post-mortem' in the days following.

### **2.7.1 'F2F, IRL, AWK, CMC, and virtual': Comparing on and offline interactions**

Before comparing face-to-face interactions with online interactions, a summary of the different terminology used to describe on and offline settings is warranted. On the Internet, the acronym 'IRL' stands for 'in real life', implying that somehow being online is not a part of objective reality. In light of this, some Internet users prefer the terminology 'AWK'—or 'away from keyboard'—as a way of acknowledging that being online is in fact a part of their 'real life'. Slater (2002) predicted that eventually a distinction between 'virtual' (online) and real-life (offline) worlds would seem quaint; a hypothesis that has apparently come to fruition. Though the following discussion explores some of the differences between on and offline interactions, it assumes both are indeed aspects of 'real life', purposely avoiding references to terms such as 'virtual communication' and 'IRL'. Therefore offline interactions and communities are referred to as 'face-to-face' and Internet-based interactions and communities as 'online'. This study also does not propose on and offline interactions and communities are entirely independent of one-and-other, and that both communication environments may in fact compliment and strengthen each other as will be discussed later in this chapter.

Broadly speaking, discussions and comparisons of online and face-to-face communication tend to focus on the relative degree of personal anonymity Internet-based interactions offer (Bargh & McKenna, 2004; Christopherson, 2007; Etzioni, 1999; Galston, 2000; Okdie et al., 2011; Pierce, 2009; Suler, 2004; Weidman et al., 2012), and the extra information face-to-face interaction provides, including aspects such as visual cues and tone of voice, which apparently reduce ambiguity as to the overall intention and tone of the message being communicated (Bargh & McKenna, 2004; Galston, 2000; Mallen, Day, & Green, 2003; Okdie et al., 2011; Pierce, 2009; Weidman et al., 2012). Anonymity online has been linked to assuming false identities, anti-social behaviour and an inability to control it, the revealing of very personal information or beliefs, and a sense of being less obliged than in face-to-face interactions and communities to adhere to social rules and conventions.

Suler (2004) terms this 'The Online Disinhibition Effect', and argues that some people act out more frequently or intensely when online than they would face-to-face. Suler (2004) describes a dissociative anonymity, whereby if people choose to provide little information online, little is revealed as to who they actually are. He argues that when people can separate their actions online from their real identity, then they feel less vulnerable if self-disclosing or acting out. Effectively, whatever they do can't be linked to the rest of their lives. Suler discusses invisibility online, where in a text-driven environment when people cannot see each other they do not have to worry about how they look or sound when typing a message. As a result people avoid eye contact and face-to-face visibility, increasing the disinhibition effect (2004). Suler then introduces the concept of asynchronicity, whereby people need not interact in real time online. Not having to deal with someone's immediate reaction, he posits, also increases the disinhibition effect. When there are delays in replying to electronic communication, peoples' thoughts may become toxic and avert social norms, or, after posting a personal, emotional, or hostile message people might 'run away' for a length of time (2004). Finally, Suler suggests anonymity online leads to a minimisation of status and authority. Some people are reluctant to say what they actually think as they face an authority figure, but online people are much more willing to speak out, conceivably even misbehave (2004).

In suggesting the relative anonymity, invisibility, and asynchronicity that the online environment offers creates disinhibition, Suler (2004) frames online interaction in a negative light. Bargh & McKenna (2004) argue that the relative anonymity afforded by the Internet reduces the risks inherent in self-disclosure, akin to the 'strangers on a train' phenomenon discussed by Rubin (1975). In other words, the Internet makes talking to people easier, which might particularly benefit those who experience some difficulty with face-to-face communication. Those with social anxiety might feel more comfortable to interact online. The potential anonymity and deindividuation offered in an online setting renders social cues—including one's appearance—largely irrelevant, and the asynchronous nature of interaction means that an individual can take more time to compose responses, eliminating some of the pressures of face-to-face communication (Weidman et al., 2012). Pierce's

(2009) study of 280 high school students revealed a positive correlation between social anxiety and choosing to interact on social media websites rather than face-to-face.

Christopherson (2007) terms the ability to completely hide one's physical appearance online the 'equalisation hypotheses'. Assuming that people treat each other differently based on gender, race, age, ethnicity, physical disability, and attractiveness, interacting online eliminates expectations for behaviour based not being able to visually assess these factors (Christopherson, 2007; Okdie et al., 2011). Without these cues, individuals are unable to project judgments on others based on stereotypes, and expectations of behaviour based on these stereotypes should reduce. Murthy's (2010) study of Pakistani music subcultures on the Internet supports this theory, finding that as South Asian people continue to be marginalised in other settings, particularly in relation to Islamophobia, specialist music websites allow South Asian youths to express themselves creatively, freely, and safely in an online setting. Furthermore non-South Asians who embrace the culture but might feel excluded offline comfortably participate on the Internet. The ability to interact online also equalises in another way not suggested in Christopherson's (2007) evaluation; it enables people to communicate regularly across borders and time zones who might not otherwise because of financial factors, illness, age, handicap, or fear of leaving home (Etzioni, 1999).

Further assessments of the loss of inhibition on the Internet raise concerns around not only identification but also accountability (Driskell & Lyon, 2002; Etzioni, 1999; Nieckarz, 2005). Etzioni (1999) states that when information is given online disclosure is often limited, and identity might not be authenticated. As a result individuals who have harmed others or caused other unrest can simply return to online groups with other identities, bypassing any attempt at regulation or control of antisocial behaviour. Driskell & Lyon (2002) suggest there is limited social liability and psychological detachment online, and that resultantly people can enter and exit a community with relative ease. They further assert that this does not build a level of trust often present in face-to-face communities. Nieckarz (2005) argues similarly, maintaining that as the barriers to the exit of groups are low, in the event of social dissatisfaction online leaving the group will be the predominant outcome. He further suggests that groups online do not develop a meaningful sense of reciprocal

responsibility or mutual obligation, and that groups formed out of common interests do not need to develop these social mores, as the interest of each individual is served by participating in the group. Nieckarz (2005) concludes by suggesting that because online communities are brought together by converging individual interests, they do not encourage mutual obligation or create a basis for sacrifice.

Taking into account some of the discourse surrounding the potentially damaging aspects of anonymous interaction online, 'closed' Internet groups and forums perhaps foster a more meaningful and ultimately safer incarnation of community than interaction on web pages available to the general public. Baym (2015) describes members of the discussion board for her favourite band sharing a commitment to friendliness, observable in how they disagreed with one-and-other with statements such as "I might be wrong, but I thought that..." designed to minimise offense and maximise affiliation. The online tape trading networks Nieckarz (2005) studied are closed groups that possess a shared set of goals and values, and new members who do not socialise to expectations around courteousness and reliability are marginalised, effectively stifling their ability to function meaningfully in the group. The underground music communities in Beekhuyzen et al.'s (2011) study are also closed groups, with strict rules in place for inviting new members owing to the threat of copyright law in relation to the groups' activities. Again, behaviour in the groups is effectively collectively moderated around a shared set of rules, understanding, and beliefs. Everett's (2007) description of closed groups operating within the DC++ file sharing client is similar, where operators of groups even go so far as removing users who participate in ways deemed mutually disrespectful by the group.

Discussions comparing face-to-face communication and online communication often highlight the 'extra bandwidth' that face-to-face communication provides. That is, when interacting in person aspects such as body language and tone of voice provide extra information which serve to reduce ambiguity as to the intention of the message being communicated (Bargh & McKenna, 2004; Galston, 2000; Mallen et al., 2003; Okdie et al., 2011; Pierce, 2009; Weidman et al., 2012). In his early article questioning whether the Internet strengthens community ties, Galston (2000) questions whether the absence of face-to-face communication online affects the development of community ties. He states

that “we all rely on a range of non-verbal evidence to reduce (if never quite eliminate) our qualms about others’ motivations and identities” (p. 200), before suggesting that the duplicitous nature of online personalities in comparison to face-to-face realities is not compatible with the development of meaningful affective ties. In other words, the extra bandwidth face-to-face communication offers leaves less room for interpretation, arguably providing a more realistic impression of a person than in an online setting, and in turn allowing deeper connections between people.

Some studies have set out to test these hypotheses. Mallen et al. (2003) randomly assigned 64 individuals to either a face-to-face or an online environment. Participants were given the same instructions as to how to get to know each other using a set of pre-determined topics. In regard to satisfaction, closeness, and self-disclosure, the results suggested participants in the face-to-face environment felt more satisfaction with the experience, linked to feelings of closeness and interconnectedness with their partner. These individuals self-disclosed more than participants in the online environment. In terms of conflict, participants in the online environment reported a higher level of disagreement than those in the offline setting. In both categories of assessment, tone of voice and visual cues (or lack thereof) were postulated to be the reason for different outcomes. Specifically regarding conflict, it was suggested not being able to decipher a ‘full’ message owing to a lack of vocal tone and eye contact had led to greater animosity in the online setting. Finally, both groups appeared equally able to judge the emotions of those they interacted with, though participants in the face-to-face group reported higher levels of both positive and negative reactions, that is, the engagement appeared more emotionally intense. Mallen et al.’s findings suggest that the extra bandwidth face-to-face communication provides leads to a greater depth of perception, interconnectedness, and closeness between individuals, with less potential for conflict.

More recently, Okdie et al. (2011) set out to test how communicating online differs from face-to-face interactions, investigating how first impressions are formed in different communication modes. In this instance participants interacted twice with a partner, once within each realm of communication. Participants reported a feeling of more oneness with their partner in the face-to-face environment, owing to a greater abundance of social cues.

They also reported a greater self-awareness in the online setting, though from their partner's point of view this translated to coming across as more self-centred. This was linked to participants feeling the need to overstate their clarity and contributions online owing to a lack of other cues, as well as participants interacting face-to-face focussing more of their attention on their partner owing to their physical proximity. The results again suggested face-to-face communication was the more effective mode of exchange in forming favourable impressions of people, the extra social cues inherent to it providing a better channel by which individuals may assess the characteristics of others.

Baym (2015) suggests that instead of wholly focussing on what mediation *does* to communication, looking at what people *do with* mediated communication can be helpful as well. She observes that when people are limited to textual communication they find ways to convey non-verbal social cues in order to show feeling, play, perform, and create identities and relationships. Two examples include using upper-case lettering and punctuation to indicate emphasis, and acronyms such as LOL (laugh out loud) and BRB (be right back) to convey emotion and physicality quickly and universally. Baym (2015) describes how people show others they are approachable and interested in text-based interactions, filling language with immediacy cues many would not typically use in more formal written communication. The language of immediacy is informal, with non-standard spellings, casual and slang vocabulary, and tailored greetings and sign-offs. People are adapting long-held grammatical rules and norms in absence of vocal exchanges.

### **2.7.2 'Face-to-face and online together': How on and offline interactivity converge**

Some of the discussion around community and interpersonal relations in this chapter has a tendency to portray on and offline activities and interactions as independent of one-and-other. However as Internet connectivity has become increasingly embedded in our day-to-day lives, the distinction between being wholly off or online, or engaging in on and offline activities, has become increasingly blurred. As early as 2002 Slater recognised that distinguishing on and offline worlds as separate was a methodological assumption, and that the nature and social place of new media was changing. Everett (2007) noted that online activities now supplement already established forms of online communication, and as other

research demonstrates, on and offline activities and engagements often complement each other (Bargh & McKenna, 2004; Bennett, 2012; DiMaggio et al., 2001; Hirzalla & Zoonen, 2011; Matzat, 2010; Sessions, 2010; Slater, 2002).

Slater (2002) credits McLuhan's (1964) concept of the 'global village' as predating an understanding not only of the Internet, but the phenomenon of being connected online in geographically disparate settings. McLuhan (1974) suggested that an event broadcast on television was also happening in every living room where a TV was being watched at the same time. In other words, although individuals might be physically separated across a vast geographical area, everybody watching television is essentially 'present' at an event at the same time. Analogous to on and offline activities being embedded, McLuhan's (1974) sentiments suggest the correlation between 'real life' existence and online (onTV?) experiences is not new.

In response to suggestions that the Internet might isolate people from more traditional activities and engagements, some studies have found that Internet use is actually associated with higher levels of engagement in other facets of existence (Hirzalla & Zoonen, 2011; Wellman, Anabel Quan, Witte, & Hampton, 2001). Wellman et al. (2001) surveyed 40,000 visitors to the National Geographic website and found that heavy levels of Internet use correlated with greater levels of engagement with voluntary organisations and politics. In the same year Kavaunaugh and Patterson (2001) found that the more people engage with the Internet, the more likely they are to engage in social capital building activities elsewhere. A decade later Hirzalla & Zoonen's (2011) study of young people in Holland's civic participation found that those who chose to engage with politics and activism did so irrespective of the mode in which they participated. These studies suggest that individuals who are particularly engaged with beliefs, interests, and activities offline use the Internet as just another resource in their day-to-day activities. In the case of the Kavaunaugh and Paterson (2001) and Wellman et al.'s (2001) studies, a high level of Internet engagement correlated with an above average offline involvement with participants' chosen interests.

Some studies have looked at how a combination of face-to-face and online interaction affects interpersonal dynamics. These studies suggest that a mixture of online and face-to-

face interaction might reduce potential problems around sociability in online environments, ultimately establishing greater trust in relationships (Bargh & McKenna, 2004; Matzat, 2010; Sessions, 2010). In the earliest of these studies Bargh & McKenna (2004) suggested that when relationships formed online get close enough, and specifically when sufficient trust has been established, people will often then meet each other in a face-to-face sphere. Though this is demonstrated to hold true in the contemporary communication environment (using dating sites as just one example) where the study seems perhaps dated now is a further assertion that once people migrate from online to face-to-face communication they begin to communicate with each other less on the Internet. Online communication is now far more embedded in our lives than in 2004, and digital communication is often now a part of the regular interactions of many social associations. Consequently, the more recent studies of Matzat (2010) and Sessions (2010) better reflect the now more embedded nature of online and face-to-face interactions.

In Matzat's (2010) study of 26 online communities of teachers in the Netherlands, the author found that face-to-face relationships support online communities and interactions. Matzat (2010) found more trust and less free riding amongst community members who interacted with one-and-other in both face-to-face and online environments. He also found a general embeddedness of online and face-to-face networks, where new contacts made online can transfer to face-to-face environments in unplanned ways and where in turn participants reported being able to satisfactorily maintain existing offline contacts using predominantly online communication. Sessions' (2010) paper, which observed how online communities are affected when groups converge face-to-face, reported similar findings in regard to face-to-face interactions strengthening social ties between group members. Sessions' (2010) research, which analysed over eight and a half years of the activities of a large online community, observed that meeting up face-to-face positively impacted members' engagement and dedication to the community in general. Those who met up with others face-to-face were less likely to abandon the online community or stop contributing by way of online posts or comments. The study also found that community members who met face-to-face were more likely to favour interaction with one-and-other online than with those who did not attend offline meetings.



Concurrent with the Internet becoming increasingly embedded in day-to-day life, people increasingly interact online via a mixture of webs of websites, applications, blogs, streaming services, and social network services. Exploring this phenomenon requires a shift from studying the habits and behaviours of members of specific private online groups to focussing on what Baym (2015) terms 'networked collectivism', where groups of people now network online in a variety of ways and in a variety of 'locations'. Baym (2007) suggests that though this development has empowered community members to share more media with one-and-other and interact in a wider variety of ways, when there is no single shared environment communities do not feel like metaphorical places, meaning shared practices are less likely to develop and resources may have to be deployed repeatedly to reach all community members. Baym (2007) also suggests that in this fractured environment identities are harder to develop, and people may play certain roles on one site that they do not play on another.

Baym's (2015) concept of 'networked collectivism' seems most prescient in relation to the increasingly ubiquitous use of social networking (SNS) sites. SNS allow people to make visible their social networks and tastes (such as favourite books, films, or music), allowing for connections between people not already acquainted to form based around common interests (Baym & Ledbetter, 2009; Boyd & Ellison, 2007). Though the maintenance of these relationships might not be as strong as those with 'real' friends on SNS (Baron, 2008), these taste fabrics (Liu, Maes, & Davenport, 2006) are alternative network structures built around shared interests and texts (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). Beer (2008) observes that even if the maintenance of these relationships is not as strong as with other friends, as SNS activity becomes increasingly day-to-day and mundane, the versions of friendships and connections offered might begin to reshape understandings of friendships and social connections more generally.

To conclude, this section has compared and contrasted face-to-face communities and social interaction with online communities and social interaction. The discussion has primarily drawn from research produced from the late 1990s onwards, or, from the beginning of the general public beginning to engage with the Internet until the present day. During this time period how and where individuals engage with the Internet and with each

other online has changed markedly, and Internet use is now far more ubiquitous. Early studies on the social and cultural effects of Internet usage often tended to be speculative, as well as addressing being 'online' or 'offline' as two separate states of being. More contemporary studies reflect a world where online communication is far more embedded in most people's lives, with portable devices such as smart phones allowing ever-present Internet access, changing social patterns of digital connectivity. Social media now dominates Internet traffic, and online networks have now expanded to include family members, employment networks, and more strangers than ever before. In other words Internet use has become far more normalised and connectivity more widespread. Technological advancements have lessened the once divided notion of the 'virtual' as compared to the 'real'.

This hybrid communication environment, where face-to-face communication and online communication are increasingly enmeshed, increasingly reconfigures social, educational, economic, and civic activity (Haythornthwaite & Kendall, 2010), as well as notions of what constitutes a community. Wellman (2001) suggested that rather than existing in one specific group, people find community in a series of networks in their day-to-day lives, and that the Internet encourages this 'networked individualism'. Baym (2015) proposed an update of Wellman's terminology—'networked collectivism'—which reflects that whole groups of people now network online in a multitude of ways and on a variety of platforms, resulting in their being no one single shared online environment for community members.

Studies have found that face-to-face relationships compliment and support online communities and interactions, and that the opposite also holds true. Research conducted since the general introduction of the Internet posits that communities can and do form around participants' shared interests, irrespective of geographical proximity or face-to-face interaction (Beekhuyzen et al., 2011; Bennett, 2012; DiMaggio et al., 2001; Everett, 2007; Lingel & Naaman, 2012; Murthy, 2010). Studies have also demonstrated that individuals who are particularly engaged with certain beliefs, interests, and activities offline also demonstrate similarly high levels of engagement in online settings (Hirzalla & Zoonen, 2011; Wellman et al., 2001). These findings suggest that the particularly engaged consumers of recorded music who are the focus of this study—the collectors, 'Early Adopters', 'Band

Fans’, and ‘Explorative Consumers’ (Parry et al., 2012)—might now place particular emphasis on the role of the Internet in pursuing their interest, as well as utilising the medium to form relationships with likeminded individuals. Indeed previous studies of online recorded music communities have suggested that these organised groups bring individuals together in a safe environment consisting of like-minded people not only in terms of musical taste, but often political and social ideologies as well.

Online communication differs from face-to-face communication. The Internet allows individuals to be anonymous if they choose to, or at least be less able to be identified than during face-to-face interactions. This has implications for how online communities function and how individuals involved in these communities interact. A lack of visual cues inherent to face-to-face communication—in particular vocal register and body language—also increases the potential for ambiguity and misunderstandings when communicating online, though as Baym (2015) observes people have found ways to convey non-verbal cues using text. Some scholars such as Suler (2004) argue that some people act out more frequently or intensely when online than they would face-to-face, while others such as Bargh & McKenna (2004) argue that the relative anonymity afforded by the Internet reduces the risks inherent in self-disclosure, which benefits those who experience some difficulty with face-to-face communication. Whether anonymity is ultimately counter-productive or fruitful for individuals interacting with one-and-other is a matter that is considered when analysing the data presented in 4.7 of this thesis, which focuses on discussing aspects of community in face-to-face and online settings.

## **2.8 ‘Contextualising the research question’: What is distinct from previous research**

In broad terms, this research project is approached from three key areas of enquiry. Firstly, evaluating the historical and ongoing significance of the independent brick-and-mortar record shop as a socially and culturally relevant space, and more broadly assessing the continued value of geographically distinct spaces where individuals can convene and connect with one-and-other. Secondly, discussing the significance of recorded music to highly engaged music consumers’ lives, as a well as exploring how technological change has

altered audiences' everyday attitudes towards, as well as engagement with, recorded music. Thirdly, exploring how technological changes have altered how highly engaged music consumers (and people in general) now interact with one another, and in turn how communities now manifest themselves.

Previous studies addressing the social and cultural significance of the independent record shop have focussed on the importance of these spaces as sites of corporate resistance (Gracon, 2009), on how the economic structure of the recorded music industry impacts upon the sustainability of stores, musical diversity, and the communities associated with the stores (Gracon, 2010), on defining the pleasures customers derive from frequenting record shops and assessing the impact of stores declining in numbers (McIntyre, 2009), on comparing different generations' music acquisition habits and identities in the context of a shift away from physical products and physical stores (McIntyre, 2011), on how unique spaces like the independent record shop can reinforce subcultural identity (Simpson, 2000), and on the social and cultural value of independent record shops in more general terms (Fullington, 2008). Though each of these studies address themes pertinent to this research project, none specifically address the impact the Internet has had on highly engaged music consumers, typically the individuals who traditionally frequented independent brick-and-mortar record shops. Be it owing to the vintage of some of the studies in relation to the impact of the Internet at the time, or the specific focus of each of the projects, none of these studies specifically address the influence the Internet has had on both independent-brick-and-mortar shops, as well as the individuals who would typically frequent them. Though this research project does assess the cultural and social value of independent brick-and-mortar record shops, as well as assessing their long term cultural relevance and viability, it does so from the standpoint of presenting these spaces as a contextual basis from which to assess if highly engaged music consumers derive similar social and cultural pleasures when online, also examining how interpersonal interaction and notions of community are changing in an increasingly globally connected communication environment.

In addressing how interpersonal interaction and connectivity is changing, this research project evaluates the value and significance of localness, in particular assessing the community building benefits of geographically specific retail spaces, as well as questioning

how conceptions of what is local may be changing in an increasingly globalised communication environment. Though Gracon's (2009, 2010) studies emphasise the significance of the independent brick-and-mortar store as a local space that counters McDonaldization (Ritzer, 1993), and encourages community-building and civic engagement, and McIntyre (2009), Simpson (2000), and Fullington's (2008) works cite the significance of localness in defining the identity of independent brick-and-mortar record shops, again none of these studies address the topic from the standpoint of primarily observing the impact the digital technology, in particular the Internet, has had on these local community spaces. Studies of local stores in general have assessed the impact of large corporate retailers on these businesses (Brennan, 2000; Clarke & Banga, 2010; Coca-Stefaniak, Hallsworth, Parker, Bainbridge, & Yuste, 2005; Coca-Stefaniak et al., 2010; Jen, 2010), some specifically assessing the implications this has for local communities (Clarke & Banga, 2010; Coca-Stefaniak et al., 2005; Coca-Stefaniak et al., 2010). These are themes also addressed in this research project, though this study primarily evaluates the impact technological change has had on the communities that traditionally frequented local independent brick-and-mortar record shops.

This research project also investigates the changing ways in which people are engaging with music, observed against the backdrop of the widespread change that has occurred in the recorded music industry since the final years of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. The study has depicted the contemporary music distribution environment as far less restricted than that of the past, characterised by audience members being able to access far more music than ever before, as well as interact with other audience members with relative ease. This study specifically focusses on the social implications of these changes, whereas many previous studies (though addressing some of the social impacts of a changing music industry and music distribution model) have tended to approach the subject primarily from a business perspective (Anderson, 2008b; Dilmeri et al., 2011; Evans & Wurster, 1997; Graham et al., 2004; Nuttall et al., 2011; Parry et al., 2012; Warr & Goode, 2011). Including McIntyre's (McIntyre, 2009, 2011) studies, McCourt's (2005) investigation of changing recording formats, and Jones' (2002) early research which concentrated on how changing technology

affects music reaching people and people reaching music, there are few studies which focus primarily on how these changes affect audience behaviours and expectations.

Finally, in assessing how human interaction might be changing as people increasingly convene online in lieu of gathering together in physical spaces, this research project has utilised general rather than music-specific studies that assess and critique the impact digital technologies, principally the Internet, have had on social interaction and interpersonal connectivity. These have argued that communities can and do form around a shared group interest irrespective of geographical proximity (Beekhuyzen et al., 2011; Bennett, 2012; DiMaggio et al., 2001; Everett, 2007; Lingel & Naaman, 2012; Murthy, 2010), compared face-to-face interactions and communities with the online equivalents (Baker & Ward, 2002; Christopherson, 2007; Driskell & Lyon, 2002; Etzioni, 1999; Galston, 2000; Mallen et al., 2003; McKenna & Bargh, 2000; Okdie et al., 2011; Pierce, 2009; Suler, 2004; Weidman et al., 2012; Wellman & Melina, 1999), with some examining how face-to-face and online activities complement each other (Bargh & McKenna, 2004; Bennett, 2012; DiMaggio et al., 2001; Hirzalla & Zoonen, 2011; Matzat, 2010; Sessions, 2010; Slater, 2002).

This research project has also outlined the findings of studies specifically examining online recorded music communities; namely Nieckarz' (2005) investigation of online tape (recordings of live music performance) traders, Beekhuyzen et al.'s (2011) exploration of underground online music sharing communities, Lingel & Naaman's (2012) study of the phenomenon of taking videos of live music events and posting them on YouTube, Bennett's (2012) investigation of concert attendees who connect with each other using technology, tweeting concert concert-set lists and other information in real time, and Murthy's (2010) study of Pakistani music subcultures on the Internet. Though these studies focus on recorded music communities, they primarily focus on the experiences of these communities in online settings, rather than focussing on assessing changing behaviours and experiences as people involved with these groups have moved online.

Globally there has been little published research assessing the affect rapid technological change, principally now widespread Internet usage, has had on the behaviours, experiences, and expectations of highly engaged music consumers. Now that the majority of music

consumers procure music online, the nature of community engagement and human interaction occurring during this process has changed. The majority of commentary concerning the shift from brick-and-mortar music retail to online acquisition of music concentrates on the economic ramifications (Anderson, 2008b; APN News & Media, 2008; Arditi, 2013; Benzine & Dosanjh, 2007; Bockstedt et al., 2006; Boehlert, 2000; Bowers & Treanor, 2013; Burkart, 2008; Campbell, 2010; Christman, 2002; Dilmperi et al., 2011; Epstein, 2013; Fairfax Digital, 2009; Fletcher, 2012; Fox, 2004; Graham et al., 2004; Harmon, 2011; Lam & Tan, 2001; Nuttall et al., 2011; Parry et al., 2012; Plummer, 2011; Sachs, 2007; Warr & Goode, 2011; Youngs, 2011; Zentner, 2008) but there has been less exploration of the interpersonal ramifications of this change in audience behaviours. Therefore this research outlines the cultural and social significance of the independent brick-and-mortar record shop, using these spaces as a contextual basis from which to assess the changing ways in which highly engaged music consumers now engage with one another. The project also assesses the ongoing social and cultural value of such spaces in the contemporary media acquisition and communication environment.

Discussions about music retail have often been absent from historical accounts of the recorded music industry (Fox, 2005), particularly in New Zealand. This research project contributes to existing studies exploring the historical as well as ongoing significance of music retail spaces to both audience members and the wider industry, focussing in particular on the role technology has played in changing the behaviours and expectations of individuals who place a particular significance on the role of music in their lives. This project offers a contribution to wider research assessing how changing communication technologies may be affecting both individual identity and community identity in more general terms, as well as studies assessing how societal engagement with new technology is affecting human interaction, connectivity, and communities.

### 3 Research Design & Methods

Having identified a lack of previous studies specifically addressing how technological changes have affected communities that are based on recorded music, this research was based on the opinions and reflections of 29 individuals who identified as highly engaged recorded music consumers.

Because this study focused on participants' reflections regarding how people are engaging with both recorded music and communities that are based on recorded music, a qualitative methodology was deemed appropriate. Data was gathered in the form of four focus groups and three one-on-one interviews, and a total of 29 participants engaged in research conducted in Auckland, New Zealand, from a localist standpoint (Alvesson, 2003). Data was analysed using Glaser & Strauss' (1967) grounded theory methodology. The research design also used a grounded theory approach, whereby the researcher elicited participants' relaying of the literal aspects of engaging with recorded music and other people, as well as their individual understandings and interpretations of these experiences, such that the data gathered would form the basis for the generation of key findings (Nash, 2009).

When interviewing participants my data collection method sought not only facts, but participants' subjective perceptions of their world, as well as their own personal narratives. A more fixed or quantitative design such as surveying or deploying questionnaires may have been effective in collecting basic information, though due to the problems of securing a high level of involvement from those completing surveys or questionnaires (Robson, 2011), much less effective in recording participants' true feelings or views of the world they inhabit. Similarly other forms of flexible qualitative designs, for example participant observation which involves watching and listening, would not have gained insight into participants' perceptions and narratives; elements crucial to seeking to discover how participants understand their relationship with recorded music and fellow audience members, as well as how they perceive changes that have occurred in the recorded music industry in more general terms.



### **3.1 'Research design': A flexible yet grounded approach**

This study employed empirical interview-based research in order to gain in-depth insights and understanding of highly engaged music consumers, both in regard to their reflections on how recent technological changes have affected communities that are based on recorded music, as well as their perspectives on the changing ways that people are engaging with recorded music in their everyday lives. The data from the focus groups and one-on-one interviews was analysed using grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) in order to generate a set of explanations following discussing key themes with research participants; namely their initial and ongoing engagement with recorded music, what pleasures they seek when consuming music, their engagement with and reflections on changing music and communication technologies, their involvement with and perspectives on recorded music-based communities and social interactions, and finally their reflections on the ongoing social and cultural relevance of the independent brick-and-mortar record shop.

Robson (2011) identifies a flexible research design as advantageous when the project starts with a single idea of a problem that the researcher sets out to understand. This study began with such a 'hunch', in that I had observed that rapid technological developments had spurred similarly rapid changes to how people engage both with recorded music and with each other. As a result I was curious to explore how these changes (essentially people spending increasing amounts of time online) might be affecting the behaviour, attitudes, and outlook of highly engaged music consumers, and in particular how people's increasing presence online might be redefining the kind of communities that have traditionally formed around physical spaces like the independent record shop. A flexible research design allowed for theories to be developed as data was obtained from the research sessions (Robson, 2011). Successive research sessions built on the findings of the first focus group, also gleaning new topics for analysis. My first focus group provided evidence that allowed the partial construction of a theoretical viewpoint, with findings from the following focus groups and one-on-one interviews creating patterns of data forming the basis for analytical generalisations (Robson, 2011).

Owing to this study investigating changing human behaviours as a result of the recent proliferation of Internet usage, a wide range of age groups was sought. Of the 29 people who took part in the research, 13 individuals who took part were aged in their thirties, nine were in their twenties, four in their forties, and three in their fifties. Six of the participants were under 25, and though they had some memories of physical format recordings and physical format retail outlets, they had grown up primarily sourcing music from the Internet. All participants identified as regular and competent Internet users, though older participants could also provide first-hand recollections of their experiences in the pre-Napster era. This spread of ages ensured not only a range of insights into modern-day phenomena, but also crucial variance in historical narratives and experiences. Traditionally social scientists have observed the world in a similar way to the one that physical scientists before Einstein viewed the world, a place to discover generalisations about regularities between cause and effect (Gomm, Hammersly, & Foster, 2000). But the social world – in this instance the world of individuals who place a particular emphasis on the role of recorded music in their lives – is arguably more intricate than that. In his 1957 speech to the American Psychological Foundation, Cronbach suggested the science of psychology would benefit if inquirers ceased looking at the effects of actions generally, and instead began to study the effects of interactions between actions and people with different aptitudes (Cronbach, 1957). Cultures change and human experience is constructed not caused; therefore engaging with participants aged from 22 to 51 years-old offered a wide range of perspectives and narratives on how technological changes have affected communities that are based on recorded music.

Robson (2002) discusses differing degrees of flexibility in designing research, from a highly flexible approach should the main purpose be highly exploratory, to a selective approach where previous investigation has suggested some rationalisation of the topic or subject beforehand. A crucial design consideration for my data gathering was that participants not be presented or coerced with pre-determined opinions or suggestions of my own. That is, this research asks an open-ended question (Geer, 1988) in seeking to find out how recent technological changes have affected the social interactions of communities that are based on recorded music, it does not present a particular hypothesis at the outset.

For this reason I chose a research design combining exploratory and selective, such that participants were able to reflect on their engagement with recorded music and fellow enthusiasts in a wider context, as well as discussing more specific issues via semi-structured interview questions that were topic specific, yet purposely open-ended and unbiased toward a preferred or specific outcome. Yin's (2009) observation regarding case study designs and methods—which is transferrable to flexible research designs in general—suggests investigators are particularly prone to a preconceived position due to a prior understanding of the issues; the researcher out in the field rather than an unbiased research assistant. Thus a heightened awareness of the need for an unbiased approach was critical to my data collection, as was a willingness to accept findings contrary to any 'hunches' I had beforehand.

A flexible design was preferred as it allowed me to conduct investigations that permitted in-depth explorations of individuals' perceptions, reflections, justifications, and rationales of personal and social practices (Haunschild & Eikhof, 2009) revolving around their engagement with recorded music. The aim was to use first-hand accounts to shed light on recorded music communities, though framed through participants' attitudes, backgrounds, and actions that they explained in their own terms. That is, to "listen to people as they describe how they understand the worlds in which they live and work" (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 17). Though the participants do not represent the thoughts and feelings of all highly engaged recorded music consumers, they are a selective and hopefully indicative sample allowing for academic enquiry into a hitherto unexplored field of study in New Zealand.

### **3.2 'Data gathering': Interviews & focus groups**

Of the 29 participants who took part in the data gathering phase of this research, three engaged in one-on-one interviews with the researcher, while 26 participants attended focus groups moderated by the researcher. Each one-on-one interview was approximately one hour in length, and each focus group session ran for approximately 90 minutes. Two key factors were taken into consideration when deciding on the length of the sessions. The first

consideration was that participants were volunteering their time to the study, and therefore session times needed to be long enough to procure viable data, but not so long that participants might decline from the outset, or agree but then have to contend with external factors (such as securing and then paying for an extended period of parking in central Auckland). The second consideration was the recommendations of research design literature. In regard to one-on-one interviews Robson (2011) suggests they run for one hour, stating that anything under half an hour is unlikely to be valuable and—echoing my first consideration—anything over one hour might be making unreasonable demands on busy interviewees. With regard to focus groups, there is widespread consensus that focus groups are most effective when conducted between one and two hours in length (Morgan, 1996; Onwuegbuzie, Dickinson, Leech, & Zoran, 2009; Vaughn & Schumm, 1996), and again I considered securing commitment from as many prospective attendees as possible, so a length of ninety minutes rather than the perceivably weightier commitment of two hours was decided upon.

This study sought reflections from individuals who place a particular emphasis on the role of music in their lives ('highly engaged music consumers'), and the sampling method for the focus groups and one-on-one interviews reflected this. Unlike probability sampling, where elements or individuals are recruited in accordance with their incidence in the population, a purposeful recruitment and sampling strategy was employed. A purposive sampling strategy is employed when the researcher, based on theoretical understanding of the topic being studied, seeks individuals that have important perspectives on the phenomenon in question (Stewart, Shamdasani, & Rook, 2014). A purposive sample is thus made up of elements that possess a certain characteristic or attribute that the researcher is interested in studying (O'Dwyer & Bernauer, 2013), and individuals are recruited based on their anticipated richness and relevance of discussion in relation to the study's research questions (Yin, 2011). The advertisements placed to procure participants reflected the purposive sampling method, seeking 'people who have a higher than average level of involvement with music consumption in either or both online ('the Internet') and offline ('brick-and-mortar store') environments, as well as individuals who are currently, or have in the past, worked in music retail'. The locations these advertisements were placed also reflected a

purposive approach. Advertisements were affixed to the walls of local record shops and independent radio stations, as well as posted on relevant social media pages.

As a result, the recruitment process did not reflect the usual demographic makeup of wider society, particularly where gender was concerned. Put simply, the participants were nearly all male, with only two women involved. Initially this seemed concerning, and an effort was made to secure more female participants. However on reflection the sample of participants was actually fairly representative of those that regularly patronise brick-and-mortar record shops, in other words the environment is typically male-skewed (Pettit & Monem, 2008; Shuker, 2004). This is a compelling phenomenon outside of the scope of this study, and is as such addressed further in subsection 5.3, where a gender-based investigation is suggested as a potential area for further research.

In accordance with recommendations that focus groups should include enough participants to yield diversity in the data gathered, yet should not be too large such that participants do not feel comfortable, three of the four focus groups consisted of between six and nine participants per group, within the range of the common recommendation of six to 12 participants (Johnson & Christensen, 2004; Krueger, 2000; Onwuegbuzie et al., 2009). However one of the four focus groups was attended by only three people, although the requisite number had confirmed they would attend beforehand. Discombobulated by the lack of attendance, I forgot to press start on the voice recorder, first noticing in the final half hour of the session. As a result I preserved and used only one third of a focus group attended by three people. This was the only Saturday morning focus group I conducted, and the session yielded anecdotal evidence that maybe highly engaged music consumers and weekend mornings do not mix.

Some research methods literature identifies potential problems with combining focus groups and one-on-one interviews (Barbour, 2007; Lambert & Loiselle, 2008). Lambert & Loiselle (2008) suggest that combining both methods can inadvertently lead to a flawed hierarchy of evidence, whereby one data collection method may be used following the other for confirmatory purposes, in turn leading to one method being considered more 'accurate' than the other. During my research this did not prove to be an issue as, though it

would be misleading to state that I did not notice similar key themes emerging during the focus groups and one-on-one interviews that correlated with past sessions, my decision to analyse the data using grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) meant that I explicitly chose to analyse the data *following* the cessation of all the data gathering sessions. There was no anticipation that the one-on-one sessions would either corroborate or yield superior data to the findings acquired in the focus groups (Lambert & Loiselle, 2008). Though I was making casual observations, and observing familiar discussions across the sessions, these unavoidable 'mental notes' were nowhere near as diagnostically thorough as the formal data analysis that followed.

Combining focus groups with one-on-one interviews has been criticised as a shortcut to data gathering, principally in terms of under-resourced or less than industrious researchers utilising group settings in order to avoid the need for multiple one-on-one sessions (Barbour, 2007; Lambert & Loiselle, 2008). However, my decision to employ both focus groups and one-on-one interviews was primarily a measured response to not only reflecting on what I required from my participants, but the key research themes as well. Granted, focus groups did provide an economical, fast, and efficient method for obtaining data from multiple participants (Krueger, 2000; Morgan, 1996), but heeding Barbour's (2007) pragmatic suggestion to first consider what the research is trying to achieve, I chose to utilise focus groups as this study is ultimately about human interaction and engagement and therefore a group setting for such a discussion seemed apt. More pointedly, this study investigates participants' observations of, and reflections on, changes that have occurred in the recorded music industry over roughly the past two decades, and focus groups provided the ability to observe individuals of differing age groups who engage at different levels with various music formats and technologies interact. This provided direct evidence of differences and similarities in experiences and opinions that otherwise would have had to be drawn from post hoc analysis of one-on-one interviews (Morgan, 1996). Group conversations are potentially more naturalistic than one-on-one interviews (Kamberelis, 2013), allowing unpredictability and contradiction (Stewart et al., 2014), and the comparisons that participants made regarding each other's experiences and opinions

(Morgan, 1996) were valuable sources of insights into multiple perspectives on social and technological change.

Focus groups also offered an environment that was more controlled than participant observation, but less structured than one-on-one interviews (Morgan, 1996). This afforded a particularly productive balance of contributions from the researcher and input from the participants. That is, as grounded theory is a method by which theory is developed from the collection and analysis of data (Charmaz & Bryant, 2011), the researcher needs to guide the conversation where necessary, but be careful not to influence a particular proposition or outcome. Focus groups provided an environment where participants could often be left to themselves to 'generate their own data', while I could still steer them towards topics of interest where necessary (Robson, 2011). Agar and McDonald (1995) argued that one-on-one interviews place a burden on interviewees to explain themselves at every point, and conducting focus groups allowed participants in this study to contribute only when a topic, theme, or line of questioning was most relevant to them (Barbour, 2007). This free-flowing conversation offered potentially less 'tainted' data than one-on-one interviews might generate.

Some research methods literature suggests assessing when focus groups may not be a viable data collection method for qualitative research. Suggestions include determining if participants may be vulnerable in any way (Barbour, 2007; Kamberelis, 2013), assessing how sensitive the research topic is to discuss in a group setting (Stewart et al., 2014), and considering if group settings might produce misleading data in comparison to one-on-one interviews, as Wight (as cited in Morgan, 1996) discovered when interviewing adolescent males about their relations with the opposite sex. Taking these points into consideration, as well as institutional ethical obligations, I decided that neither the research topic nor the participants I had recruited posed any risk to conducting interviews in a group setting. Thankfully, upon reflection after conducting the groups, participants were both courteous and cooperative, as well as highly engaged when discussing the themes presented. However despite this rapport (at least one participant commenting at the end of the group that he had 'found his people'), it appeared that at least two of those who took part felt

they could not offer a suitable level of insight and expertise, and held back on commenting as often as they might have otherwise.

Upon further reflecting on the focus group sessions, particularly in relation to how group dynamics might have affected the data gathered, different groups did have particular idiosyncrasies. Hollander (2004) describes different types of social contexts that might influence participants' interactions. The first, associational context, presented the biggest challenge across all groups. Essentially Hollander (2004) suggested a common characteristic amongst participants might affect dynamics, and bringing 26 highly engaged music consumers together in a series of groups did lend itself to participants disappearing down 'general music conversation' rabbit holes. But keeping the groups focussed was just a matter of rigorous moderation, echoing Morgan's (1996) observation that if group knowledge is high, the moderator has to work hard to control the conversation. Hollander (2004) also suggests relational context can affect participants' interactions. Focus Group Three had a particularly high concentration of deejays around the same age group who either currently or had in the past had lived for a significant amount of time in Auckland. As a result there was a level of familiarity I had not anticipated, and again I had to steer the focus group back on topic on a number of occasions. Focus Group Three also presented what Morgan (1996) describes as group polarisation, or certain individuals expressing more extreme views than they would in private. Rex appeared to exhibit this trait, though it was anything but a hindrance to the data collection, and his attitude did not appear to trouble the group. Rex's pragmatism, coupled with his debating of points with other group members, yielded very compelling, and ultimately serviceable data.

Having discussed the particular value and relevance of focus groups to this study, it might seem counter-intuitive to have also conducted one-on-one interviews. But individual interviews did provide a valuable contribution to the realisation of this research. The decision to conduct one-on-one interviews emanated from two key considerations. From a sample of nursing studies, Lambert & Loiselle (2008) found three broad rationales for combining focus groups with one-on-one interviews, two of which are applicable to this study. The first is for pragmatic reasons. Fundamentally, it proved a challenging task to coordinate the roughly forty people who expressed interest in taking part in this study into



timetabled sessions that suited the majority, and I wanted to minimise refusals and withdrawals (Lambert & Loiselle, 2008). Following approximately a quarter of those who approached me eventually not participating, I had two people still interested in contributing but unable to attend one of the focus groups. Hannah and Drew thus joined Jim (who I had decided from the outset I would interview individually) as the participants who took part in one-on-one interviews

Jim was preordained to take part in a one-on-one interview as he fit the other of Lambert & Loiselle's (2008) rationales relevant to my study, striving for data completeness. As well as fitting the general criteria for the study, Jim had worked in music retail since 1992, and at the time the interviews were conducted worked fulltime at Marbecks, which is the longest surviving independent record store in Auckland, New Zealand. Fortuitously Hannah and Drew had also worked in music retail, and alongside all three participants being engaged music consumers, music audience members, and Internet users, they offered the further perspective of having worked in the physical spaces that form the basis for this study. A discussion of the changes that have occurred in music retail and recorded music communities 'post-Napster', as well as the social and business environment beforehand, warranted a deeper engagement with individuals who have at some stage worked in a record shop. One-on-one interviews provided an opportunity for more specific discussions around key topics and themes than the more communal exchange of ideas that occurred in the focus groups.

Striving for data completeness was not only a desire from the outset, but also an ongoing consideration throughout the data gathering process. Though I did not formally analyse any of the data I had collected until the cessation of all the focus groups and interviews, the one-on-one interviews were conducted following the focus groups, and thus I did have some idea of specific topics I wanted to address in greater depth in these sessions. One-on-one interviews are particularly useful when a study requires the in-depth understandings of a person's detailed contextual history and experiences (Kamberelis, 2013; Lambert & Loiselle, 2008), or what Gee (2011) calls primary discourses. Though I used the same set of core questions in the one-on-one interviews that I used in the focus groups, as my interviews were semi-structured I asked Jim supplementary questions that concentrated on

his experiences in retail, Drew extra questions that concentrated not only on retail but his experiences as a particularly engaged and committed music collector, and finally Hannah further questions regarding her experiences as a music consumer and audience member. Adopting these specific lines of questioning was a result of a combination of some thought beforehand, but equally if participants' contributions lent themselves to my following a particular area of interest I could pursue these lines of individual perspective in greater depth than appropriate in the focus group setting. However topics manifested themselves, one-on-one interviews provided more of a 'microscope' into individual behaviour and beliefs (Morgan, 1996), and conducting them following the focus group sessions proved a valuable conclusion to the data gathering process.

Having critiqued focus groups and one-on-one interviews respectively, the rest of this subsection evaluates the interview process in more general terms. That is, throughout the following discussion references to the interview, interviewing, and similar, are intended to reflect on the methods used in both the focus group sessions and the one-on-one interviews.

Kvale (1996) describes the qualitative interview as a construction site of knowledge which should be understood in terms of five elements of post-modern knowledge: as narrative, as conversation, as language, as inter-relational, and as context. As a theory was to be reverse engineered using the grounded theory method - that is data collection and analysis *preceded* theory generation – a 'construction site' of participants' knowledge, language and experience was the ideal setting for grounded theory-based examination.

Robson (2011) dictates circumstances where a qualitative research interview is most appropriate as firstly those where the study focuses on a particular meaning of a particular phenomenon to participants, and secondly where individual accounts are required of how a particular phenomenon has developed. Where quantitative data concerning consumer engagement with recorded music or retail outlets (such as the number of sales at brick-and-mortar stores or the number of particular formats being purchased) would have provided hard data on the activities of contemporary music consumers, how these individuals make sense of these engagements and the social world they exist in could not have been

measured using such a method. Beliefs and attitudes are complex and multidimensional, as are first-hand accounts of social and cultural dynamics. What do people do? What do people know? What do people think and feel?

As the grounded theory method was to be used to analyse data, I sought to build assumptions faithful to, and following on from, evidence gathered (Neuman, 1997). Thus I was mindful of not eliciting a particular response from interviewees, stating at the beginning of each one-on-one interview and focus group that there were no 'right' or 'wrong' answers, and that I sought responses based on participants' own perceptions of their worlds. The key themes that formed the framework of my initial interview 'script' echoed similar key themes explored in my literature review. I was principally concerned with participants' thoughts, feelings and experiences in regard to the following five themes:

- 1) Participants initial and ongoing engagement with recorded music,
- 2) What pleasures participants seek and gain when consuming music,
- 3) Changing music and communication technologies,
- 4) Recorded music-based communities and social interactions,
- 5) The social and cultural relevance of brick-and-mortar record shops.

Based on my own anecdotal observations as a long-term popular music aficionado, as well as empirical evidence gathered in the course of research, music is of particular significance to the wider narrative of highly engaged recorded music consumers' lives (Gracon, 2009; McIntyre, 2009, 2011; Nuttall et al., 2011; Parry et al., 2012). In terms of the consumption of recorded music, audience members often seek and gain further pleasures than solely those derived from the process of listening (Gracon, 2009, 2010; Hill, 2001; McIntyre, 2009; Simpson, 2000). These were the first two themes I sought participants' reflections on.

Discussing these themes at the beginning of the focus groups and one-on-one interviews was a purposeful research design consideration. Essentially the data gathering sessions began with my asking participants what they like about music and where their appreciation for music began, providing an opportunity for them to recall pleasant memories and reflect on a significant and positive influence on their lives. Hannabuss (1996) highlights the

importance of establishing rapport with interviewees, as well as the importance of maintaining this rapport and keeping the discussion going. The intention is to institute trust, as well as maintain it throughout the interview in order to keep the participants talking freely. Outside of initial general conversation and my introducing myself and the purpose of my research, the first two themes discussed in my interviews—though also very much intended for use in later analysis—were planned as part of the same ‘warm up’ process, designed to elicit comfortable responses to the more contemplative and probing questions in the sections that followed.

Hannabus (1996) suggests there are four key interviewing skills. Firstly establishing rapport with interviewees. Secondly the interviewer must keep the discussion going and avoid questions that diminish participant responses. I avoided questions that would elicit one-word answers (in particular ‘yes’ or ‘no’) in order to maintain conversational flow, as well as avoiding loaded questions, double negatives, and anything that would confuse or irritate participants. Thirdly, the interviewer needs to know how to pace the interview and maintain focus, as well as knowing when to interrupt. Fortuitously I have a background in radio broadcasting and interviewing for print journalism, and I thus engineered the interviews in a similar manner to those I have conducted before; hopefully identifying when to let participants pause for thought and interjecting at points where garnering supplementary information was appropriate. Specific to the focus groups sessions, as well as knowing when to interrupt in order to explore a particular point raised in more depth, I also had to steer the group towards topics of interest but at the same time not lead the group to any specific expectations or prior hypothesis (Sim, 1998). Lastly, Hannabus (1996) suggests the interviewer should employ a non-judgmental attitude. This was particularly relevant where the data was to be analysed later using grounded theory, and I endeavoured to maintain impartiality throughout the interview process.

Hannabus’ (1996) four key interviewing skills aim to create an equal relationship between interviewer and interviewee, both being engaged in the production of sited accounts through interpersonal interaction (Qu & Dumay, 2011). This is what Alvesson (2003) terms a ‘localist’ perspective on interviewing. An investigation of how technological changes have affected communities that are based on recorded music required participants’

understandings of and reflections on their own experiences, and from a localist perspective the means by which these responses were acquired also warranted attention. Interviews are collaboratively produced, and interviewers are active participants (Miller & Glassner, 2011).

Alvesson (2003) dictates three theoretical standpoints on the research interview as a method. The first two are more established perspectives: neopositivism, studying facts, and romanticism (also referred to as emotionalism), studying meaning, while the third is localism (Alvesson, 2003; Miller & Glassner, 2011; Qu & Dumay, 2011; Silverman, 2008). Both of the first two approaches to interviewing treat respondents as epistemologically passive; mere vessels of answers (Qu & Dumay, 2011). Conversely, the third standpoint, localism, breaks with these conventional views on interviews. The localist sees the interview process as a chance for the respondents to explore the meaning of the research topic, and this process is inherently bound by the social context in which it takes place (Mishler, 1986).

The neopositivist researcher sees the interview process as a device to be used to create a context-free truth about objective reality producing responses with minimal bias, such that it comes as close as possible to providing a mirror of the reality that exists in the respondents' world (Miller & Glassner, 2011). The interview process is conducted as a procedure in which the interviewer ignores the context, as it does not affect the meaning of answers (Qu & Dumay, 2011). The romantic approach to interviewing rebuffs the neopositivist position that researchers should maintain a neutral stance during an interview. They argue that researchers should connect with interviewees on a personal level, such that an atmosphere of rapport is established allowing interviewees to produce genuine responses (Welch & Piekkari, 2006). Though the localist approach is similar to the romantic in that the interview is interactive and social by nature, it goes further by acknowledging interviews as bound by the social context in which they take place (Welch & Piekkari, 2006). The information produced from interviews is inter-relational (Kvale, 1996), and the narratives produced situated accounts of the phenomenon (Qu & Dumay, 2011). Localists view the interview as an empirical setting (Qu & Dumay, 2011), a social encounter in which

interviewer and respondents selectively “draw upon their shared knowledge of the social world to make sense of each other” (Welch & Piekkari, 2006, p. 420).

In adopting a localist approach to interviewing, I approached the interview as a conversation, focussing on questioning and listening (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). The research interview as conversation investigates participants’ everyday life by developing a methodological awareness of forms of questioning, focusing on what is expressed during the dyadic exchange between investigator and interviewee (Qu & Dumay, 2011). To best utilise key elements of everyday conversation in order to enquire or gain knowledge, I chose a semi-structured interview format over a structured or unstructured model. The semi-structured interview involves prepared questioning framed within identified themes, though because it has its basis in human conversation the skilful interviewer may deviate from set questions, or modify the style and pace in order to evoke the best response from the interviewee. Crucially, it also allows the interviewees to respond on their own terms using their own language (Qu & Dumay, 2011), which in the case of participants I interviewed was especially valuable in gaining an understanding as to how they perceive the role of recorded music and communities based on recorded music in their lives.

Having interviewees respond on their own terms using their own language was made easier as I was studying a group and culture of which I am a ‘member’. Various analyses of the interview process discuss the need to establish trust with interviewees (Goulding, 2002; Miller & Glassner, 2011; Qu & Dumay, 2011; Robson, 2011); this process made easier by studying groups with which we share membership (Miller & Glassner, 2011). As a fellow highly engaged recorded music consumer and community member I could relate and respond to the experiences relayed to me, as well as the language in which they were presented; people in specific cultures use words, explanations and narratives differently according to their shared understandings (Goulding, 2002). I was familiar enough to ask the right questions, and presented as a fellow ‘music fan’, as well as an academic with a critical approach to collecting then analysing data.

The interview process can be understood as conversation because conversation is the foremost method of knowledge transfer in the post-modern/post-structuralist world (Qu &

Dumay, 2011); how social actors interpret their experiences of the lived world constructs knowledge. Rather than knowledge being a direct mirror of reality it is a social construction of reality (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Kvale (1996) describes the qualitative research interview as consisting of five features of post-modern knowledge: knowledge as narrative, as conversation, as language, as inter-relational, and as context, exposing the relationship people have with the world around them. I sought to comprehend central themes that emerged from the qualitative open accounts of subjects' experiences and viewpoints, open to new and unpredicted phenomenon, rather than imposing pre-determined assumptions. This approach was appropriate to the method by which I then analysed my interview data; grounded theory analysis.

### **3.3 'Data analysis': Grounded theory**

Grounded theory originates from the empirical world and describes a method by which theory is developed from the collection and analysis of data (Charmaz & Bryant, 2011). In contrast to a fixed experimental design, grounded theory does not begin with a pre-determined hypothesis because a theory is generated from the data rather than tested by it. The originators of this method, Glaser and Strauss (1967), created a method whereby conceptual categories are devised from the data and relationships are formed between these categories, leading to the development and generation of overall research findings (Robson, 2011). Categories are formed by first open coding the data, or reviewing it and organising it into themes; a word or a sentence or a paragraph may be a unit of data that relates to another, such that they link to form conceptual categories (Robson, 2011). Categories are then linked together by axial coding, whereby the original data has been disassembled and rearranged into thematic parts, and these parts are then reassembled to lead to an understanding of the central phenomena in the data (Robson, 2011). Discovering the central phenomena happens in the third stage, selective coding, where the categories and their relationships begin to explain the overall picture (Robson, 2011).

Initially I had some reservations regarding employing grounded theory method, owing to traditional grounded theorists tending to treat enquiry as separate from its social conditions

(Charmaz & Bryant, 2011). In adopting a localist approach to interviewing participants, remaining a neutral observer ('separate from social conditions') would have been impossible. However there have been advancements in methodological enquiry over the past fifty years, resulting in the emergence of constructivist grounded theory. Constructivist grounded theorists locate themselves within the inquiry to get as close to the studied phenomenon as possible (Charmaz & Bryant, 2011) and view data as constructed rather than out there in the world waiting to be discovered and gathered. Having adopted a localist approach to data gathering, a constructivist grounded theoretical approach to data analysis allowed me to reflect upon themes pre-constructed in the development of my prepared question sheet, as well as develop new themes in response to the data gathered. I was able to acknowledge my influence on the research process, though ultimately participants' responses illuminated the central findings that emerged from this study.

The question sheet I prepared before interviewing participants was divided into five themes: 'engagement with recorded music, pleasures sought and gained when consuming recorded music, technological change, community and social interaction, and brick-and-mortar record shops. These themes were devised as a bridging point between the literature I had reviewed and the data I was to gather. As the interviews were semi-structured, each focus group and one-on-one interview was asked a majority of the pre-prepared questions, though my line of questioning was flexible according to participants' responses. I then began to open code the data gathered, allowing a new set of themes to develop that would form the basis of my discussion and analysis of findings.

Following transcribing the interview sessions I embarked on the first stage of data analysis, open coding. Though I had established five key themes when devising the questions for the data gathering sessions, I looked for subthemes common across the one-on-one interviews and focus groups. Using discussions that arose from the already established key theme of 'community and social interaction' as an example, strong subthemes that emerged included participants having embraced social media as a key forum for communication, participants suggesting people behave better in 'closed' online groups than in more public regions of the Internet, and participants identifying that they



have access to many individuals with similar interests online, though they often interact with these people in physical isolation.

The next stage of data analysis, axial coding, involved creating sections for the research chapter based not only on the themes that emerged from the data, but the 'conceptual baggage' (Robson, 2011) I was carrying based on both the literature presented in Chapter Two and the research questions. The chapter sections and subsections that emerged were based on considering both the coded categories of the data and the original categories I had devised for the interview question sheet. The main sections of the research findings chapter were primarily influenced by the thematic categories presented in the literature review and included in the subsequent semi-structured interview plan: firstly participants' relationship with recorded music, secondly technology and technological change, thirdly evaluating the relevance of the brick-and-mortar record shop, and fourthly a general discussion about community in face-to-face and online settings. The subsections of the Research and Findings chapter were influenced by the open coding of participants' responses. I used particular pieces of data - 'quotes' - to title many subsections, these quotes indicative of the coded theme of each. Direct quotes in the subsection titles included 'possibilities are endless', 'it's all just data', 'sharing is more accepted in the Internet age', and 'music harks back to a tribal thing'. The idea was to order and present the data such that it 'spoke for itself' wherever possible, allowing a pattern to form so that categories emerged from the data, rather than attempting to mould the data into rigid pre-determined categories.

In the final stage of data analysis, selective coding, I identified my core categories based on what had arisen from axial coding, which had provided me with a picture of running themes and relationships between each of the coded data categories. If I had sought to test or effectively outright answer one of my original research questions using a more experimental approach to analysing my data, participants' responses did essentially provide answers as to whether brick-and-mortar record shops are still relevant and might continue to survive. But in adopting the grounded theory method to code and analyse my data, the particular significance of other key themes and questions became apparent. Essentially, discussions with participants and the research process in general solidified a concern I had held from the outset that concentrating on the continued survival or relevance of brick-and-

mortar record shops might be bound up in nostalgia before contemporary relevance, and that my study was more about observing how highly engaged music consumers and the communities they are a part of are functioning now, how this differs from the past, and the implications of this.

In the following chapter, 29 individuals discuss their experiences of and reflections on engaging with recorded music, music-based technologies, and fellow recorded music enthusiasts. Participants' experiences are discussed and analysed, and the central theme that emerges is that though 'something' is lost with increasingly less physical community spaces and face-to-face interaction, the Internet provides a potentially more inclusive and expansive platform for a greater cross-section of audience members to feel involved.

## 4 Findings & Analysis

The purpose of this chapter is to present, discuss and analyse findings from the data collected, reflecting on the literature presented in Chapter Two. As stated in the previous chapter, data gathering took the form of three one-on-one interviews and four focus groups consisting of 29 individuals who identified as having a higher than average level of involvement with music consumption than the general public. The chapter is divided into nine sections.

The first three sections introduce the participants, discussing the origins of their interest in music, the development of this interest, as well as the pleasures they seek and gain when engaging with recorded music. Section 4.4 to 4.6 examine the changing ways by which participants acquire and then consume music, exploring their thoughts and feelings in regard to different recorded formats, as well as revealing their observations about how recent technological changes have affected the music industry as a whole - from production, to distribution, and consumption. Section 4.7 assesses the contemporary relevance of the independent brick-and-mortar record shop, also questioning the ongoing significance of traditional music tastemakers such as record shop employees. Following this discussion, Section 4.8 compares the 'richness' and 'reach' of contemporary music distribution and exchange with some of the more restrictive aspects of store inventory and store employees' motivations in the pre-Internet era. The section also investigates the brick-and-mortar record shop as a potentially emotionally loaded space, and begins to compare face-to-face interactions with interacting online. Section 4.9 explores interpersonal interaction in more depth, first introducing independent brick-and-mortar stores as spaces that have traditionally functioned as community hubs, before the section then explores participants' contemporary use of the Internet, discussing the ramifications of the Internet now being the primary platform by which recorded music communities now engage. Next, the section discusses the implications of now widespread engagement with the social media products of large corporations, the implications of now ubiquitous global communication, and also assesses how the changing ways in which people are communicating might alter notions of localness. Following on, the section finds that participants now interact less in face-to-face

settings, socialising online though tending to do so on-on-one rather than in real-time groups, often in physical isolation. Finally, the section explores the implications of these changing communication habits, before concluding with a discussion comparing face-to-face interaction with socialising online.

All sections of this chapter present the data as well as reflect on it in relation to the key themes and previous research presented in Chapter Two.

#### **4.1 '29 people and three cities': Introducing the participants**

A total of 29 people were involved in the focus groups and one-on-one interviews conducted for this study. Over a two month period in late 2014, 26 people took part in four focus groups and three engaged in one-on-one interviews with the researcher. The focus groups occurred on campus in Auckland, New Zealand. At the time of the study 23 of the participants resided in Auckland, New Zealand, five in Wellington, New Zealand, and one in Melbourne, Australia. Participants not living in Auckland participated via a Skype connection broadcast to those physically present at the focus groups. Using Parry et al.'s terminology (2012), participants were not drawn from the majority 'Cautious Consumer' demographic, rather falling into one or more of the 'Early Adopter', 'Band Fan', or 'Explorative Consumer' categories. In other words participants were chosen first because they identified as highly engaged recorded music consumers, though two other key factors were taken into consideration.

Firstly, owing to this study investigating changing human behaviours as a result of the recent proliferation of Internet usage, a wide range of age groups was sought. Thirteen who took part were aged in their thirties, nine were in their twenties, four in their forties, and three in their fifties. Six of the participants were under 25, and though they had some memories of physical format recordings and physical format retail outlets, their primary reference point for where to procure recorded music was the Internet. However, in terms of these younger participants being skewed towards online resources, age did not always correlate with where music was primarily sourced. For example two participants in their twenties claimed they procured over 80% of their music offline, while two participants in

their 50s stated they sourced over 99% of their music online. As engaged music consumers and fans, all participants indicated they were regular and competent Internet users. The latter point proved fruitful where the older of the participants were concerned, as all had engaged with, and had a long-term perspective on, both traditional and modern audience practices.

Secondly, individuals who currently work or have worked in recorded music retail were sought for this study. Five people came forward, and two of these took part in focus groups while the other three were interviewed one-on-one. Though all participants identified as engaged music consumers, music audience members, and Internet users, these five participants offered the added perspective of having worked in the physical spaces that form the basis for this study. A discussion of the many changes that have occurred in music distribution 'post-Napster', as well as the social and business environment beforehand, warranted reflection from those who have at some stage stood behind the counter at a record shop.

One commonality of most participants, though certainly not a selection criterion, was a high level of music industry involvement and knowledge. This was not surprising given that a key requirement for taking part in the study was 'a higher than average level of involvement with music consumption'. Consumption aside, just over half the participants had been, or were currently involved with, music in some kind of professional capacity. Roles performed included deejaying, music journalism, music promoting, venue ownership, band membership, radio hosting, music teaching, and music-based community work.

Before attending, all participants were asked to provide some basic demographic information in the form of their age and gender, an estimate of how long they had been consuming music, and a breakdown of how much recorded music they currently consumed in on or offline settings. In considering the latter, some participants rightly noted 'consuming' was a term open to interpretation in terms of the act of gaining ownership of an MP3 or physical format recording being quite different to activities such as streaming music over the internet or listening to a radio programme. But the question was not

included in order to procure hard data; rather it was to get participants to start considering their current activities before attending the focus groups.

The focus group participants are outlined as follows (pseudonyms have been used):

Focus Group One (Wednesday 3 September 2014 @ 6.30pm):

Name	Age / Gender	Offline / Online	Years Actively Consuming Music
Vincent	35M	80/20	20
Barnes	36M	80/20	24
Roger	44M	10/90	31
Eric	22M	20/80	10
Mike	33M	15/85	25
Ralph	32M	40/60	24
Mark	22M	5/95	13
Herb	35M	5/95	23

Focus Group Two (Saturday 6 September 2014 @ 11am):

Name	Age / Gender	Offline / Online	Years Actively Consuming Music
Jack	32M	60/40	20
Terry	46M	95/5	31
Bob	27M	45/55	19

Focus Group Three (Wednesday 10 September 2014 @ 6.30pm):

Name	Age / Gender	Offline / Online	Years Actively Consuming Music
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Thom	30M	20/75	20
Rex	24/M	10/90	15
Don	38/M	50/50	25
Henry	50/M	1/99	40
Sean	42/M	0/100	32
Si	50/M	0/100	40
Tony	38/M	15/85	28
Gen	22/F	80/20	14
Jed	35/M	5/95	25

Focus Group Four (Thursday 27 November 2014 @ 6.30pm):

Name	Age / Gender	Offline / Online	Years Actively Consuming Music
Nasir	51M	10/90	40
Craig	28M	10/90	18
Paz	23M	25/75	23
Lee	20M	0/100	12
Pat	34M	10/90	16
John	29M	90/10	26

All three participants who took part in one-on-one interviews either currently worked in, or in the past had worked in, recorded music retail. All identified as having had a long-term and active involvement with music as an audience member. Interviewee one is Jim, a male

who has worked in music retail in New Zealand since 1992. At the time the interviews were conducted Jim was 43 years old and working at Marbecks, an independent record shop in Auckland, New Zealand. The interview with Jim was conducted on Wednesday 10 September 2014 @ 6pm. Interviewee two is Drew, a male who at the time of the interview was 36 years old and Program Director for Base FM, a low-power radio station in Auckland. Drew worked in music retail for nearly a decade. The interview with Drew was conducted on Thursday 18 September 2014 @ 4pm. Finally, interviewee three is Hannah, a female who at the time of the interview was 33 years old and working part time in music retail while studying full-time. Hannah worked full-time for the CD & DVD Store in Newmarket, Auckland from 2002 until 2007. The interview with Hannah was conducted on Thursday 25 September 2014 @ 11am.

The interview with Jim was conducted on Wednesday 10 September 2014 @ 6pm. The interview with

#### **4.2 'Big brothers & Black Sabbath': The origins of a lifelong interest in music**

Participants who took place in this study all placed a high value on the influence and involvement of music in their lives. Analogous to Parry et al.'s Early Adopters, Band Fans, and Explorative Consumers (2012), participants did not appear to exhibit or express mainstream music tastes or acquisition patterns. Seemingly in accordance with the high value they placed on music, participants who answered the initial research questions concerning their earliest engagement with music were able to vividly recall early lifetime events. Gen remembered enjoying heavy metal from a young age.

*I would have been about four. My dad used to pick me up from day care and then we'd listen to Black Sabbath. I remember our favourite songs. (Gen, FG Three)*

Tony recalled growing up surrounded by musical instruments and records.

*As early as I can remember. Parents with records, piano, guitar... instruments lying around the house. So earliest memories, going through dad's records and being told off for doing so, you know. (Tony, FG Three)*

*What age? (Interviewer)*



*Four, five? The Monkees were probably my favourite record to start with. (Tony, FG Three)*

Mark's first memories were of engaging with music video shows on the television.

*Well I started listening to music when I was five or six, maybe just what you'd see on the Top 40, you know, what they used to have on Sunday mornings? The Coca Cola Top 40 or something like that... and I'd just listen to that on a Sunday, and just everything that came through. (Mark, FG One)*

Thom recalled a fascination with 'forbidden fruit'.

*Being told not to touch dad's records, so naturally that becomes a thing of interest you know? How can I break this? So yeah typical... (Thom, FG Three)*

Another key theme that emerged when questioning participants about their initial engagement with recorded music was the influence of older relatives. For Jed, the musical tastes of older siblings as well as parents who listened to jazz were a guiding force.

*I grew up with older brothers and sisters who stopped me listening to music I should not have been listening to, like New Kids on the Block. So I got brought up listening to David Bowie and all that sort of stuff. My parents were into jazz. (Jed, FG Three)*

Still working in music retail at the time the interview was conducted with him, Jim described older siblings introducing him to these spaces.

*I was the youngest in the family, so two of my brothers both worked in record shops. But even before they worked in record stores we used to on a Saturday jump on our bikes and go record shopping. (Jim, Interview One)*

Drew's father solidified his interest in music when he played him a particular song.

*...what really got me into music, there's one pivotal point. I remember I was about eleven years old, and I'd already kind of told my dad that I wanted to start playing guitar, and he sat me down and he played one song, and that one song changed my*

*life, the way I heard music. It was Van Halen 'Eruption', from their first album. (Drew, Interview Two)*

While for Henry, it was the soundtracks of an aunt and her friends that introduced him to new music.

*I had an aunt who was ten years older who lived with me who lived with us. Her boyfriends and everyone coming through the house it was just, even when I was five or six, ten year difference... it was just sort of washing over... (Henry, FG Three)*

Craig's interest in music came from the sounds that trickled through from his brother's room next door.

*He'd be playing it in his room and that would like trickle next door to my room until I'd be trying to get on to what he was listening to... (Craig, FG Four)*

Many participants were also able to vividly recall their first purchase of recorded music. For Pat this event was attached to pleasant family memories.

*My brother used to play football and he would... if he scored or played a good game Dad would take him to buy a cassette. And I remember the first time he got to pick an album he picked the Footloose soundtrack [laughs]. And I think from that experience it was, it was kind of like, he just let us go for it. And I remember the first album I picked out was The Fat Boys album. I think it was just called The Fat Boys. (Pat, FG Four)*

Drew remembered shopping around for well-priced shoes in order to procure his first album.

*I bought my first album, and it was Guns and Roses 'Appetite for Destruction'. I got given sixty bucks to buy shoes, so I bought \$40 shoes and used the change to buy the LP, which I've still got. So I bought that maybe in '88? (Drew, Interview Two)*

Tony, Henry, and Sean were also able, many years later, to recall in detail their first purchases.

*...my first piece of vinyl would have been Upper Hutt Posse, E Tu, and ALE, Stuck on Earth. (Tony, FG Three)*

*See I bought my first at ten, Wings, Band on The Run. I think my brother and I actually went fifty-fifty on it because of the expense. (Henry, FG Three)*

*My first purchase was two purchases, Frankie Goes to Hollywood Welcome to the Pleasuredome and Prince When Doves Cry. (Sean, FG Three)*

Participants exhibited an infatuation with music from a young age, able to vividly recall early listening and purchasing experiences. For Mike, Jack, and Terry this aligned with a sense of being somehow different to the general population, obsessed with music beyond ‘the norm’ and in some cases distinct from others in their home town.

*I remember feeling desperate for new music. I felt like I had a hunger that could not be sated. (Mike, FG One)*

*But I kind of felt like what I was collecting and what I was interested in no one else kind of was. Tauranga you know... I wasn't really interested in buying Doobie Brothers records... (Jack, FG Two)*

*I think it's trying to find something a bit different to what everybody else was listening to as well. You don't want to be, I mean coming from a village I could go back now into the... we've got four pubs... and it won't be my mate you know, it'll be his son sat in the same place, you know what I mean? There'll be a few like that and a few who've got away. And the ones who've got away are the ones interested in doing something a bit different. (Terry, FG Two)*

Overall, the introductory questioning for the focus groups and interviews confirmed that music was of immense significance to the narrative of participants' lives. From being able to distinctly recall music-related events in their childhood, to identifying as somehow different to most other audience members, as well as describing the various ways and means by which they would procure music when younger, from an early age participants showed signs

of possessing meaningful personal mythologies not dissimilar to those McIntyre (2009) suggests are further developed while patronising independent record shops. Jack's description of 'being interested in what no one else was', and Terry's description of those who had left his home town as 'the ones interested in doing something different', suggest a self-reflexive 'otherness'; kindred individuals disinterested in mainstream practices.

#### **4.3 '666 Satan stoner': Pleasures gained and sought when consuming music**

Outside of the primary motivation of eventually owning and listening to it, participants were questioned about what pleasures they sought or gained when procuring recorded music. Key themes that emerged were reinforcement or growth of personal identity, a desire to gain knowledge, a desire to support artists, and an affinity for physical copies of titles as well as the physical spaces where music could be obtained.

On reinforcement or growth of personal identity;

*It's kind of influential on your lifestyle as well in terms of, say, it might be an artist and they have a following of people and if they have gigs then you'll go along to those gigs and you'll meet other people that might be like-minded and into similar things and then you can interact with other people. So it's kind of like a style, you know, of who you want to be or be around. (Craig, FG Four)*

Craig alluded to the significance of identifying and aligning with a group of people who share similar interests and attitudes. Craig's description of 'people that might be like-minded and into similar things' and 'a kind of a style, you know, of who you want to be around' bears a similarity to Terry describing 'people interested in doing something a bit different'. Craig describes an affinity for not only music but a broader lifestyle phenomenon that accompanies it. This echoes the shared group identity many customers and staff experience at independent record shops, as exposed in McIntyre's (2009, 2011) and Gracon's (2009, 2011) studies, as well as Simpson's (2000) discussion of Florida's Blue Chair Records. For Craig, like those involved in earlier studies, the consumption of recorded music forms one part of a broader homology of music-based personal and collective identity.

On a desire to gain knowledge;

*For me it's like it's my in to finding out about history or finding out about a place. Like right now I'm kind of, you know, buying a lot of these reissue things which have really great sleeve notes, tell you about music in Turkey in the '70s, or tell you about funk in Ethiopia or whatever. You get a kind of insight into that world. It's the first way in and then you read other stuff if you are interested. (Nasir, FG Four)*

*Well I think definitely knowledge of different ideas. Like I'm quite into Twitter and I follow a few artists on Twitter and it's interesting to... especially when you are talking about a single artist not a band... like when I started following Jean Grae I was like 'fuck! I have so much more in common with her than I ever thought'. She's such a nerd. She likes sci-fi. (Hannah, Interview Three)*

*Kind of how I find out a lot about indie bands is actually through Bandcamp, and with all these useful tags at the bottom you could actually just key in, I dunnoh like, you could key in any random word in there and.. I've seen so many weird ones like '666 Satan stoner' and... you find really good music at the end of the day though. (Eric, FG Three)*

*Definitely going to a source of authority. Like podcasts, there's this great podcast that has just finished up, it was hosted by Scott Kelly of Neurosis and he would have guests on and they would talk about their favourite tunes. Just because he's got such a rich musical history he'd tap into some of the influences... (Thom, FG Three)*

*So knowledge? (Interviewer)*

*Yup. Podcasting. (Thom, FG Three)*

*True that. I did actually listen to a couple of Henry Rollins podcasts for that reason as well. Because he'll tell you about the stuff that happened... like this band called Death from Detroit in the '70s... (Gen, FG Three)*

Aside from Nasir's more traditional approach of reading physical record sleeves, participants' experiences reflect the post-Napster music industry environment, where vertical authority is increasingly replaced by a horizontal system of exchange and interaction. Jones (2002) stated that the concentrated industrialisation of music in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century alienated performers and audiences from one and other, and that the Internet is

changing this. Parry et al. (2012) concur, asserting that this change allows greater communication between audience and industry, illustrated by Gen and Thom being able to bypass traditional ‘tiers’ of the music industry supply chain to hear from artists directly, or Eric being able to directly access a variety of artists according to tailored search terms. In turn Hannah feels a genuine sense of connection to Jean Grae, a major recording artist from New York City, through learning more about her in Twitter posts.

This phenomenon ostensibly undermines a historically significant aspect of the independent record shop environment. Where Hill (2001) observed that digital technology has made consumers as sophisticated as producers, it might also be said new technology has similarly equalised the relationship between audience member and record store employee. Despite Gen and Thom visiting physical stores to purchase physical copies of music, both identified the Internet as ‘a source of authority’ and did not mention the role of record stores in this context at all. Similarly Eric—who indicated elsewhere during the focus group that he attended many local indie gigs—did not mention offline environments when discussing looking for new bands, instead preferring to type ‘666 Satan stoner’ into California-based website Bandcamp. Where Gracon (2010) and McIntyre (2009) identified the significance of the recommendations and advice of record shop employees in gaining knowledge and new music, Gen and Thom are able to ‘plug in’ directly to international musicians’ and tastemakers’ weekly podcasts, and Eric looks first for artists on Bandcamp rather than being handed an album or seeing a poster in a local store.

On a desire to support artists;

*I had a friend who played music and bought all his albums... and he said ‘well if you want to support the artists you want to buy the albums and show that support through actually purchasing something.’ So from there up until now I have made an effort to purchase all my music... (Mark, FG One)*

*[In reference to online music retail] It’s really very easy to get a hold of what you want and you can still pay a fee for it which is really cool. (Ralph, FG One)*

*I think going to gigs, supporting local shows, is probably one of the most important things. As far as supporting the band that you like, I feel. Because if you, if you really do like them you should make the effort to go out and see them. (Eric, FG One)*

*I tend to support a lot of local stuff. If someone has a pay what you like download, if there's five tracks I'll give them five bucks, and if there's eight tracks I'll give them eight bucks, you know? (Drew, Interview Two)*

*It makes me uneasy to think about all of that music just out there. I know people who download stuff without even thinking about how it impacts artists. It's just a really awkward area. (Hannah, Interview Three)*

Aside from Hannah's gentle declaration of 'unease' in regard to downloading music for free, the act of piracy appeared normalised across all focus group discussions and age groups. This is best exemplified by the fact that whenever downloading music or the current state of the music industry came up as topics, nobody approached the conversations from the ethical or moral standpoint that piracy was 'bad' or 'destroying the music industry'. Instead the conversation in the groups reflected on the resultant phenomenon in an evolutionary context. This approach was apparent when supporting artists emerged as a pleasure gained when procuring music. In this instance downloading music for free was not criticised, but rather how to continue to provide support in this environment was discussed.

This particular 'pleasure' further suggests the vertical authority industry system is eroding. For those who expressed a responsibility to support artists, it is now their own decision to act on this responsibility. Mark purchases albums not because this is the only way he can procure music, but because a friend explained to him that this supports an artist's career. Eric described attending local gigs as 'supporting' and 'important'. Drew also used the word 'support' in describing his decision to make a point of paying for local artists' releases, implying he has choice, and may not do the same with other releases. Ralph described being able to pay for music online as 'really cool', as if this is somehow now a novelty, and a discretionary action on his part.

Participants' conscious efforts to support artists is not surprising given the initial criteria that focus group attendees have a particular interest in and passion for music. Though statistics show that people under 25 are purchasing far less music than ten years ago (The Economist, 2010; Ugwu, 2014), Eric and Mark—22 years old respectively—are making a concerted effort to support artists. Drew feels less inclined to pay for international releases, preferring to support New Zealand artists. Similar to the responses of those who took part in Nuttall's (2011) study, Eric, Drew and Eric's decisions as to how and when to support artists demonstrates a level of wider industry knowledge, and a consideration of the political economy aspects of it.

In identifying a desire to gain knowledge and a desire to support artists as key pleasures sought when procuring music, participants consequently revealed a fluid hybrid existence in both on and offline environments. This is in contrast to McIntyre's (2011) assertion that Baby Boomers have a predilection for music shops and Generation Y prefers to be online, and in a wider context supports Everett's (2007) observations about distinguishing between 'virtual' and 'real' worlds. When discussing seeking knowledge and supporting artists, Hannah, Eric, Drew and Gen highlighted that their online activities complement their offline pursuits and vice versa; a phenomenon common to all focus group attendees and one-on-one interviewees who participated. Participants did not seem to exist in both a 'virtual' (very close to being something without actually being it) world and a 'real' world, rather, as Bennett (2004) described, they use the Internet as another cultural resource in a pre-existing communal context. Participants' experiences echo Everett's (2007) claim that music-based communities use online environments as a means of supplementing rather than replacing more traditional forms of offline communication.

On an affinity for physical copies of albums and singles;

*When you acquire recorded music, what else are you seeking in the process?*  
(Interviewer)

*The artwork. (Lee, FG Four)*

*The story. (John, FG Four)*

*Yeah the artwork. (Nasir, FG Four)*



*I actually like having, if you like, the artwork and stuff and actually having a copy so I can put it in my CD rack and have it on display. I don't know, it's just a thing to have... the physical record feel. (Barnes, FG One)*

When reflecting on the desirable aspects of physical copies of recordings, participants often appeared to be framing their experiences, unwittingly or otherwise, in the context of the now predominantly digital media landscape. Though Lee, John, and Nasir's comments regarding seeking 'the artwork' and 'the story' did not directly address this comparison, Barnes's observation, 'I don't know, it's just a thing to have... the physical record feel', seemed to be his reflecting on what is missing with MP3 recordings. The following sentiments from Terry and Mike were more pointed toward the issue.

*It's like going back it used to be great, because you didn't know the b-sides back in the day. I'd listen to John Peel, get me a-side, and of course I didn't know what was on the b-side... and the b-side might be fucking brilliant, you know? Or an album, you might like two tracks off it and you buy the album. It's just getting it and putting it on and listening to it, not having it instantly. You can go online can't you and go 'I'll just have a sample of that', 'no I don't like it', 'a sample of this', 'no I don't like it' [indicates throwing away each]. (Terry, FG Two)*

*I sold a record to a guy in Berlin on Discogs that was only like fifty pressed and he was really after it and I gave it to him for the right price and he was so happy, he sent me this email about him coming home, rolling a big spliff, getting real stoned putting it on real loud, and how happy he was listening to it... and I was like 'awesome'. That does not happen with an MP3. (Mike, FG One)*

In these instances, Terry and Mike expressed concerns about what they perceived as the immediacy and disposability of digital music. Terry reflected on discovering what is on a b-side or whole album by way of comparing this experience to what he observed as the throwaway culture that results from being able to obtain music relatively instantly online, whilst Mike's tale of a herbally augmented German tellingly ended with 'that does not happen with an MP3'.

Similarly, Henry's description of purchasing physical copies of recordings demonstrated not only an appreciation of the tangible nature of the product, but the enjoyment of the time that has to be invested in the process also.

*But there's that associated buzz when it turns up and there's that knock on the door, the courier turns up and you've got that bag... unwrapping it... half the time I don't even turn the turntable on. I just marvel at the artwork. (Henry, FG Two)*

In summary, participants' combined commentary portrayed physical format recordings as offering a narrative that extended beyond the music pressed or burned on to them. This narrative revealed itself both within the physical manifestation of the album artwork as well as sleeve notes, and the process involved in finding then eventually owning desired recordings. Terry's juxtaposition of the 'Type → Search → Select → DOWNLOAD → Consume' model of music acquisition with his experiences of engaging with physical copies of music implies greater time is often invested in appreciating what is contained within the latter. The sentiments and experiences participants shared evoke Shuker's (2004) description of physical sound recordings as significant cultural artefacts, and the pastime of finding or collecting these as a commodity pursuit encompassing 'the thrill of the chase' as well as obsession and accumulation. Akin to Fuat-Firat's (1987) sentiments on consumer goods in general, physical recordings might also represent a sense of achievement, identity, status or belonging. Like Craig's earlier comment on seeking identity through music in general, Barnes describes not only enjoying the artwork, but *having* it and *displaying* it to others.

On an affinity for physical spaces;

*You can go online and see all the stuff you want, but you go to a record store, and you might have two hours looking through shit, then find something that's like 'fuck!' (Terry, FG Two)*

*Makes your day, yeah... (Jack, FG Two)*

*But you can do that online? (Interviewer)*

*But you can't... (Jack, FG Two)*

*It's not the same as finding it... (Terry, FG Two)*

*Yeah you walk into a record store and you have no idea what you'll be walking out with. I know that's kind of the same on Trade Me, you can scroll through and find a gem, but it's a real cool feeling walking into Real Groovy and having no idea what you're going to find that day... (Jack, FG Two)*

In discussing their fondness for physical items and spaces, participants' responses echoed both the displaced hunter-gatherer behaviour described (and the motivational categories devised) in McIntyre's (2009) study of record shop customers. Those who commented on the value of physical spaces seemed to value 'the thrill of the chase', seemingly unimpressed by the simplified version of shopping and downloading online. Terry described spending two hours looking through music and then finding something important to him before Jack added that it 'makes your day, yeah'. When it was suggested the same thing could be found online (presumably far more quickly), Terry stressed that 'it's not the same as finding it', as if 'finding' is a word specifically associated with the more lengthy and ritualistic act of sorting through physical albums in the store. Jack's final comments in this exchange confirmed the relevance of the process to both, acknowledging you can scroll through a web page and 'find a gem', but it is not the same as the 'real cool feeling walking into Real Groovy and having no idea what you're going to find that day'.

Terry and Jack's exchange corresponds with McIntyre's (2009) 'interpretive' dimension, or the environmental legibility and integrity of record store spaces for customers. Terry and Jack enter a space with consistent *coherence* [emphasis in original] and *credibility* [emphasis in original] in terms of store layout, and know their niche tastes will be catered for by Real Groovy's extensive stock of titles. However, as they know the Internet offers a similar if not more extensive inventory, the value of *chance* [emphasis in original] or *serendipity* [emphasis in original] is also important. Essentially, they seek a space that is consistent in its recognisability and desirability to them, but that will also expose current wants (or completely unexpected offerings) after a prolonged search is undertaken.

For Mike, Henry, and Jack, this process appeared to provide immense pleasure.

*I found this copy of one of my favourite albums of all time in some random place for a dollar and I was so fucking happy... and the joy of finding it, taking it home and putting it on was amazing. (Mike, FG One)*

*I was in Christchurch and I just started going through Penny Lane [record store] down there, and just sort of rediscovered the joy of vinyl and going through stores. Of going through the vinyl, buying the vinyl, and bringing it home... (Henry, FG Three)*

*It's my sanctuary, Real Groovy, you know? If I'm having a bad day I just jump in the car and go down there for a few hours. I might not buy something, but... (Jack, FG Two)*

Mike and Henry used the word 'joy' in outlining their experiences, an emotion high on the scale of describing happiness, whilst Jack described Real Groovy as his 'sanctuary', particularly if he is having a bad day. Jack's articulation is similar to respondents' sentiments in McIntyre's (2009) study, who suggested record shops provided them with a sought after enjoyable environment, a sense of containment McIntyre (2009) terms *refuge* [emphasis in original]. Ralph's following comments align with another of McIntyre's (2009) categorisations; *age* [emphasis in original].

*When I'm travelling overseas one of my first ports of call in the city is to go to the underground or counter-culture record stores and talk to the people that work there, find out what's going on, get them to recommend local bands I can listen to, buy some of the music, see if there's any shows I can go to or places I can go. (Ralph, FG One)*

McIntyre (2009) describes *age* [emphasis in original] as sought-after and reliable long-term destinations that are part of an overall cognitive map of a geographic area for the involved music consumer. It appears Ralph grounds himself in foreign locations by seeking out an independent record shop as soon as possible after he arrives, such that he can gain vital local knowledge about the local music scene. Indeed, the inherently local nature of many independent brick-and-mortar record shops is an often cited as a valuable cultural asset. What Ralph seeks is the 'vernacular culture' described by Gracon (2010), where localness is expressed, and cultural forms are made and organised by everyday people. Similar to Gracon's (2010) observations, conceivably Ralph would not find what he seeks at

a branch of a national or global chain store, as generic 'mall culture' generally does not foster unique independent locations and art forms.

In summary, discussing the pleasures gained and sought by participants when procuring recorded music revealed a broad set of motivations, as well as greater insight into their relationship with music and music-based environments. Music was identified as a central point of reference for a broader sense of personal identity, as well as the catalyst for a shared group identity 'other' to the mainstream. Participants' discussions also reflected the modern media environment, where large scale connectivity and interaction is commonplace amongst audience members now less controlled by the vertical authority industry system of old. With music industry 'middlemen' wielding less power than they did during the pre-Napster years, participants described connecting directly to artists, gaining knowledge and information from them through platforms such as podcasts and social media. The traditional record shop model and employee is seemingly now undermined in this regard, yet another 'middleman' in an environment where audience members can now seek music opinions, knowledge, and guidance online.

When discussing pleasures, participants did not berate the act of piracy, though as particularly engaged music consumers Mark, Eric, and Drew recognised the need to support artists financially, and discussed some of the ways they do so. But in discussing this, participants again exposed a music industry where more power lies in the hands of the consumer or audience member than ever before (Parry et al., 2012; Warr & Goode, 2011). The decision of how, or even if, to support an artist was revealed as discretionary on the part of those who commented, and though it was not explicitly stated it is a reasonable assumption this is because they knew how to procure what they purchase just as easily for free. In this regard, as aware and engaged music consumers focus group attendees showed a wider knowledge and concern for the political economy aspects of the modern music industry. It could be reasonably assumed that it is individuals like this who will continue to support and regularly engage with acquisition processes other than solely downloading music for free.

#### 4.4 'Finding that track from 1982': Changes in how music is acquired

As the central focus of this study is examining the social interactions of communities that are based on recorded music, there is value in exploring participants' engagement not only with others, but also the various technologies that deliver recorded music to the consumer, as well as the technologies that enable interpersonal interaction. Without technological advancement music would not have been recorded, the Internet would not have allowed for instantaneous global communication, and communities could not have formed around the cultural artefacts central to these groups' existence. Therefore the following three sections, 4.4 to 4.6, examine the changing ways by which participants acquire and then engage with music, their preferred recorded music formats, and their observations regarding how recent technological changes have affected the music industry as a whole; from production, to distribution, to consumption. Participants describe a contemporary environment with far more options than ever before, where access to music and information is not limited by geography or inventory, or at least nowhere near as limited as it was in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Discussions reveal that participants perceive vinyl copies of recordings as more authentic than their digital counterparts, though most participants prefer utilising MP3s over CDs, the latter of which are described as 'nothing products'. In Section 4.6, participants consider the ramifications of recent technological changes in the wider context of the music industry as a whole, suggesting audiences and artists are more connected than ever before, though music itself might now be treated as more disposable than it was in the past.

*I think it's more about accessibility, like literally you find the song on YouTube, grab the link, chuck it on a website, download it, it's there. And it's like, 'well do I want to search for ages to try and find a free download, or do I pay the \$1.19... you know what, fuck it, I've got the song here.' I think that's what a lot of what's happening. (Paz, FG Four)*

*So in general, what do you think the positive aspects of the shift online for music are? (Interviewer)*

*Greater reach. (Gen, FG Three)*

*Accessibility. (Rex, FG Three)*

*Portability. (Sean, FG Three)*

*You can find that track you remember from 1982 that disappeared. (Si, FG Three)*

*[laughter]*

Both Paz's observation, as well as the exchange that took place in the third focus group, exemplify the key themes that emerged across all of the one-on-one interviews and focus groups when discussing changes in how and where music is sourced. Participants described a contemporary environment in which their ability to source music is not limited by geography or inventory, and where relative speed and portability is now customary. This environment differs from the world Si, John, Paz, and Vincent described growing up in.

*I spent two hours in the record section of the stationers in Howick, which was where records were sold in those days. (Si, FG One)*

*For me it was growing up in a small town. The nearest music shop is an hour and a half away so we didn't go there often. (John, FG Four)*

*Yeah, we lived in Palmerston North, and I think there was one CD store in the city centre and we'd only go there once a weekend. I'd spend my entire time in the store listening to the CDs that they had... (Paz, FG Four)*

*I remember growing up in Mt Manganui same thing. One record store and it was very much like a rock, Top 40 record store and, like you'd end up having to go to the Flea Markets and buy stuff or garage sales to buy like your old classics and stuff. (Vincent, FG One)*

In regard to accessing music, the environment participants described growing up in was limited both by geographical and industrial factors. Despite an age difference of 27 years, Si and Paz essentially described the same situation regarding growing up in New Zealand, that of one physical store being their only access point for procuring recorded music (though Si grew up in Auckland, and eventually there were far more stores trading there than in provincial New Zealand). John's experience was even more restricting, owing to having

grown up in a small town where the 'local' record shop was an hour and a half away by car. For Vincent the limited inventory in his local store was not to his taste, leading him to seek out second-hand titles at flea markets and garage sales.

Unsurprisingly, participants' experiences reflect their having grown up in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century pre-Internet world. Participants were not only restricted by physical location (seemingly accentuated in 'small town' New Zealand), but by the wholesale commercial control of the supply of music globally at the time. With music availability once wholly dictated by the record company, distributor and retailer (Graham et al., 2004), these participants' options were a limited selection of titles distributed and made available in a limited amount of locations. This is precisely the scarcity Anderson (2008b) describes in his reflections on the 'Long Tail' of the modern media environment; where near unlimited selection now replaces the 'hit driven' economics that led Vincent away from his local music retailer in search of more esoteric options elsewhere.

Having grown up in this limited media environment, participants highlighted the importance of radio in their lives. Paz identified the chart show on his local commercial station as a source of new music.

*I remember when I was a kid, we used to live in Palmerston North and I remember going to sleep and the radio, I used to listen to the ZM Top 10 at nine o'clock every night. And I'd sit there and I'd have my tape ready to record off the thing... (Paz, FG Four)*

Nasir highlighted the significance of radio tastemakers when growing up in Britain.

*But radio, totally crucial. I mean I grew up in England, and I'd listen to Radio Luxembourg as a kid, eight, nine years old... BBC Radio One, John Peel... and then I'd listen to Irish radio. After John Peel ended at midnight we could actually tune into this guy called Dave Fanning, kind of the Irish John Peel. (Nasir, FG Four)*

Craig recalled listening to local independent radio station 95bFM, in particular the specialist hip hop show *The True School*.



*bFM, the True School Hip Hop Show was obviously there every Thursday night or whatever for years. And then like winning prizes and stuff off the radio. That was a really big part of my life growing up. (Craig, FG Four)*

Hannah cited not only the historical importance of radio to her musical enlightenment, but music television also.

*Um, at the time when I was early twenties I was getting music from the radio. We had some good music sources when I was in my early twenties; we had Max TV and 96.1, which was a radio station that was ad free and all alternative music. So I listened to that a lot. (Hannah, Interview Three)*

In all of these instances, participants discussed radio stations or radio shows that specifically broadcast new or non-mainstream music, a testament to the then limited number of options available to them to discover and hear a wide range of music. Overall, the media environment participants described growing up in was very limited compared to today, as embodied by the following observation from Rex regarding music formats.

*I think beyond the collector's element of it, where you get to look at the artwork, feel the weight, all that kind of thing, um, to be honest with you I feel with MP3 and with online the possibilities are infinite, whereas they never were with physical. (Rex, FG Three)*

Rex's observation, that the possibilities of digital technologies are 'infinite', is further demonstrated in the following comments regarding how participants now source music.

*It all depends on what Groovy has to offer as well, because this is what I'm finding, having had a spurt of rediscovering going through record stores I'm finding less and less that I want to buy. Whereas I go back online and it's that same old thing, the possibilities are endless, and the amount of money you can spend is limitless, so... (Henry, FG Three)*

Henry is referring to buying and collecting vinyl, a pursuit traditionally associated with brick-and-mortar record shops. Though having 'rediscovered' record shops, the reality for

him is that what is on offer is limited, as opposed to shopping online where ‘the possibilities are endless’ and the ‘amount of money you can spend limitless’. Vincent expresses a similar sentiment, though in the context of the limitations of local store inventory in terms of being a vinyl deejay.

*One thing. You’re very much dictated to by what the store gets in. So even today in Auckland, the vinyl deejays, if they, for example if somewhere like Conch will get like five copies or ten copies of whatever record, and you go to the gigs the next week and no matter what deejay you hear they’ll be playing that same track. Like everyone plays the same stuff. Because they like buying the same records from the same place. (Vincent, FG One)*

To contextualise Vincent’s sentiments, he indicated elsewhere during the focus group that he sources vinyl copies of music online in order to have a selection of music to differentiate himself from other local vinyl deejays. For Pat and Drew (who also deejay but play digital files as well as or instead of vinyl) the Internet has also expanded their potential repertoire.

*I think for me that was one of the main things moving to Serato was like ‘wow, look at all this music I’ve got now’, or I’ve got access to. Before it was the main stops, Beat Merchants, Real Groovy, Conch... and I’d go around, and it’s like, you miss the order day or whatever, you come in and everything is gone; slim pickings. But now with Serato, like, you find a song on YouTube, you basically search it out, you download it from Juno Download or something like that, you know? (Pat, FG Four)*

*Being able to get stuff easily, find stuff easily. Like, if I want a song, chances are, unless it is super obscure, I can pretty much find it. Even if I can’t find the legitimate paid download, I can still find it somewhere. (Drew, Interview Two)*

#### **4.4.1 ‘Freed music, not free music’: Music availability online and offline**

For the participants who spoke about transitioning to sourcing music online, the primary appeal appeared to be *freed* music, not *free* music, just as Hill (2013) posited about early Napster users. As enthusiastic and engaged music consumers, digital technology, principally the Internet, has extended the parameters for discovering, researching, sourcing, and

collecting music. However, Jed, Mike, and Craig provided some critique of Internet-based music acquisition.

*I've been in Brazil recently too where you go into stores and there's just these stacks of vinyl, and you just, you can't do that on the Internet I find. I enjoy buying what I want on the Internet, especially with deejaying it's like 'this is the tune I need to jam tonight'. However if you want to find something that you never knew existed you have to go to an actual physical store to find it. (Jed, FG Three)*

In this instance, Jed draws attention to the fact that not everything is available on the Internet. For the deejay and collector obsessed with exclusivity or rarity, there are many titles that have not yet been, and may never be, digitised and uploaded to the Internet. Like some of the comic book collectors in Wright's (2008) study, record collectors and deejays like Jed might place particular emphasis on finding the truly obscure in the form of hard-to-find physical media. For Mike, another deejay who took part in the focus groups, limited availability of physical copies of music translated as a valuable point of difference in the pre-Internet environment, avoiding the sameness that Vincent described earlier.

*....the records that were coming in were like in a limited quantity and there was only a few and you could buy that twelve inch and then you'd have that twelve inch and you'd play that twelve inch out and feel great because someone else doesn't have it... and that doesn't really happen with Beatport or illegally downloading something where there is instant access to everything. (Mike, FG One)*

Whether limited availability of specific titles is a positive or a negative is a subject that was debated at great length in the focus groups. The topic is especially significant as it symbolises a broader discussion around media availability in the pre and post-Napster environments, what physical spaces offer that the Internet does not (and vice-versa), as well as whether physical spaces such as record shops are truly inclusive spaces in comparison to the Internet. This subject is consequently critiqued in greater detail in Section 4.8 when the limitations of record shops are assessed.

For Craig, the possibilities of digital technology are not infinite insofar as the benefits of tactility are concerned.

*Thinking about actually trying to find a tune that you want to play, say on an iPod and scrolling through or deejaying, actually having the mental process of trying to think what's good to play next. Whereas if you've got records they're a physical object and that's like you're playing each song in your head and you're looking through your records and thinking what is gonna go with it then you've got those cues. But if you're just trying to think of a song out of nothing, it's so hard sometimes. (Craig, FG Four)*

In this instance, Craig does not appear to be suggesting physical records are superior, in contrast to some respondents to McIntyre's (2009) study, though he does share their sentiments in regard to feeling digital music is less 'involved' than physical copies. For Craig it is not so much about the superior audio quality or greater depth of listening experience that McIntyre's (2009) respondents discussed in regard to physical formats, but rather the more practical elements physical copies offer. Craig's description of 'trying to think of a song out of nothing' resembles McCourt's (2005) suggestion that as recordings lose their physicality, the listener interacts less physically, resulting in music and audience becoming more isolated from each other.

After discussing how they now acquire music in general terms, participants reflected on a contemporary environment where the Internet has expedited the availability of music and music-based information.

*I think there's more stuff out there. Like, I've learnt more about music in the last ten or fifteen years with the Internet than ever before. There's lots of blogs, if you want to find... you go to YouTube first and then you can branch out to other sites. The places you buy music from online also have people who write reviews, there are auto recommendations as well. So I think it's easier... you can find, like you were saying, if you are into someone you can find very quickly lots of stuff about them and who they work with, and kind of be familiar with them. In a few days you could know the whole output of an artist. (Nasir, FG Four)*

*The main thing for me is I can get to hear something sooner. Like, if it's an album I have been waiting for, I'll be able to get the MP3 or the online stream sooner... by the time it gets to the store I've listened to it a lot sooner and maybe ordered it online. (Vincent, FG One)*

*I was gonna say, I tend to listen more online, or on the computer, as opposed to pulling out albums. Got lots of albums, I don't tend to listen to them like that, you know? And I think it's mainly probably because of the radio show [Pat hosts a radio show], having a quick listen to something on Soundcloud, sourcing the song, or whatever. Whereas before you'd go into a shop, listen to the actual physical album, and then purchase it, take it home, play it, listen to it. (Pat, FG Four)*

Nasir, Vincent, and Pat's comments attest to Evans & Wurster's (1997) discussion of 'richness' and 'reach', which is further explored in the context of the music industry in Graham et al.'s (2004) article. Nasir states 'there's more stuff out there', Vincent effectively says he can get 'stuff' quicker than ever before, and Pat observes that 'stuff' online is more easily accessible than sourcing, selecting and playing physical copies of recordings. The 'stuff' Nasir refers to is information about music. As a 51-year-old long term music fan, Nasir has 'learnt more about music in the last ten or fifteen years with the Internet than ever before'. This is a greater 'richness' of potential knowledge than was available in a pre-Internet world, owing to the ability to source information being far easier when physical forms (such as books or magazines in the case of information about music) need not be exchanged or acquired (Graham et al., 2004). Vincent and Pat refer to the now greater 'reach' of information in their statements. 'Reach' is the ability to connect, as well as the number of people connected and involved in exchanging information. For Vincent this means he can 'get to hear something sooner' than he could before being regularly engaged with the Internet. For Pat 'reach' manifests itself in terms of ease of access. He need not be 'pulling out albums' or 'go into a physical shop', instead able to immediately and quickly engage with a number of different titles online in order to prepare for his radio show.

Participants' sentiments indicate that the Internet has done away with the limitations of a wholly physical media environment. Vincent can research and listen to titles before he gets to the store and orders them, and Pat implies he does not necessarily go to his physical album collection to listen on a day-to-day basis any more. For Nasir, he is not limited to visiting physical spaces such as record shops, book shops or libraries in order to research and learn about music, rather he engages in websites such as YouTube which 'branch out to other sites', as well as providing machine generated recommendations as well. Participants

are no longer limited to a physical media environment characterised by relatively poor supply and demand matching as well as relatively inefficient distribution. Instead they engage in an online environment where 'shelf space' is virtual, thus low cost and unlimited, and where computer and user generated recommendations afford far greater reach than was previously possible (Anderson, 2008b).

Despite this, Nasir, Vincent, and Pat still engage regularly with physical media and physical record shops. As record collectors, all three still source and purchase physical titles, though they are not as wholly reliant on these physical recordings as they were in the past. Nasir, Vincent and Pat's statements confirm that they engage regularly with both physical and online manifestations of music and music-based information, which poses both similarities and contradictions to the findings of previous studies. Nuttall's (2011) study of 18 to 19 year olds found that ownership was not as important to the research participants as accessibility to music, which was seen as crucial. In this case participants' responses correlate with Nuttall's (2011) study in regard to age being a contributing factor to the value placed on ownership, though Pat, Vincent and Nasir's discussion points reveal that as older audience members they too value the new-found accessibility the Internet has allowed for. McIntyre's (2011) research findings present rigid demarcation of age groups in relation to audience behaviour, when he posits that Generation Y audiences focus on speed and convenience rather than the product itself and Baby Boomer audiences have a predilection for physical media and physical spaces. Again, though McIntyre's findings are not being called into question, Pat, Vincent and Nasir's responses exhibit the behaviour of both the Baby Boomer and Generation Y participants who took part in the (2011) study.

There are two possible explanations for Pat, Vincent, and Nasir exhibiting the behaviours of both groups in McIntyre's (2011) study, as well as the teenagers in Nuttall's (2011) research. Firstly, 'Baby Boomers' are those individuals born post-World War II between the years 1946 and 1964, while 'Generation Y' is a term for those born between approximately 1980 and 2000. Nasir, Pat, and Vincent were all born in-between these generational groups. Perhaps more crucially, Pat and Vincent, aged 34 and 35 respectively, grew up in tandem with the general introduction of digital technologies. It is feasible that their ease of engagement 'online' differs to the responses of the Baby Boomers in McIntyre's (2011)

study as they engaged with early incarnations of this now ubiquitous technology from a young age, and therefore are more attuned to using it. It is also feasible that they co-exist and engage with both physical and digital media and technology as they have lived for a reasonable length of time in both the 'pre-Internet' and 'Internet' world, still engaging regularly with both physical media and online resources, unlike the teenagers in Nuttall's (2011) study.

The second possible explanation for Pat, Vincent, and Nasir engaging regularly with both physical media and the Internet is that they, like all participants in this study, identify as particularly engaged and aware music consumers who value music as being a central focus of their lives. Neither McIntyre's (2011) nor Nuttall's (2011) studies specified what level of engagement those who participated had with music, other than being audience members and consumers. As particularly engaged music consumers Nasir, Vincent, and Pat all collect and play physical format music, as well as visiting brick-and-mortar record shops, but also utilise the Internet for their interest in music in ways which were not possible before. It is a not unreasonable proposition that it is individuals like Nasir, Pat and Vincent who will continue to patronise brick-and-mortar record stores, though owing to how they engage with the Internet and what they derive from it, these stores may have to reinvent themselves in order to stay relevant.

#### **4.4.2 'Possibilities are endless': The richness & reach of the modern media environment**

When discussing contemporary music acquisition patterns, participants described a setting where access to music and information is not limited by geography or inventory, or at least nowhere near as limited as it was in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Sean, Craig, and Paz described a 'faster' world in comparison to the past, where—as well as speed—portability and convenience are now expectations too.

*I find the thing for me though is being able to take it everywhere. (Sean, FG Three)*

*Yeah I'm with you on that. (Jed, FG Three)*

*True. (Gen, FG Three)*

*A lot of listening now, when you're doing other things or going somewhere, that's the beauty of portable devices. (Craig, FG Four)*

*It's convenient, because I could be meeting up with a friend and be like 'dude, have you checked this out?' 'Nah I haven't heard it', then I literally rip it out on my phone right there and then and play it to them, you know? (Paz, FG Four)*

During one of the conversations around the changes in how music is acquired, Mike spoke of the process involved in distributing and finding an audience for independent music two decades ago.

*Twenty years ago I bought this punk record and it had like a mail order thing inside it. And, um, it blew my mind how much time and organisation people had to get for such a niche scene spread out in these little pockets. It's like mail order, sending stuff in self-addressed envelopes, contact each other by letters... (Mike, FG One)*

Mike's reflection on the 'time and organisation' involved in distributing punk music twenty years ago echoes similar reflections on the past as well as critiques of the present that occurred across all of the focus groups and one-on-one interviews. Despite participants' unanimous engagement with modern technology, principally the Internet, participants did see some problems with the 'sped up' new media environment, and their critiques make up some of the content of Section 4.6, 'It's all just data'.

Upon reflecting on how the act of acquiring music has changed, participants described a contemporary environment significantly freer and more flexible than that of the past. Music consumers are no longer restricted by physical location, nor are their choices wholly dictated by record companies, distributors and retailers. This is at odds with the environment those participants who grew up in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century described, where a more limited selection of titles were made available in a limited set of locations. In short, participants and music consumers in general are no longer restricted by geographical location or a pre-determined inventory.



Though not literal, Rex's description of the possibilities of digital and online technology as 'infinite' in comparison to the past does highlight the substantial changes that have occurred since the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. For participants, the appeal of new technologies (principally the Internet) is *freed* music before *free* music (Hill, 2013). New technology has made the once impossible possible in regard to discovering, sourcing, collecting and researching music. Henry's reflections (on page 131) characterise the emphasis on *freed* music taking precedence over *free* music. He has found that 'the possibilities are endless' when shopping for vinyl online, and 'the amount of money you can spend limitless'. It appears that as engaged and enthusiastic music consumers most participants still purchase music, though in an environment with far more choice and flexibility than that where brick-and-mortar record shops were the primary outlet.

Conversely, Jed and Craig did offer critiques of Internet-based music acquisition and music-based digital technologies (on pages 133 and 134 respectively). Citing a recent trip to large record shops in Brazil as an example, Jed suggests that 'if you want to find something that you never knew existed you have to go to a physical store to find it'. In other words, not everything has been digitised, and for the true 'digger' or collector there is still a lot of music in circulation that does not yet—and might never—exist on the Internet. In another focus group Craig suggested that, as a deejay, physical copies of music make identifying and then deciding what to play next easier in comparison to digital files, owing to being able to more easily identify and recall each piece of music based on viewing and holding the physical artefact.

Overall, participants revealed a modern media acquisition environment with far greater 'richness' and 'reach' (Evans & Wurster, 1997; Graham et al., 2004) than the pre-Napster world offered, though most still engage regularly with the physical media and physical record shops central to the 20<sup>th</sup> Century distribution and acquisition model. At 51 years of age Nasir declares that he has learned more about music in the last ten years than ever before ('richness'), while Vincent and Pat describe being able to connect and engage with media and information far quicker than in the past ('reach'). Despite their sentiments suggesting that the wholly physical media environment of the past was relatively limited, Nasir, Vincent and Pat, like many participants, still engage regularly with physical media and

shops. However they are not solely reliant on both as they were in the past. As music collectors and aficionados, Nasir, Vincent and Pat engage regularly with both physical and digital environments, both settings complementing each other and arguably providing a more enhanced experience than that available in the past. Essentially, participants who discussed this subject suggested that the Internet has not replaced physical media and physical spaces, it has instead enhanced and developed their overall access to music and music-based information.

Finally, this section introduced two points of discussion that are covered in greater depth later in this research. Firstly, Mike's reflection on the positive aspects of some physical titles only being available in limited numbers (namely exclusivity as a deejay) forms the basis of a wider discussion around the limitations of brick-and-mortar record shops in Section 4.8. In section 4.8 it is debated whether or not this kind of exclusivity is elitist, and whether in turn the Internet democratises audience members. This in turn opens up a similar discussion in regard to record shops themselves, and whether they are universally inclusive spaces. Secondly, although participants unanimously engaged with new technologies, some did see problems with the 'new media' environment, and their reflections are included in Section 4.6, 'It's all just data'.

#### **4.5 'Nothing products': Format preferences, perceived value, and reliability**

In this section participants contemplated the value they place on different recording formats, including the compact disc (CD), vinyl record, and MP3. Participants' responses suggested that physical copies of recorded music are perceived as more authentic, providing a true sense of ownership in comparison to procuring an MP3 or other wholly digital format recording. For those participants who purchased and owned vinyl records, the format appeared to offer particular 'added value' in the form of larger format artwork, liner notes, exclusivity, and collectability. The range of feedback from these participants suggested vinyl was perceived as superior to compact discs, also providing participants with a point of distinction from more mainstream music buyers, linked in turn to feelings of an exclusive shared experience with fellow collectors and music enthusiasts.

Across the focus groups and one-on-one interviews there were individuals who still own, purchase, and listen to CDs, though it was overall the least preferred format in comparison to vinyl records or digital files. Amongst some participants there was a decided disdain for (or disconnection from) the format. Mike and Vincent's descriptions of the format were bleak.

*I find that with CDs it's weird... they were such a big part of my teenage years but then they started feeling intangible and kind of... they're like nothing products now...*  
(Mike, FG One)

*...soulless... (Vincent, FG One)*

Similar to Mike's sentiments, Nasir described no interest in CDs despite having once embraced the format.

*I have quite a few CDs but, I don't know whether it's because of the revival of vinyl and second-hand stuff, or the easy availability of MP3s, but I find I'm not buying CDs that much. I went in the other day actually, to Real Groovy to see, should I get the CD version of this album? Makes more sense, it's cheaper and everything, but there's just something, I don't feel attached to them anymore. (Nasir, FG Four)*

Ralph and Rex also stated that vinyl was their preferred physical format.

*[On CDs] Like I find it impossible to even get excited about the booklets or anything. I mean if you've got a nice large vinyl format with a good booklet or artwork with it...*  
(Ralph, FG One)

*...even though I still consume music regularly and buy vinyl records, um, I'd almost say I wouldn't dream of going into a store and buying a CD, which is what my first purchase was. (Rex, FG Three)*

That discussing the credibility of the compact disc format elicited such antagonistic responses is significant, given they were by far the most dominant format during the most successful era of music sales ever, the 1990s (Gracon, 2009). Considering that the major record labels made a concerted effort to phase out vinyl records in favour of the compact

disc, even convincing many consumers to discard their vinyl and repurchase their collection on the new format, these responses mirror the large-scale audience-led move away from the format that began with Napster (Dilmeri et al., 2011; IFPI, 2006; Lam & Tan, 2001; Warr & Goode, 2011; Zentner, 2008). Participants' responses also highlight the fact that the CD is now an undesirable format for most music consumers. The majority of mainstream consumers now opt for digital files over digital discs, while many collectors like Mike, Vincent, Rex, Nasir and Henry have re-embraced (or never stopped collecting) the once apparently superseded vinyl format. Considering the obsolescence of vinyl was a consumer perception manufactured by record company public relations campaigns, the above responses seem to be further evidence of a shift in the power relationship between the music industry and the consumer. The CD is no longer the dominant music format, and the consumer has more choice and sovereignty than ever before. For Mike the format that defined music listening in his teenage years is now 'a nothing product', 'soulless' at Vincent's suggestion. Nasir does not 'feel attached' to compact discs anymore, Ralph finds it 'impossible to even get excited' about them, while Rex 'wouldn't dream of going into a store' to purchase one as he regularly did in the past.

The following comment from Hannah suggests that in order to sell a CD in the current media climate, it needs to be more than just a vessel for the audio recording.

*Well I am aware that these days the package of a CD is a little bit more interesting than it used to be. It used to be that an artist could sell a CD with just a single slip and the names of the tracks and the production credits and that's it. That's not so easy these days, and I know that I like having a really well put together sleeve, and you kind of know the artists that do that and the artists that don't do that. (Hannah, Interview Three)*

Hannah's comment, alongside the other participants' remarks regarding compact discs, highlight a difference between mainstream audience members and more involved music consumers; a difference that might be crucial to independent brick-and-mortar record shops' survival. As Hughes (as cited in Reid, n.d.) remarks, the mainstream music buyer typically does not give a lot of thought to the artist, the industry, or the music scene. Resultantly there is no reason for them to shop at a brick-and-mortar retail store for music,

or buy a compact disc or vinyl copy of an album or single when digital files are more easily (and often more cheaply) available online. Considering that the corporate music chains' demise was largely due to continuing to try and sell these 'general' product lines (McGuire, 2012; McIntyre, 2009; Reid, n.d.)—essentially going into competition with Internet retailers and music pirates—it is store inventory like CDs and vinyl records with 'a really well put together sleeve' that might continue to attract more dedicated music consumers to independent stores. Whatever the physical format preference, it is the 'value added' aspects such as well produced artwork, limited edition runs, or intricate packaging that appear to attract more dedicated consumers like the participants in this study.

For Mike, Jed, and Drew procuring a vinyl copy of a recording equated with a sense of genuine ownership of the recording.

*Like a lot of time at work, I sort of work and I listen to a lot of music that I've illegally downloaded and then I'll find something that I really like and I'll probably buy it on vinyl. (Mike, FG One)*

*I find if I have a vinyl... if I have it on any other format I don't own it. If you have it on vinyl it is your collectors thing, that's your... (Jed, FG Three)*

*OK, it happened to me in Sydney last October. There was this one Amon Tobin record, I've got everything that he has released from basically '95 to now. Except for one 12". I'd never actually seen it in the flesh but I knew it existed, I had the CD single of it... but it wasn't good enough, because you know there is always that one thing missing. I started digging through this record store, I always go back to this store every time I'm in Sydney, um, Revolve Records in Erskineville if you are digging, um, and found it within the first couple of bins.... and I just pulled it out and was like 'holy shit', and the condition was mint, and it was five bucks. I put that on my pile and just kept digging, and I was like already this trip is a success because I've found that... it doesn't matter what else I buy, I've found that one piece. (Drew, Interview Two)*

Despite Mike already having sourced digital copies of certain recordings, if he finds something he particularly likes he will purchase it on vinyl, while Jed does not feel like he truly owns a piece of music until he has it on vinyl. Similarly, though Drew already owned the Amon Tobin single on compact disc, it was still 'missing' from his collection until he

found a vinyl copy. These participants' comments bear similarities to those expressed in McIntyre's (2009) study, where the 12" vinyl format was believed to be superior to digital formats. In both studies there seems to be something compelling to the participants about the vinyl record, with compact discs and digital files perceived as less involved or valued formats.

When questioned on the recent resurgence in vinyl production and consumption, and the endurance of physical format recordings in general, Jim suggested it is not an exclusively audience-driven phenomenon.

*There still is, there are still the artists who will only ever put their work out via the Internet. But in some ways a lot of it is the artists still wanting a hard copy of their work to exist. (Jim, Interview One)*

Participants' reflections on different recording formats suggest that for them (and consumers like them) their choice of format is about more than just obtaining a copy of a sound recording for consumption. Similar to respondents in McIntyre's (2009) study, participants saw the vinyl record as a "user-involved, socially creative artistic artefact" (p. 472), different to the 'nothing products' Mike described when discussing CDs. For the participants who commented, physical format recordings appeared to offer a greater level of engagement with the artefact. From Ralph discussing 'a nice large vinyl format with a good booklet or artwork in it' to Jed disclosing 'if I have it on any other format I don't own it', physical format recordings, particularly vinyl records, were associated with a perceived greater depth of involvement, dedication, and enjoyment than other available options. Similarly Jim's comment regarding artists and physical format releases opines that for some music might not be seen to truly *exist* if it does not do so in some physical form.

Though he did not express exactly why, Paz suggested a lack of mass and physicality equates to something that is 'just not the same' experience as engaging with physical format media.

*It's weird. It's kinda like books. Like you can download books on your iPad and read them, but it's just not the same as having a book in front of you. (Paz, FG Four)*

For Hannah there was a similar disconnection with digital files in comparison to physical copies of music in general.

*...sometimes feel a little empty buying digital music. I got the Run the Jewels album last week because they were offering it free on their Bandcamp or Soundcloud or somewhere, and I still haven't opened the zip file. It's still sitting on my desktop. If I'd bought that album I would have listened to it already. I don't feel such urgency with digital music. (Hannah, Interview Three)*

Paz's sentiment, 'it's just not the same', neatly sums up the elusiveness of responses to questions around the topic of what *exactly* it is that is different about engaging with physical format media in comparison to digital file format media. Though participants straightforwardly discussed the added value of tangible elements like large-format artwork and booklets, it was their descriptions of the more emotion-driven aspects of why they believed physical formats to be more desirable that were more ambiguous. From Hannah expressing a sense of less 'urgency' towards digital files, to other expressions of a greater sense of attachment to or excitement for physical format recordings across the discussions, eliciting a precise answer as to why physical format recordings were more emotionally gratifying to participants proved difficult.

This ambiguity is not surprising, given the way in which people are consuming media has changed so significantly in such a short period of time, and resultant discussions are thus relatively new. McCourt (2005) describes such conversations in terms of how the world of physical commodities in relation to the world of abstract things continues to challenge our perception of value. He further describes vinyl records as emotionally gratifying, owing to the fact they are visual and tactile. Based on McCourt's observations it seems that participants' sense of 'urgency', 'excitement', and 'attachment' to physical media might derive from these material vessels for the music adding further layers of perceived meaning and value to the consumption experience. As not only consumers but collectors of these physical manifestations of sound recordings, participants who spoke about preferred formats appear to value these items as significant cultural artefacts.

The following statements suggest that for some participants engaging with their preferred physical format is not just about the perceived merits of the object itself.

*It's like a club. You talk to someone if you're doing vinyl they're like 'oh yeah OK' and then you start talking about your vinyl because it's a common interest kind of thing. There is that. Um, CDs that's less so because vinyl's... vinyl's cool. There's just something about vinyl. (Gen, FG Three)*

*Yeah but all those things, while they might be 'cool', I struggle a lot of the time to see the necessity as a music consumer. If you were just your everyday music consumer I don't see... (Rex, FG Three)*

*That's why it's cool. (Gen, FG Three)*

*CDs everyone? (Interviewer)*

*I got rid of everything I have. (Henry, FG Three)*

*Why? (Interviewer)*

*Elitism. (Henry, FG Three)*

Henry and Gen's responses reveal a sense of self in relation to others is attached to their choice of music format. Gen's comments that vinyl collecting is 'cool' and 'like a club' suggest that for her, outside of the enjoyment of accumulating records, the pastime allows her to identify and meet people she considers kindred spirits, distinguishable from the general population. In turn, Henry appears to consider himself somehow exalted from others owing to his decision to get rid of all the CDs he once owned. These comments align with Belk's (1988) suggestion that as consumers we regard our possessions as extensions of ourselves, and Fuat-Firat's (1987) observation that products represent feelings of belonging, aspirations, achievement, uniqueness, or status.

In summary, participants described multifarious values they place on their preferred recording format. For them recording formats seemed to function as more than simply a vessel for the audio recording. Vinyl format recordings were identified as most desirable, linked to a sense of the truest ownership of a sound recording. This perception appeared to be related to the tangible nature of the product, where aesthetic aspects such as sleeve artwork and liner notes were seen to add further value and meaning. The desirability of vinyl format recordings was also linked to collecting the finite number of individual copies available in comparison to digital format releases. Though offering similar 'value added'



aspects, compact discs were viewed as a particularly undesirable format by some. Participants' responses indicated that, though the major music companies once successfully phased out vinyl in favour of the compact disc, there has been a niche audience-led move back to the format. These responses further highlighted that, similar to general music consumers embracing digital files over compact discs post-Napster, the tight control the major labels once had over the supply of music to the audience is now less significant.

Discussions about format preference also elicited more emotional and sociocultural-based responses. For participants who spoke, vinyl records afforded a greater sense of involvement, enjoyment, and devotion 'just not the same' as other formats. Gen suggested that for her owning and collecting vinyl records is also linked to more easily identifying and aligning with people with similar interests, particularly the 'cool' she attaches to the format and collecting culture. In turn Henry suggested he has specialised in collecting vinyl over compact discs as they are a format associated with what he perceives to be true music aficionados.

Examining participants' format preferences is compelling not only in regard to uncovering what it is that attracts certain individuals to physical format music—and in turn the spaces that accommodate these items—but also in respect to how primarily or wholly digital music consumers might derive a similar sense of self-identity. It is feasible that, in an environment where for the majority of consumers there is less emphasis on ownership of music in favour of use and ease of access, it is the *devices that play the music* that now help define the self for many. This seems evident when considering the popularity (or perhaps 'cult') of Apple, and the status many attach to their portable media products. This also supports Leyshon et al.'s (2005) claim that, for the general audience member, music might no longer have 'stand-alone' cultural significance in a world of increasing media convergence, access, and portability.

As a post-script, Tony reminded his focus group and the researcher how they all ended up in a room together.

*I'm just, um, the same reasons as when I started digging. I just want to find next favourite tune for that day. That has never changed. The format doesn't matter...*  
(Tony, FG Three)

#### 4.6 'It's all just data!': The album, the artist, and 'the quickening'

Section 4.2 to 4.5 presented participants' reflections primarily from the perspective of their experiences and expectations as audience members. In the current section, participants began to reflect on the outcomes of recent technological changes in the wider context of the music industry as a whole, from production, to distribution, and consumption. Participants first discussed some of the ramifications of online music availability and acquisition, before they reflected specifically on how online music distribution affects artists and their works. In turn the ability to connect was described as a changing phenomenon, particularly where artists and audiences have the potential to interact more than ever before. Conversations then moved to the album, the topic of which introduced broader reflections on the significance attached to paying for music in comparison to sourcing it for free, as well as a sense that society might somehow be 'sped up' now, music might be treated as more disposable, and engaging with music is now apparently more about immediacy and accessibility rather than other aspects such as audio quality, packaging, physicality, or a sense of ownership.

Participants were first asked to comment in broad terms on what they considered both the positive and negative aspects of online music availability and acquisition. A key theme that emerged was that, owing to the relative ease with which artists can now make music available to the public, there is now far more music available than ever before. This increase in the range of titles and artists accessible to the public was seen as a positive resulting from the process of releasing music having become more democratised. The predominant negative perception was that the overall quality of releases may have suffered as a result of new technologies making it much easier to circulate music than ever before.

*Well that was the other point that I was coming to is that the negative is the churn, there's just so much, there's just an avalanche of material... (Si, FG Three)*

*It's all just data! (Sean, FG Three)*

*...that you can just be swamped with all these tracks. (Si, FG Three)*

*...it creates an oversaturation. It's almost harder to find the good music because there's so much of it. (Paz, FG Four)*

*That's true as well. (Lee, FG Four)*

*Yeah. (Craig, FG Four)*

*...you have to sift through a lot of shit... (Rex, FG Three)*

The role of new technologies in the increase in music available to the public is not linked just to communication and distribution advancements. Participants also described the relative ease with which music may be produced and recorded now.

*There's a much higher volume. I find there's much more music I really fucking love, and lots more music I think is awful. I think the fact that there's global access online, it's facilitated people who are just kind of maybe alright and they just bought Reason and they put out a tune and then they put it on Beatport and it's kind of alright and a couple of people buy it... whereas before you'd have to be really committed and you'd buy a synthesiser, and to get it on vinyl, it was just like a filter for quality. I find that, if you wanted to share on a more amateur level it would only be local, and not global, but now everyone can go global. If they want. (Mike, FG One)*

*Yeah. And it's like, people can make stuff in their bedroom studios and chuck it up online. That's the beauty of how technology works now. But I'm sure if they had to go through the process of mastering it and pressing it up into a physical format, maybe a lot of the stuff they have just put up for free, they'd be like 'well that doesn't cut it'. (Drew, Interview One)*

*Yeah, oversaturation. Everyone's a producer, everyone's a deejay. (Paz, FG Four)*

*John Key's son's a deejay. (John, FG Four)*

When describing the significant increase of music available online in comparison to pre-Internet times, participants' language choices seemed to suggest this increase in availability was linked to feeling overwhelmed by sheer quantity combined with not as consistent quality. Si suggested 'an avalanche of material' was making him feel 'swamped', while Paz described an 'oversaturation' of available titles. Meanwhile, Rex described having to 'sift

through a whole lot of shit' in order to find music he deemed worthy. Mike, Drew, and John expressed concerns about the role of modern music production technology in this climate. These participants' responses suggest that this aspect of the new media environment—the 'richness and reach' advocated by Graham et al. (2004), the 'portfolio of choices' described by Warr & Goode (2011), and the 'world of abundance' promoted by Anderson (2008b)—might not always be as optimistically framed as these writers have suggested. Although Anderson (2008b) suggested that the 'Long Tail' frees up the 'hit driven' music industry of old and reveals what consumers really want, on the other hand it might be argued that the gatekeeping aspects of the traditional music industry model acted as a useful filter for the music that eventually reached the public for consumption. From the influence of Artist and Repertoire staff to record publishers and producers, as well as the record labels they represent, the ability to release music used to be a more refined process; its availability to the public further filtered by the curatorial decisions of record shop owners and their employees. Though the vertical authority system of the traditional music industry afforded less freedom to artists and audience than enjoyed currently, and the relative scarcity of available titles has been superseded by an abundance, for these participants an abundance of choice is apparently not wholly liberating. It appears there is still some scope for intermediaries such as industry personnel and tastemakers in the music consumption process.

On the other hand, Gen, Rex, and Jed observed that the relative ease with which music can now be made available online, as well as greater choice, has led to the democratisation of the popular music supply chain, and significantly increased the possibility that any artist might find an audience (or conversely any audience might find an artist).

*It allows, um, what's a less degrading word than amateur? Um, young bands and musicians or deejays, it allows them to put stuff out that they wouldn't have been able to do beforehand. (Gen, FG Three)*

*You would never have been able to access music that was made by a seven-year-old kid in his bedroom in Poland before. (Rex, FG Three)*

*The variety is amazing now. There is so much out there now because of things like Soundcloud and Bandcamp. Any small producer can release something and it becomes huge. Nowadays it's just everywhere. (Jed, FG Three)*

From artists being able to easily distribute their music online, to audience members being able to access and discover that music—in turn leading to potential exposure and measurable success for the artist—Gen, Rex, and Jed's comments presented an optimistic depiction of this online music distribution and acquisition model. But with the sheer volume of music now available online, and the volatility and unpredictability of cultural goods in general (Brown, 2008; Jones et al., 2007), though the process of releasing music is simpler than it once was, guaranteeing an audience is a substantial challenge. Furthermore, if an artist does capture a significant audience as a result of music they have made available online, the combination of high rates of music piracy and the substantial financial devaluation of music as a product dictates that success, if success is measured in a financial sense, is unlikely for most. Nevertheless, measuring the wholesale success of art and creativity in monetary terms is problematic, and only the motivations and desires of the artists themselves can determine if significant remuneration is a relevant gauge of achievement.

Craig suggested that the post-Napster environment is challenging attaching a monetary value or expectation to musical output in general.

*It's like I guess... maybe it's putting music to where it's meant to be in terms of it's not something—unfortunately maybe for the artist—that you can make heaps of money off, but it's actually just something that should be shared and enjoyed. And that's what I think a lot of artists have to face; the fact now that they're never probably gonna be millionaires, because there's too much music so they just make it because they want to, and hopefully people dig it. (Craig, FG Four)*

*So it changes the artist's motivation maybe? (Interviewer)*

*Yeah well I guess there are still probably a lot of people out there trying to do that as well, but they'll probably end up with broken dreams a lot of them. (Craig, FG Four)*

Irrespective of how an artist measures their own success, it is a reasonable assumption that if they release their music they have a desire for their work to reach and connect with

an audience. For those looking to find an audience in order to further prosper as performers, the following reflection from Vincent demonstrates that utilising new technology for more than simply making music available online increases the chance of a release finding an audience, and an artist enjoying further successes.

*I mean like, I remember when I put my first record out I basically went and did all that just online. So I cut the track, emailed it off, got it pressed up, box of records turned up, like, a month later or something, and then sold it all over the world on the message boards. And that's something like, if you're trying to do that in New Zealand at your two record stores in Auckland, like there's no way you're going to move hundreds of copies in a month here, like the only way that could happen is because that culture and that network has grown because of its... because of the logical... it is a good thing what the Internet has done I suppose... (Vincent, FG One)*

In this instance Vincent used modern communication technology to control each stage of the distribution process himself, using specialist networks in the form of message boards to ensure individual copies of the release each found an audience member. By targeting a specialised audience in a closed Internet group, Vincent sold his music rather than giving it away for free. The release also (as he stated elsewhere in the focus group session) led to further opportunities in the form of establishing networks and gigs overseas. The distribution process Vincent described represents the most complete form of disintermediation described by Jones (2002), deindustrialisation, whereby the artist controls all facets of the business and creative process. Whether or not taken to this extreme by artists distributing their music online, the process of finding an audience is now, particularly where a record label is not involved, about artists recasting their traditional role. Functions previously reserved for those in industry roles—production, promotion, and distribution—are increasingly taken up by the artist themselves, removing any number of middlepersons.

Hannah's experience of discovering a new band also demonstrates a disintermediated process, though from the perspective of an audience member.

*The shift to digital. Um, the shift means that.... OK here's one good example. So a few years ago I saw a band and I thought 'this is a cool band' and I started to follow them on Facebook... went to more of their gigs. Then on Facebook they posted a link to another band from Dunedin and were like 'hey this is cool, listen to this Soundcloud, we used to play with them all the time'. So I listened to it and I was like*

*'oh wow, this is really good too', and a couple of months ago they came to Auckland and I went to their gig and I bought their album at their gig. I never would have heard of them had it not been for opening my computer and listening to their music on my computer. I never would have been able to access their music. And I doubt they would have come to Auckland had it not been for being able to put their music out there first. (Hannah, Interview Three)*

*So you wouldn't have heard of them if you were fulltime in the record shop? (Interviewer)*

*Because they are unsigned. The record shop would have never... who would have heard of them? (Hannah, Interview Three)*

In this instance Hannah attended a band's gig, before following them on their Facebook page. Through the social networking site the band posted a link to another band's music, using music-based networking site Soundcloud. As a result Hannah both attended the second band's Auckland show, and also purchased their album at the gig. As Hannah highlighted, the band were 'unsigned', meaning they had no record label working on their behalf. In this instance the original band Hannah began following played the role of promoter of the second band, while the second band independently distributed examples of their music using Soundcloud. They then managed to garner enough of a following to play a show in Auckland which Hannah attended, also purchasing their album directly from the venue. In this example it appears many aspects of promotion of both the band's tour and distribution of their album was disintermediated, Hannah making a near direct-connection with the band albeit assisted by both artist and audience member utilising third-party social networking sites.

#### **4.6.1 'You always have the liberty of changing it': The album versus the shuffle button**

When discussing recording formats, many participants paid particular attention to the decreasing significance the album format apparently possesses to the modern listener. This is owing to the advent of single track downloading services like Napster, the dominant market share of the iTunes store and its pay-per-single delivery service, and the popularity of portable music players with customisable music libraries such as smart phones and stand-alone MP3 players. Downloading and consuming single tracks has become normalised, and single track sales and downloads now far outweigh album purchases (Berman, 2011; Griggs

& Leopold, 2013). The following observation from Hannah reveals the significance of technological change to listening habits, in particular the inclusion of a shuffle button (which randomly selects tracks from a master library) on most modern digital music players.

*How I listen to music. Yes it has changed how I listen. I remember, not too many years ago in fact... as I was saying when I was younger, when I was a teen I'd buy a CD and I'd sit down and listen to it in its entirety. This was the days before the shuffle button. So you would have to listen to it in order, beginning to end, and that's how you would consume an album. When they put a new Shins album in 2007 I was really excited about it, and I bought it and went to my boyfriend's house and locked myself in his room and I said 'don't you come into this room!' And I listened to it from the beginning until the end, and it was the first time I'd done that in so many years and I don't think I have ever done that again. That's the difference. And I had such a good time listening to that album. (Hannah, Interview Three)*

Further participants' comments revealed wider socio-cultural forces linked to these technical changes, which have also lessened the popularity of the album format.

*So that would be my biggest, sort of, complaint about the move to online is that I don't think to myself 'oh I've got an hour to sit down and listen to this album'. (Si, FG Three)*

*And the amount of music that you can consume in the time that you, you know online, in the time that you would spend listening to an album sitting in front of your computer is probably... someone online would be like 'well I'd rather move on to something else than sit here and listen to an entire album'. (Rex, FG Three)*

*I feel like I don't have time to repeatedly listen to albums any more. I feel like some of the most key albums of my life that I keep revisiting, albums that I thrashed, I hardly do that now and I'm trying to force my behaviour back into doing that. I think the download, listen, delete... Spotify radio on shuffle versus buying a CD and listening and it never leaves the CD player... (Mike, FG One)*

Central to the above comments was a shared sense between Rex, Mike, and Si that they somehow have less time than ever before, a sentiment echoed (though in less direct terms) throughout many of the following discussions about the album, the single, where and how we now listen to music, the now relatively low purchase cost of many music releases, and



the ease with which music can be not only procured but disposed of as well. It is peculiar that in a world where technology has made many daily tasks quicker to complete than ever before, many participants held the perception that modern society, and in turn modern music audiences, simply no longer possess the time to listen to an album of work; opting instead for an ever-revolving playlist of various single tracks.

The lessening significance of the album format was seen as problematic by both Mike and Thom, who both described repeatedly listening to a whole album as a process that encouraged a high level of engagement with the music, particularly music which might not be interpreted well on a first listen, but that eventually becomes highly cherished upon repeat engagement.

*I haven't been connecting enough with newer albums. I could see that I would like them in a while but I kind of, for a while there (I think it was about three or four years ago) I was listening to albums that I liked immediately a fair amount, but I wasn't really falling in love with them massively and I kind of got a bit despondent... and I found that I wasn't giving slightly more difficult things a chance, and to me they always used to end up being the best. (Mike, FG One)*

*But the thing is, all my favourite albums, it's taken a good five plays all the way through to get the album and to realise that the songs that initially didn't stand out to me actually end up being my favourites. So, even as someone who loves the album format, I have found my appreciation of the album is a lot less because there is so much distraction out there... (Thom, FG Three)*

Mike and Thom's concerns, alongside Si, Rex and Mike's perception that they no longer have enough time to listen to albums, echo the participants in McIntyre's (2009) study who believed the introduction of digital technologies signalled the beginning of more 'uninvolved' formats. Though where participants in that study were more subjective in their observations, framing a loss of involvement as directly related to a loss of physicality, it seems Mike, Thom, Si, and Rex feel less involved in more measurable terms, in that they find it increasingly difficult to engage with whole album releases owing to the 'distraction out there'.

In the following comment Eric described listening to two albums in a row. Aged 22 at the time of the focus group, Eric's reflection on doing so seemed to suggest that for his generation this is an unusual activity. Perhaps more crucially though, he identified how audiences now engage with music differently as a result of changes in how they interact with the playing technology.

*I for one remember sitting down listening to Godspeed You! Black Emperor. I sat down for three and a half hours and listened to two albums. It's things like that that not many people do in that sense. Not many people sit down at their computer and listen to the same thing for three hours... you always have the liberty of changing it. Whereas with physical I think it's a bit different maybe? You kind of like you sit there and actually listen to it. (Eric, FG One)*

Eric suggested that physical format recordings might encourage greater engagement with albums owing to having to 'sit there and actually listen to it' rather than presumably being tempted by a hard drive full of easily changeable options. Henry also pondered how physicality might be related to the popularity of the album format, suggesting that now not having 'that pause to flip it over' (in relation to vinyl records) might make it 'too hard or too long to listen to an album these days'.

*Which then comes back to this other argument that people aren't listening to albums. Are albums too long now? Because... the time possibilities... how much can you fit on a CD? 70, 80, 90 minutes? Whereas you go back to a vinyl, maybe you were able to encapsulate... grab people's attention over 24 minutes per side without losing them. So maybe it is just too hard or too long to listen to an album these days; particularly when it runs right through without even having that pause to flip it over. (Henry, FG Three)*

Craig and Drew suggested that the high fixed price of albums that culminated in global music revenue reaching an all-time high in the 1990s (Calamar & Gallo, 2012) might have encouraged greater wholesale engagement with albums than exists now.

*Yup. I think less than ten years ago, we got music either through the radio, through what limited music television we had, or we bought a whole album and listened to a whole album. If you've spent \$30 on a CD then you are going to listen to that album. You are going to listen to it start to finish. Now, people are just going to grab a song. So we're not listening to an artist's body of work, in perhaps the way the artist*

*intended it to be heard. You hear a song in the context of an album and you're like 'wow, I love how the album ends on that tune, or the flow when it hits that track'. (Drew, Interview Two)*

*And I guess when you buy it like that, when you buy the whole package of an album, you're more inclined to listen to the whole thing back to front and get that intent that the artist put on it, of being an album. Rather than listening to song by song. (Craig, FG Four)*

Moving away from discussing the album to discussing the consumption of music in more general terms, Hannah described feeling less engaged with digital files than physical format recordings owing to being less inclined to engage with packaging, artwork, and supplementary information in general.

*One thing that has started to happen when I started listening to digital music is I started not remembering the names of songs. I started not knowing the names of songs. Like I would know how a song went and someone would say 'oh what is the name of that song' and I'd be like 'oh I don't know, I listen to it on my iPod and I never look at the iPod as the song changes'. Like when I was a kid and I used to listen to tapes I would be sitting there with the cover open reading it as the tape played. (Hannah, Interview Three)*

*So it's coming back to your description of the faceless zip file? (Interviewer)*

*Yeah, exactly. And with digital music the time and effort that the artists put into creating a package is lost. And I'm not saying that... that could just be lost with the physical packages. It's not a priority now and artists realise that. But I still think that a lot of time and effort goes into thinking about artwork and formatting and content for that sleeve, and once you download that digital file you're basically saying 'that doesn't matter'. (Hannah, Interview Three)*

Those sentiments suggest that now the purchase cost of music has significantly lowered, and there is often less supplementary information available with releases, that possibly the perceived value of and depth of engagement with recorded music has lessened in general. This was further alluded to in the following comments from Vincent and Eric regarding the ease with which music may now be disposed of.

*It kinda seems like it's a little more disposable these days as far as the product.... like so people will, you can download it and just delete it. It's not the same as carrying a*

*box of LPs to the Salvation Army or the rubbish bin or something like that. It's actually a lot easier to just drag it to the trash icon... (Vincent, FG One)*

*It's definitely changed, kind of like with the liberty you have sitting behind your screen instead of going out... just clicking delete is a lot easier than going out and throwing it away and having to look at it again one more time before you actually throw it away. (Eric, FG One)*

Discussions regarding many younger consumers' attitudes to audio quality revealed that immediacy and accessibility is apparently more important than high fidelity. This again was linked to an overarching sense that recorded music does not have the same set of values attached to it as it once did. Rex recounted the attitude of many of his friends.

*If I could just weigh in with another potential negative, especially from digging around trying to find music, is degradation in quality across the board. A lot of people are just grabbing whatever. I see friends of mine who are bumping music in their car that they have ripped off YouTube. The sound quality is just horrible. But they don't care. That's not a problem to them. They just want the song. They can't hear that there's no mid in that whole track or anything like that. It's not an issue for them. We at the table might find that depressing but the majority of society probably doesn't give a shit. (Rex, FG Three)*

As another of the younger participants, Lee reported a similar phenomenon occurring with his friends.

*Like, you wouldn't believe the amount of friends that have... like I'm not an audiophile geek but I appreciate better sounding music than, like I have friends that will have, like they'll download it from some weird YouTube link and it's got crackling in the background... (Lee, FG Four)*

*You've got the ad... (Pat, FG Four)*

*Yeah [laughs]. It does get to you. (Lee, FG Four)*

Paz and Rex suggested that music acquisition is increasingly about accessibility and convenience over concerns about audio quality.

*I think it's more about accessibility, like literally you find the song on YouTube, grab the link, chuck it on a website, download it, it's there. And it's like, 'well do I want to search and pay the \$1.19? You know what? Fuck it, I've got the song here.' I think that's what a lot of what's happening. (Paz, FG Four)*

*I mean, I suppose it's all regulated to a certain point. You can only fit so many songs onto a record or onto a CD, without it degrading so much so that it is not really saleable, whereas online a lot of the time it might be free, or it's extremely cheap, so... (Rex, FG Three)*

Participants' discussions about the drop in popularity of the album format, as well as changing music consumption habits in general, align with previous studies exploring changes in how music is now consumed. Respondents to Nuttall et al.'s (2011) study described portability and ease of access to multiple tracks as crucial. Similarly, McIntyre's (2011) discussions with Generation Y music consumers found these individuals focussed on convenience and speed of access to music rather than the product itself, while Parry et al. (2012) described an environment whereby giving attention to a CD or vinyl record has shifted towards the merits of value-in-use. Both Everett (2007) and Hill (2001) described one of the key benefits of digital music files as the ability to easily customise, manipulate, share, and choose them. Audiences are now able to be as sophisticated as producers (Hill, 2001), and their individually curated playlists function as a type of personal expression (McCourt, 2005). In this environment, where audiences have a predilection for a customisable library of easily-accessible single tracks, it stands to reason that there are fewer individuals consuming albums from beginning to end as stand-alone bodies of work. It is also unsurprising that many audience members now value ease of access, immediacy, portability, customisation and sharing over audio quality, packaging, or price being attached to perceived value. But to say the overall value of music has lessened is possibly a disservice to modern music consumers. Rather, the hierarchy of values attached to recorded music has shifted in accordance with the technical changes that have occurred throughout this century.

In summary, upon broadening their discussion on the consumption of music to also include production and distribution, participants' reflections revealed that modern audience

members place emphasis on immediate and accessible ‘in-use’ values over more traditionally valued aspects such as extended packaging and information, audio quality, and a sense of ownership. Participants also described a contemporary environment where, as a result of technology (principally the Internet but also easily available music production tools), more music is available to the public than ever before. This was seen as a positive in terms of artists and audiences having greater potential to connect, though was faulted in terms of the average quality of music now available having apparently lessened. Craig suggested that the modern music industry and distribution model might be ‘putting music where it’s meant to be’ in terms of the expectation of financially profiting from music having lessened making music ‘actually just something that should be shared and enjoyed’. Vincent highlighted the fact that in an industry environment where production, promotion, and distribution roles are increasingly disintermediated, it is often not enough for an artist to simply release music online and hope for an audience. If releasing independent of a record label or other significant third-party, artists increasingly take on business roles traditionally assigned to others in order to find an audience and further successes.

Discussions concerning the decreasing significance of the album format revealed that technological changes appear to have altered how audience members now engage with music, and that the consumption of single tracks takes precedence over listening to whole albums. Participants indicated the world for them felt somehow ‘sped-up’ in comparison to the past, and this was linked to the sheer volume of media now available for consumption. Mike and Thom critiqued their own moves away from listening to albums, in that both felt repeat engagement with the format encouraged the discovery of more challenging (and ultimately rewarding) pieces of music and bodies of work. Mike found he ‘was not giving more difficult things a chance’ and Thom found his ‘appreciation of the album is a lot less because there is so much distraction out there’. Again, participants’ responses indicated ‘in-use’ values now take precedence over other features recorded music might offer. The value of immediacy manifested itself in discussions about music player technology, including the ease with which music tracks may be played, skipped, shuffled, and even deleted forever. Immediacy also factored into participants’ reflections on modern audience members easily obtaining and consuming low-resolution (poor audio quality) music files; Paz’s comment in

particular highlighting that ripping a YouTube stream is a quicker process than searching for and completing a transaction with an online retailer. Participants also pondered whether the drop in financial cost of recorded music in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century has lessened other values attached to it, creating a sense of greater disposability with less emphasis on ownership. Overall participants' responses suggested that the value of music has not necessarily lowered, but rather modern audience practices have shifted the hierarchy of values attached to recordings, whereby ease of access, portability, immediacy, customisation, and the ability to easily share music now often takes precedence. These changes are inextricably linked to the significant technological changes that have affected music distribution and access in the post-Napster environment.

#### **4.7 'Wow I'm seeing it in real life!': On the contemporary relevance of record shops**

Before discussing communities based on recorded music in Section 4.9, this section considers participants' reflections on the relevance or otherwise of brick-and-mortar record shops in the contemporary music distribution and acquisition environment. Participants' responses in previous sections have revealed a modern-day atmosphere where vertical authority has been replaced by a horizontal system of exchange and interaction, and audience members and artists may now more easily interact. This has implications for the relevance of intermediaries such as record shop employees and other 'tastemakers', particularly where participants identified the Internet as a source of information and authority, not identifying record stores in this context at all despite a number of participants still frequenting these spaces and identifying with an affinity for them. Also significant when discussing the relevance of the record shop were participants' descriptions in Section 4.4 of a contemporary environment in which their ability to source music is not limited by geography or inventory; two established parameters which record stores once relied on for regular and continued patronage. Responses in the previous section (4.6) suggested that how many audience members engage with recorded music has changed, with greater emphasis now placed on ease of access, immediacy, portability, customisation, and the ability to easily exchange and share music; values not immediately complimentary to

physically bound spaces selling physical products such as the brick-and-mortar record shop. However this section reveals that, in spite of earlier discussions, most participants do believe brick-and-mortar record shops remain significant spaces in the contemporary climate, though readily admit their continued existence is an anomaly to dominant modern audience practices, as is evidenced by the following statement from Rex.

*[On collecting vinyl] Yeah I understand, and don't worry I'm right there with you, I think it's cool too, but I think for a lot of people, now that you can access music so easily it's just not necessary to buy a CD or a record, let alone at a physical store.*  
(Rex, FG Three)

The following reflections from two of the younger members of Focus Group One reiterate that brick-and-mortar record shops are not the essential sources for music they once were.

*So for the two here who are still in their twenties... do you go to record shops?*  
(Interviewer)

*Once in a blue moon. I don't usually.* (Mark, FG One)

*Yeah same. Actually I do go there but it's one of those things that you only see but you can't buy because it costs so much...* (Eric, FG One)

*...this is what I experience all the time. It's so embarrassing to say. It's one of those moments where you go to Real Groovy and you pick up the record and you are like 'wow I'm seeing it in real life!'* (Eric, FG One)

*Take a photo of yourself with it.* (Vincent, FG One)

Bearing in mind that all focus group participants attended because they identified as particularly engaged music consumers, Eric and Mark's recollections of their relationship with record shops are telling, given that these spaces have traditionally held a high cultural and social significance to such individuals. Both 22 years of age at the time the focus groups were conducted, and identifying before attending the group that they had been actively consuming music less than 15 years, both have done so in an environment where the Internet has always been available. In the years they have been consuming music, what was once a physical item sold at a set price is now able to be shared infinitely amongst audience



members, rather than distributed from 'above' (Brown, 2008). It is little wonder then that Eric describes physical format recordings as a curiosity, in the same exchange insisting he cannot buy one as 'it costs so much'. Record shops are no longer a necessity to such individuals, and neither is purchasing the core items these stores stock.

Eric's comment echo Rojek's (2011) description of the modern media environment having signalled an irreversible shift in the production, consumption, and exchange of intellectual property, connected to a generational change in how audience members perceive entitlement and fair transaction. Though Eric might visit the record shop to wonder over holding a physical copy of a record and 'seeing it in real life', he has only known an environment where recorded music is available easily on the Internet for low or no-cost, particularly seeing as piracy has become normalised (Dilmeri et al., 2011; Nuttall et al., 2011), and many artists have openly encouraged obtaining their music at a price determined by the consumer, or even for free (Anderson, 2008a). Eric has also only known an increasingly disintermediated music industry, where not only is the majority of recorded music digitised, but so too are transactions for other band and artist products such as t-shirts, memorabilia and concert tickets. A 'native' to such a media acquisition environment, it is unsurprising he regards record shops and the trinkets they house as a curio.

Predictably, in light of the significant drop in numbers of these stores globally, as well as the significant drop in revenue for the recorded music industry, not utilising these stores as a primary outlet for procuring music was a phenomenon common across all age groups in this study. Most respondents used the Internet as their primary source for procuring recorded music. However regardless of where participants currently procure music, most suggested brick-and-mortar record shops do maintain relevance, though only for a particular niche of audience member. These individuals frequent these spaces not because of a singular necessity to source music in these spaces, but rather wider social and cultural factors linked to utilising them.

*The niche people. That's gonna keep it alive. But I don't think your general teenager is gonna get excited about physical media. I think the sort of teenager who suddenly discovers some crazy music that's only available on cassette... and then they'll suddenly discover this world of... then they'll become true weirdo addicts like we are. (Mike, FG One)*

*It's like art, it'll always be there because there will always be a bracket that wants it... (Gen, FG Three)*

*But you know, those places I always visit, I can't help it. Even if it's in Wellington, I can't help to walk into RPM Records and have a little dig. Even Conch. I'll go there for a coffee and I'll still just find myself flicking through the bins. It's just a habit because there's always those things that I want the hard copy of, and things I've been looking for for years, those elusive bits. Those missing pieces from your collection. So for me, I'll always look. If there's a record shop in a town, I'll go there and I'll check it out. (Drew, Interview Two)*

These comments concerning the contemporary legitimacy of record shops illustrate both the disposition of people who continue to patronise brick-and-mortar record shops, as well as their attitude towards the articles contained within. Mike and Drew's description of 'true weirdo addicts' who 'can't help it' exhibit a self-perception that somehow their activities are not normal. In turn, Gen's description of stores and what they contain as 'art' gives some indication of the high value she places on the brick-and-mortar record shop experience.

As has already been made clear earlier in this study, the mainstream music listener and buyer—Parry et al.'s Cautious Consumer (2012)—is now well catered for in other distribution environments, and independent stores are now more than ever about attracting niche audiences (Gracon, 2010; Marino & Toller, 2008; Matador Records, 2012g; McGuire, 2012; McIntyre, 2009; Reid, n.d.; Youngs, 2011). Mike, Gen, and Drew, all by their own admission collectors of physical copies of recorded music, exhibit the collector traits described by Shuker (2004) including "a love of music, obsessive compulsive behaviour, accumulation and completism, selectivity and discrimination, and a desire for self-education and scholarship" (2004, p. 311). For niche audience members like these, brick-and-mortar store record shops are significant spaces for personal development and satisfaction; Drew 'can't help to walk in', finding himself 'flicking through the bins', constantly searching for 'those elusive bits'.

A conversation between Don and Rex highlighted the relevance of physical format recordings as historically significant artefacts to certain audience members, rather than

items celebrated simply for their mass and physicality. Don and Rex's exchange might further explain the significance of brick-and-mortar stores to certain audience members such as collectors, as these are the spaces that have traditionally housed these relics.

*I just want to throw a spanner in the works with that physical versus digital acquisition conversation. In the advent, which is very close, of being able to print 3D records, how do you guys think that would change things? How does everything you guys have been talking about, what you do and don't do, change if you are able to download and print out every aspect of... (Don, FG Three)*

*Well I go back to the point that was made about how indies are only really valid or relevant to the collector in the same way that maybe a 3D printed record is not a record if it doesn't come from the distributor then it's not a legitimate copy so why would you want it if you're a collector? (Rex, FG Three)*

Where Parry et al. (2012) described a shift in the perceived value of recorded music from money being exchanged for a CD or vinyl record to a construction of value-in-use following downloading a music file, for many participants in this study physical recordings still hold significant value. However as Don's questioning and Rex's response indicates, the value is not based simply on acquiring and possessing physical objects. As Belk (1998) suggested, consumer behaviour cannot be fully understood without first gaining some understanding of the meanings that consumers attach to possessions. For collectors, physical format recordings must be the 'genuine article' rather than copies printed out by new duplication technologies. As Drew described earlier, collectors frequent record shops hoping to discover 'those elusive bits', the 'missing pieces from your [sic] collection'. As much of the feedback throughout this section suggests, and research on record collectors describes, for certain individuals physical recordings are significant cultural artefacts (Gracon, 2010; Shuker, 2004). For collectors of physical media 3D printed duplications of records would not hold any value, and this might also explain the lesser appeal of digital music files to these individuals. The brick-and-mortar shop remains a culturally relevant space to these audience members as part of a commodity pursuit linked to 'the thrill of the chase', obsession, accumulation, rarity, and the desire to complete, combined at times with a preoccupation with rarity (Shuker, 2004).

A reasonable criticism of this discussion might be that brick-and-mortar record shops offer a relatively limited amount of physical format recordings to the serious collector in relation to that which may now be found almost instantly on the Internet. But as the following comments from participants reveal, there is also a sought after, ritualistic aspect to both searching physical spaces for desired items, as well as making the journey to these places as well. Drew describes allocating time to travel to shops and then the activities he undertakes once inside.

*Um... I still go into record stores and will just dig. Especially record stores I have never been to. If I've travelled to Sydney and Melbourne at least, you know, a percentage of my trip will be spent travelling on a bus or a train to a particular record store to have a dig. So I guess that hasn't changed for me... (Drew, Interview Two)*

*It's that discovery that is not the same as scrolling through a list online. I think it would be weird to go into a record store and you were the only one. Imagine going into Real Groovy and you're the only customer there? There's just an environment where there's a certain type of energy. But then I've been in smaller shops and have been the only one in there and I'm fine with that too... 'right I'm going to get into those little crates underneath the table', down on my hands and knees, no shame. I don't have to worry about people trying to climb over me. It's definitely an experience, it's that discovery, it's that pure joy when you find something and your own hands have pulled it out. (Drew, Interview Two)*

The following observations from Bob further highlight the appeal of a degree of unexpectedness when searching in record shops—again tied to a ritualistic process—which to both Bob and Drew appeared to offer greater satisfaction than the process of sourcing music online.

*Isn't it sort of like what I was saying before about how I like being able to pick up a record because you have that, you don't know before you get there that you're going to get it. And you have a feeling of like 'sweet I've found it' as opposed to just mindlessly scrolling through pages. (Bob, FG Two)*

*I don't think record stores will die because there will always be some part of the population that needs to have that surprise. (Bob, FG Two)*

More than an exchange of money for goods, Drew saw this process as a ‘personal reward that’s nowadays really hard to come by’.

*Can I ask, that elusive nugget you were talking about, do you see going online for it as kind of cheating? (Interviewer)*

*In a way. The thing is I could. If I get paid for a bunch of deejay gigs and I have a surplus of cash, I could just be like ‘OK, I’m going to buy all those bits’, but, for me there is something about discovering it for yourself. The chance factor. You gotta be rewarded. It’s a personal reward that nowadays is really hard to come by. Like, when you actually find that record. (Drew, Interview Two)*

Not surprisingly, these responses are similar to the way participants described their affinity for physical spaces in Section 4.3. Again participants’ responses echoed both the displaced hunter-gatherer behaviour described and some of the motivational categories devised in McIntyre’s (2009) study of record shop customers. Drew described frequenting shops as ‘not the same as scrolling through a list online’, stating ‘it’s that discovery, it’s that pure joy when you find something and your own hands have pulled it out’. Similarly Bob communicated ‘you have a feeling of like “sweet I’ve found it” as opposed to just mindlessly scrolling through pages’. Upon contemplating sourcing physical format recordings online, Drew displayed self-awareness of the value he places in the process he undertakes searching for music, stating ‘you gotta be rewarded. It’s a personal reward that nowadays is really hard to come by. Like, when you actually find that record’. Bob suggested ‘there will always be some part of the population that needs to have that surprise’. Drew and Bob’s responses are similar to Terry and Jack’s exchange in Section 4.3. These participants value what McIntyre (2009) termed the ‘interpretive’ dimension of record shops. Though all know the Internet offers a far more extensive and instantaneous inventory of sought after titles, the value of *chance* [emphasis in original] or *serendipity* [emphasis in original] is of huge significance to their record shop experience, as is the overall slower process of not only searching through stores, but as Drew points out mapping them out and traveling to them as well.

Participants’ descriptions thus far have described the record store space as offering more than just a point of exchange for money and goods. Just as earlier studies have ascertained

(Burkart, 2008; Everett, 2007; Gracon, 2009, 2010; Jones, 2009; McIntyre, 2009, 2011; Simpson, 2000), independent brick-and-mortar record shops fulfil wider social and cultural desires for those who frequent them. However what appears markedly different at this juncture is that the fulfilments these spaces offer for participants in this study appear overwhelmingly personal rather than interpersonal. 'Digging' for records seems to place no great emphasis on the community-building aspects of shops, rather describing quite a solitary activity in a space albeit inhabited by other people. In fact some of the interpersonal aspects of frequenting record shops were criticised by participants, as is evidenced by the whole of the next section being devoted to these conversations (4.8), and where the community-building aspects of record stores were appreciated, this was in a historical context (4.9).

Despite this, the following observations from Jim and Hannah indicate a sense of community is still valued by some record shop employees and their customers, as is the opportunity to interact in these spaces. Jim suggested that the store he works in is important to staff and regular patrons in that it forms one part of a wider social construct where engagement with music is of particular significance. Hannah associated visiting brick-and-mortar stores with being 'out in the world', linked in turn to interacting with people face-to-face.

*Regards customers, there is still a core of young people who, who, do value this experience, and we still employ young people, it's not an old people's shop, much like Real Groovy. We've got students, who are music students most often, Princess Chelsea works here, she's an artist in her own right for Little Chief Records. Um, you know, I mean I deejay badly out occasionally. Lucy that works upstairs here, she's well involved in all the punk scenes, and Amy is involved in the metal scene. So there's all people here that are doing it. We're not all old grumpy old fucks, you know, that's my role in here! But, you know, they in some ways are a reflection of a lot of the people that we see in here in terms of, it's not dead to young people, people still do value coming to these places. They're harder to find, when they do find them they feel comfortable in them which is good. (Jim, Interview One)*

*[On interacting online] Yes. I think it silos you a little. It compartmentalises things. I think what you get from going into Marbecks is, you get a trip across town, you get to walk past tons of homeless people on your way, you get to walk through Queens Arcade which has some of the fanciest shops in Auckland in there. And once you go*

*into Marbecks you get to maybe talk to Roger Marbeck, who's part of the Marbecks family who have owned that store in one way or another for the last almost 90 years. It's a whole experience of localness which you just don't get when you're in your room chatting. (Hannah, Interview Three)*

In describing his co-workers as 'people here that are doing it' Jim infers that working at the record shop is one part of a wider focus on music in these people's lives. Shops like the one he works in are by his own admission 'harder to find', but when people of a similar disposition find them 'they feel comfortable in them which is good'. Jim's comments fit McIntyre's (2009) description of independent brick-and-mortar record stores as social-cultural hangout destinations that exist in the physical and cognitive maps of successive generations within local communities, as well as Simpson's (2000) depiction of record store Blue Chair as a place loaded with meaning for the lifestyle enclave that frequent it. Both Jim and Hannah describe the 'vernacular culture' discussed in Gracon's (2010) study. Jim describes working with local people who contribute to local music scenes, while Hannah vividly illustrates a journey through Auckland in order to get to the shop, before being able to talk to someone with a demonstrated history about music. By her own admission 'It's a whole experience of localness which you just don't get when you're in your room chatting.'

#### **4.7.1 'Sha-zamm!': On the relevance of tastemakers and other intermediaries**

Though record stores maintain a cultural relevance in Hannah's life, she did provide a valuable critique of their potential relevance to younger highly engaged music consumers. Hannah's thoughts addressed a generational shift to predominantly online interpersonal interaction and acquisition of music, speculating about how younger audience members perceive brick-and-mortar record shops and patrons, as well as how visiting a store might seem illogical to a cohort who have grown up in a time where the Internet has always existed.

*For a start, I think that face-to-face music communities, like people who go into a store, people who work in a store, I think they are getting this reputation as being old, stuffy, resistant to change, and boring. Like you can't... there's this idea I think that you can't be cool or dynamic or engaging or have any opinion that people—or young people—these days will think is cool unless you are... unless you know what Soundcloud is, or unless you are logged into Bandcamp. You know, like, you have to*

*know about digital stuff in order to have your opinions matter. (Hannah, Interview Three)*

*So how many of those people are going into stores these days? Are the younger audience into it? (Interviewer)*

*I think no. And also, I think it is also related to the fact that you have to travel. Like Marbecks is in the middle of Auckland, public transport costs a lot of money... why do you need to go to a music store when you can just go online and get it? (Hannah, Interview Three)*

Hannah's comments reiterate where most engaged audience members now seek and find information about recorded music, and in turn reliable and accepted tastemakers. In stating that 'you have to know about digital stuff in order to have your opinions matter', the suggestion is that in order to be up-to-date and informed as a modern music consumer the online environment takes precedence over face-to-face environments like the brick-and-mortar record store. Hannah also touched on how taking time out to reach a record shop (as well as spending money to do so) might seem unnecessary to a generation who have grown up with access to the same information in their homes and on their persons. In the following statement Hannah more explicitly questioned the significance of brick-and-mortar record shop employees to digital native audience members.

*And, I feel like people don't... I don't know about young people because I'm not a young person, but I'm guessing that young people can just talk to their friends online so why would they need to go talk to an expert when they can just talk to each other about what the new 5 Seconds of Summer album is like, or whatever? (Hannah, Interview Three)*

The following reflection from Paz, aged 23 at the time the focus groups were conducted, supports Hannah's assertions.

*When I was 10 I got the Eric B and Rakim single, 'Paid in Full'. Loved it. I didn't know who these guys were, had no idea about them, just loved that funky bassline and those drums. I just never knew anything about the history of these guys. Then as soon as I was sort of wise enough to look on the 'net I was like 'whoooah, holy shit, these guys have got like three albums that are insane. If it wasn't for the Internet they would have been one hit wonders to me. (Paz, FG Four)*



Paz's admission, 'if it wasn't for the Internet they would have been one hit wonders to me', reveals that face-to-face tastemakers might now not even be a consideration for younger audience members. Indeed even for those who grew up in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century media environment, where tastemakers such as independent record shop employees, radio deejays, and music press journalists exposed new music in a much more limited media environment, the Internet provides a much more rich and diverse (as well as relatively instantaneous) source of information. Hannah and Paz's discussions support Parry et al.'s (2012) observations that the Internet allows greater communication and engagement between audience members, and Warr & Goode's (2011) depiction of contemporary audience members being Internet peers, 'prosumers', and tastemakers who can expose artists. Considering this phenomenon, the likelihood of the record shop employee assuming this role in people's lives is arguably now negligible, even for patrons who continue to frequent these spaces. As an active patron of record shops for 40 years, Nasir revealed in Section 4.4 he had learned more about music in the last ten years than ever before, further illustrated when he described utilising just one of many online resources, YouTube.

*People post a lot of information as well. Like on YouTube you'll often have the same tune someone's uploaded three or four different versions of it, or videos to go with it. And they'll often write a lot of stuff there, so you get to find out who was on that record, or whatever. (Nasir, FG Four)*

By way of comparison, Drew's description of Chook, a record shop employee in 1990s Tauranga, New Zealand, appropriately illustrates the cultural significance of the record store employee as key tastemaker in the then limited media and information environment.

*... and there was one store called The Source, and there was a guy called Chook, he used to play in a metal band called The Abyss, and he was the guy who put us onto a lot of metal at one point. So early '90s I was really into my Roadrunner metal, thrash and stuff like that, I remember buying import Cannibal Corpse and Obituary CDs, um, you know building the catalogue of death metal back then. I didn't really look into any other styles back then. (Drew, Interview Two)*

*Was that a result of this guy Chook? (Interviewer)*

*I guess he was that classic record store dude. You'd go to see him because (a) he was older than you and (b) he was playing in a cool band, but also he, if you wanted something new... and we were always open to finding something different... he'd be*

*like 'oh you should check this out', like he kind of got to know what we were buying so when we came in the next time he'd be able to recommend something. You could listen, a listening post, he'd give you a few CDs to check out and if there was something in there you like then you'd pick it up. (Drew, Interview Two)*

Amongst particularly engaged 20<sup>th</sup> Century music consumers, the significance of a 'Chook' is not uncommon. Though with widespread access to the Internet in the developed world, and the disintermediation of traditional industry structures, it might be said that now any audience member might be a 'Chook' if they so wish, and their expertise need not be restricted to the small New Zealand town they reside in. Si's description of growing up in the 1970s in comparison to today illustrates the now global reach of previously geographically contained tastemakers and experts, and in turn the ability for audience members in general to connect and interact with one-and-other.

*Because, when we were very young, the way you found out about cool music was, you might get a deejay on the radio, this is the '70s before half of you were born, but, getting enthusiastic about a track and the cult of the deejay, or an older sibling, or the cool kids at school. That's how it went, and then you'd get into the record store and the shop assistant would say 'hey check this out', and that's how the word spread. So it was very limited. But with digital and online communities, Soundcloud and so forth, you can suddenly tap into a whole bunch of these cool guys telling you these tracks are cool. And like you said if you follow so-and-so and he checks something out, it pops up, so you check it out too. (Si, FG Three)*

Hannah's description of being an 'expert' record shop employee preceding widespread use of the Internet was telling.

*I remember there was a guy who would come in and he was really interested in the alt country scene, so he came in as a fan of Ryan Adams. A couple of us were there when he came in and he was like 'oh, what else do you think I should listen to?' And we kind of gave him all of these ideas and he ended up coming back every month or so based on... it was really based on the Border Catalogue and the Rhythm Method catalogue, but that was it. (Hannah, Interview Three)*

Though by no means setting out to deride Hannah's (or any other record shop employee's) knowledge of music or ability to match artists to customers' tastes, her

description of appearing an expert to the customer in question though ‘it was really based on the Border Catalogue and the Rhythm Method catalogue’ perfectly illustrates the restrictions in place for most audience members in the pre-Internet environment. In this more intermediated environment having access to the catalogues of record companies represented having access to different titles, and in turn being able to act as a middleperson in the consumption process. Audience members are now used to being able to autonomously source, access, and consume a wide range of titles, representing the ‘freed’ music Hill (2013) referred to in his article on changing music consumption patterns.

A machine-generated phenomenon akin to Anderson’s (2008b) Long Tail theory also occurs in this interconnected and aggregated environment of media and information sharing, potentially lessening the need for the direct advice of other human beings in any setting. Craig and Paz describe following a series of hyperlinks when online.

*For me Soundcloud and Bandcamp, particularly in the last few years. (Craig, FG Four)*

*So what’s happening on there, aside from ‘wow that’s a great tune’? (Interviewer)*

*It’s kind of like the Facebook of music I think. Like it’s very... it is a social networking site I’d say. Um, as soon as you follow someone you can just click on the side and it says who they’re following. (Paz, FG Four)*

*Or there’s something suggested. (Craig, FG Four)*

*Yeah, exactly, yeah, and you can literally go on a journey just from following one person. You’ll find the craziest stuff you never heard of. (Paz, FG Four)*

*And people who hardly have any followers or hardly any plays on their track, and then you listen to it and it’s this amazing tune that someone from nowhere has made and it blows you away. (Craig, FG Four)*

However the following responses from Sean and Drew illustrate that the opinions of trusted friends are of significance in terms of music discovery. Obviously this is not a new phenomenon, though links and recommendations and information being able to be distributed instantly is, with seemingly less need to now meet face-to-face or rely on spaces such as the brick-and-mortar store to congregate and share information and recommendations.

*I find I get most of my music from referrals from friends. You know, sending me links, 'have you heard this?' 'Have you heard that?' (Sean, FG Three)*

*I think a lot of people look to their friends, um, especially on Facebook for instance. If you've got a circle of friends who have always been the music people, they post something up and you notice. If it's a YouTube video, you might see ten YouTube music clips a day on Facebook for instance, and a lot of them are throwback tunes, but if someone says 'hey check this tune out', just a random status update on Facebook, there are certain people who I'd be like 'actually I've always trusted your opinion...' (Drew, Interview Two)*

Despite the predominant feedback from focus groups and interviews suggesting that the significance of the people who staff brick-and-mortar record shops is waning, Jim and Hannah suggested these people still have a place, albeit a now constrained one. Jim described introducing people to new music as part of his role at Marbecks.

*We sell Illium Sphere or Taylor McFerrin or Pattern or Mt Kimbie... these are things I like that I sell to people, that they have never heard before. But they'll come in with a hint of this or that, and I'll be like 'well check this out', and they'll listen to it. It's still... people still like having a conversation and being turned on to things that they may not have... (Jim, Interview One)*

Hannah revealed she prefers face-to-face conversations about new music to reading reviews.

*Oh and another, um, something that's quite... whenever I buy something physically it's generally because I've gone to Marbecks to get it, and I just like talking about it to somebody who has listened to it beforehand. It's not like reading a review of it before you buy it, I hate that. It's just about picking up a little titbit. Like even if I am talking to a person who doesn't necessarily like the album but has some sort of titbit. I like learning about production. Like if someone has a titbit about how somebody made an album and they only recorded it in churches in Atlanta, Georgia over a six month period. I like hearing about that, I think it's cool. (Hannah, Interview Three)*

*But you must look for that sort of stuff on the Internet as well? (Interviewer)*

*But often the Internet has a lot of stupid couch critique. I don't want to sift through that. (Hannah, Interview Three)*

Jim explained how conversations often transcended the topic of music.

*Might be government. Could be anything. Could be what's wrong with the world according to two old grumpy guys standing in a record shop. But sometimes music will, it'll come back to the music... 'oh have you heard that' while you are wandering around. So there's definitely that... it's a significant part of my job. (Jim, Interview One)*

The reality is that for the majority of participants in this study the Internet is used as the primary and predominant source of information and discussion about music, and stores now seem to provide a predominantly private set of pleasures that do not rely as much on seeking expertise or even engaging in general conversation with record shop employees or other customers. Though Jim's discussion about the store he works in is hopeful, and it appears the shop he manages still fulfils a valuable social role for staff and many customers based on a mutual love of music, the following statement exposes the key challenge for the contemporary brick-and-mortar store; customer numbers.

*So who comes into the shop these days? (Interviewer)*

*We get all sorts, we really do. It could be anybody. From 14 right through to 85-90. Funeral music is quite popular [laughs]. Female / male. All ethnicities. (Jim, Interview One)*

*So you're saying it hasn't really changed from... (Interviewer)*

*It hasn't really changed... the NUMBERS have decreased. (Jim, Interview One)*

Drew was asked to consider what outlets and influences remain relevant in terms of finding out about new music in the contemporary environment.

*Radio, but I think certain blogs and websites people go to. So if you're into beats, new school beats, and you follow Soulection on Soundcloud. You like their page, then on your stream when you go through and you'll see a whole bunch of shit you've never heard... I do that. So I think those online communities are the place where a lot of music gets pushed, exposed, discovered.... um... websites, blogs. Whatever your interest is, chances are you can, you just need to follow a few key things and you can pretty much be up to play. If you go to Fact, online Fact, any of those kind of online music, culture sites then you'll find videos and songs... (Drew, Interview Two)*

Noteworthy was his omission of the brick-and-mortar record space, considering Drew appeared to particularly identify with these places as a culturally significant part of his life. Similar to the responses of Mike, Terry, and Bob in this section, as well as feedback from other participants throughout the focus groups, it seems record shops maintain significance to the majority of participants as spaces not so much for seeking out the company of other likeminded individuals as for ‘digging’, often in solitude, for physical copies of recorded music. Tellingly, the community-building nature of independent record shops is overwhelmingly described by participants in the past tense in Section 4.9 to follow. Despite Jim’s hopeful comments about interpersonal dynamics at Marbecks, the atmosphere he describes in his store seems to be an anomaly today when compared to the feedback from other participants regarding how most stores now function.

Less than a decade since the studies of Gracon (2009, 2010), McIntyre (2009), Everett (2007), and Jones (2009), participants described enjoying many of the culturally significant aspects of independent brick-and-mortar stores described in these earlier studies, but very little of the social. None mentioned the value of independent stores as an alternative to the mainstream media machine (Gracon, 2010), as ostensibly the Internet now fulfils this role in participants’ lives. Aside from Jim and Hannah, no one described independent stores as educational spaces (Everrett, 2007; Gracon, 2009, 2010; Jones, 2009; Marino & Toller, 2008; Taylor & Piper, 2012), nor spaces which encourage the airing of counter-hegemonic viewpoints (Gracon, 2009). Again, aside from Jim and Hannah, nobody cited store employees as go-to people for advice and recommendations (Gracon, 2010; McIntyre, 2009), nor did they allude to any meaningful sense of group identity (Gracon, 2009; Simpson, 2000) in-store or otherwise. It seems the Internet, and the information and discussion about music it provides, has considerably reduced the need for people to interact on any meaningful level in brick-and-mortar shops.

As a postscript, even when the potential for face-to-face discussion about music arises in a physical environment, the role of new technologies such as the Shazam application—software that ‘listens’ to music played into a smart phone before reporting back to the user the artists and track name as well as offering the ability to instantly purchase the music—increasingly negates the need.

*Well... well in the days before technology, if I went into a shop and they were playing a cool song I would ask, or if I was... you know, that kind of thing. Nowadays you don't even have to ask, you can just pull out your Shazam app and Sha-zamm! [laughs]. I do that a lot now actually. (Hannah, Interview Three)*

Maybe people have indeed become “the amorphous blobs in *Wall-E*, scooting around on our little hover chairs, listening to music in our headphones and interacting with the rest of the world on a touchscreen” described by Adam Hirzel (Matador Records, 2012f, para. 9) in subsection 2.6.1.

#### **4.8 ‘Sharing is accepted more in the Internet age’: Problems with the record shop ethos**

Though setting out primarily to ascertain how communities based on recorded music now interact, the focus groups yielded data aspects of the pre-Internet music distribution and acquisition model that some participants identified as problematic, as well as aspects of face-to-face environments and communication that were difficult for some. Recollecting about when the record shop was the primary source of music for audience members, some older focus group participants described an inequitable system whereby store employees would favour certain customers when distributing limited copies of sought after titles. This phenomenon spurred wider debate among the participants about the merits of a restricted media environment in comparison to the ‘freed’ or far more democratised availability and distribution of music today. When discussing face-to-face environments and communication, some participants described experiencing social anxieties in brick-and-mortar record shops, which suggests that to individuals with similar anxieties the Internet might present a less intimidating platform for communication.

Where this thesis has used the terms ‘modern’ and ‘traditional’ audience members, the intention has not been to delineate between the practices and behaviours of different age groups as McIntyre’s (2011) study did with Baby Boomer and Generation X groupings. Rather this thesis differentiates between general audience practices in the ‘pre-Internet’ or ‘20<sup>th</sup> Century’ media environment and the ‘post-Napster’ or ‘Digital Age’ media environment in order to ascertain how audience behaviours in general are changing over time.

Nonetheless, in this section it does appear the age of participants correlated with their attitudes towards the sharing and exchange of recorded music. Broadly speaking, older participants who had grown up in a more limited media environment saw merits in certain audience members having exclusive access to sought-after titles, whereas younger participants believed music should be accessible and easily shared.

As highly engaged music consumers and collectors of music, many participants also identified that they deejayed in varying capacities. Consequently, the following discussions are framed around deejays who do not play widely available commercial music, but instead are employed for their particular selection and style of music. Mike discusses the allure of exclusivity in the days when only a handful of vinyl copies of each title were ordered in by record shop staff.

*And then I'd go into these dance music places and there'd be the deejays who were playing on the weekend and I'd kind of want to suck up to them, or I might be too nervous, or see all these records that are being bought and, the records that were coming in were like in a limited quantity and there was only a few and you could buy that twelve inch and then you'd have that twelve inch and you'd play that twelve inch out and feel great because someone else doesn't have it... (Mike, FG One)*

*But also that scarcity, I think, also helps the joy of finding and finally getting things. I remember when I was playing a lot of drum and bass... you'd try and be in store on Thursday when the records came in. Barge past your mate because you're trying to buy this one record. You get that one record and then you had it, and you could laud it and be like 'fuck yeah I got this record'. (Mike, FG One)*

Mike described not only his sense of a social hierarchy in shops, 'I'd kind of want to suck up to them, or I might be too nervous', but also the sense of achievement he felt when procuring a sought after title, stating 'you'd play that twelve inch out and feel great because someone else doesn't have it'. Whether this practice ultimately bolstered Mike's self-esteem or his ego is debatable, though 'feeling great because someone else doesn't have it' lends itself to the latter. The following comment from Henry does so more explicitly.

*The social side is finding something no one else has and sticking it in their face. (Henry, FG Three)*



Though Mike's comments specifically addressed sourcing music in the pre-Internet era, where availability to music—especially esoteric or less mainstream music—was far more limited than it is today, Henry's statement revealed his attitude at the time the focus groups were conducted. Having consumed music actively for 40 years, Henry's stance appeared to originate from the pre-Internet era Mike described, just as the following thoughts from Si did.

*Soundcloud where I was amassing all these followers, I was actually uploading nothing, I was merely leaching off Soundcloud. People thought 'gee what awesome tastes you've got' and started following me. And that's when I realised that you could change your privacy settings. So I just went dark so no one could see what I'm looking at. Because it goes back to that deejay thing with white labels. I don't want... this is going back to when I was doing shows with Radio Ponsonby that has an audience of 300 people [laughs]... I still didn't want anybody knowing what I'd found, what I was going to put on my show. (Si, FG Three)*

The same age as Henry, 50 at the time the focus groups were conducted, Si's comments also reflect a seemingly bygone era where, before the richness and reach afforded by the Internet, having the ways and means to source exclusive content was often essential to becoming a sought after radio or club deejay. Though from a practical perspective Mike, Henry, and Si were discussing the value of exclusivity in order to have a point of difference as a deejay or broadcaster, their statements were loaded with deeper self-defining pleasures they gained from having access to or owning sought-after and difficult to obtain music. Reaffirming Fuat Firat's (1987) catalogue of meanings individuals attach to consumer goods, Mike's declaration of wanting to 'suck up' to more experienced deejays, at the same time hoping to procure a copy of a record stocked in limited quantity, demonstrated feelings of aspiration, belonging, achievement, uniqueness, and status (Fuat Firat, 1987). A desire for uniqueness and status was apparent in Henry wanting to find 'something no one else has and sticking it in their face', and similarly apparent in Si not wanting anyone else to know what music he had found on Soundcloud, despite the platform typically being open-access. These responses are very different to the approach taken by Rex (24 at the time of the focus group) whose thoughts appear to illustrate a generational shift in attitudes

concerning the availability, distribution, and sharing of recorded music, as well as the meanings that audience members attach to it.

*That mentality of ‘well what’s your problem, I’m sitting on this tune and nobody else gets to know what it is, I’m just going to play it out every now and then’, that’s kind of gone and now music is... (Rex, FG Three)*

*So you’re saying more music becomes available to more people? (Interviewer)*

*More accessible.... maybe sharing is accepted more in the Internet age than it was before you know? (Rex, FG Three)*

*Yeah. (Gen, FG Three)*

*Nobody’s dug through a thousand record stores to find this one gem you know? It’s out there to access if they feel the need to and... (Rex, FG Three)*

*...I just don’t see the value in hoarding your tunes. (Rex, FG Three)*

*Well I used to take great delight in buying vinyl and going ‘oh my god I’ve got the only [inaudible] album in Christchurch’, and waving it in people’s faces... (Henry, FG Three)*

*But now it’s the world... (Rex, FG Three)*

*... But you see there’s the difference. I think when it was physical records it was like ‘I’ve got this, if I hold on to it then nobody else can have it’. Whereas now, because music is so much more accessible I know that everybody is going to find it eventually if they want it... (Rex, FG Three)*

Aged 24 and having actively consumed music for 15 years at the time the focus groups were conducted, Rex has done so exclusively in the post-Napster environment, where borderless open access to recorded music is a given. Rex’s responses are a contrast to the possessive individualism (Shuker, 2004) demonstrated in earlier reflections from Si, Mike, and Henry. Rex did not ‘see the value in hoarding your tunes’ suggesting ‘maybe sharing is accepted more in the Internet age than it was before you know?’. Rex’s opinions compared to older participants Henry, Mike, and Si’s thoughts serve to demonstrate the changes that have occurred to the political economy of the recorded music industry, and a consequential change in audience member attitudes. Rex’s attitude demonstrates the destruction of

industry frameworks that McIntyre (2011) described, where music is now shared and exchanged through virtual networks rather than distributed by intermediaries then accumulated and held privately by collectors in what Everett (2007) termed an “egocentric retreat” (p. 26). Where Henry finds pleasure in ‘finding something no one else has and sticking it in their face’, Rex suggests ‘sharing is more accepted in the Internet age’. In this instance the perspective Rex took on music acquisition echoes Everett’s (2007) further suggestion that digital collections are less about championing egotistical attributes than being able to connect people and music in ways not possible before. As McCourt (2005) suggests, when the focus is not on tangible commodities, it is the community of people interacting and sharing that becomes the commodity.

In contrast to Rex’s attitude towards music distribution, ownership, and sharing, Drew described how in former times record shop staff who also deejayed (the majority of staff members in most specialist electronic and hip hop music stores) used to purposely restrict the number of copies of titles available, rather than the limited amount of stock being a supply issue from the distributor or similar.

*I guess back then you, because you could only play the songs you had bought on vinyl, deejays were known for their catalogue. By A) how you put a set together, but also B) what tunes what you play. If you’ve got that tune... going back to working in a record store, I remember there being a tune that came in and there being three copies of it, I bought one, and two other guys bought it, and I remember going into the system and going ‘well, I’m just going to not re-order that for a couple of weeks’ because it gives me and those other two guys the chance to have something in our set that no one else has. It gives you that kind of exclusivity. (Drew, Interview Two)*

Though Rex is too young to have experienced such a situation, his suggestion ‘I think when it was physical records it was like “I’ve got this, if I hold on to it then nobody else can have it”’ succinctly describes the once relatively scarce amount of recorded music available in comparison to today, and the accompanying attitudes towards distribution and ownership. Rex’s further comment ‘whereas now, because music is so much more accessible I know that everybody is going to find it eventually if they want it’, suggests that in an environment where music may be freely and easily shared and distributed, striving for a sense of achievement, uniqueness, or status might be futile. Just as Hill (2001) observed,

contemporary audience members such as Rex have less anxiety about preexisting value systems, and participants' discussions in general suggest the world of physical commodities versus the world of abstract things continues to challenge notions of value (McCourt, 2005)

Roger observed the shift he saw from the intermediated environment Drew described to the ultimately more democratic system Rex is accustomed to.

*...with things like Beatport coming out and the availability of digital music... I remember seeing a massive change with people's interaction with music 'cause... traditionally through the record stores... especially with drum and bass, the buyers would get in of the best records only one or two copies for them and particular other people. So there was a really strong filtering process of who had what music and so people would have to come in and do favours to try and get up the ladder... to be able to get access to a particular, um, releases. (Roger, FG One)*

The 'massive change with people's interaction with music' Roger described is that sites like Beatport offer infinite numbers of digital file copies of music, and the introduction of digital replication and distribution contests the sometimes hierarchical brick-and-mortar shop distribution model of old. Notwithstanding the continued production of, and demand for, limited run physical copy-only releases or similar, overall specialist music consumers such as deejays are now not restricted by the limited inventory (or the whims and motives of staff) traditionally encountered in brick-and-mortar record shops. This change signals a substantial shift in the power dynamics of the distributor-audience member relationship. Using Gracon's (2010) example of purchasing the album *Repeater* (discussed in 2.10), had Gracon encountered a record shop where the album was available but a staff member suggested to him otherwise, there are ten other options he identified as easily available outlets for the album. This upsets the 20<sup>th</sup> Century supply model where options and choice were controlled by the relative few with distribution privileges, and consequently turning away customers today would be counterintuitive to a business surviving. In making decisions on where to acquire music audience members now have more options, linked in turn to greater control in general. Audience members can now be more active participants not only as consumers, but as distributors, critics, curators, and promoters of music (Anderson, 2008b; Meisel & Sullivan, 2002; Parry et al., 2012).

#### 4.8.1 'Put it in the bag! Put it in the bag!': Record shops as emotionally loaded spaces

Another problem some participants had with record shops was the attitude of certain staff members.

*Real Groovy was one of those places when I worked there... it was... there was a community, but there was definitely contempt in some ways [laughs], not from me I don't think, it was definitely more High Fidelity than this place is, that's for sure. (Jim, Interview One)*

*I mean, record stores are some of my favourite places, and everywhere I go I try to get to a record store, at least one. But, you know, they can be intimidating, and I remember record stores where you do get that Jack Black character in High Fidelity. He's a kind of composite of people.... [to John] they're not like that at Real Groovy by the way... (Nasir, FG Four)*

*[laughter]*

*I can think of a couple actually... (John, FG Four)*

*Who are like, they don't want to share their knowledge with anybody. Being part of a clique and thinking 'oh I'm so much cooler than you, why are you even asking me'. You'd be terrified to ask them about a piece of music. (Nasir, FG Four)*

*I felt like that the first time I went to Conch. (Paz, FG Four)*

Jim and Nasir both referenced the fictional book (Hornby, 1996) and subsequent film adaptation *High Fidelity* (Bevan & Frears, 2000), a comedy-drama in which central character Rob Gordon owns an independent brick-and-mortar record shop staffed by Dick and Barry (the latter of whom is played by actor Jack Black to contextualise Nasir's reference). Barry is brash and obnoxious to customers who he does not feel possess the requisite knowledge of (and taste in) music required to frequent the store, often resulting in customers either being told to leave or hastily exiting of their own volition. As Jim observed as a record shop employee, and Nasir as a customer, 'Barry' is based on an employee stereotype that exists, and does not bode well with the notion that brick-and-mortar shops are inclusive spaces. Hannah's statements about the 'two types of people who like to talk about music' further alludes to the existence of a Barry in many stores.

*I think there are two types of people who like to talk about music. There are the types of people who like to give their opinions freely and loudly, and there are the people that like to hear other people's opinions and let that add to their view of the world at large. There are some people who work in a music store because, yes they know a lot about music, but yes they also want to tell people why they should like what they like. (Hannah, Interview Three)*

Whether or not a store has a Barry employed, the following comments revealed that music shop spaces can feel intimidating in a more self-conscious sense, particularly where feelings of relative inexperience or knowledge are concerned. Mark felt he was too young to engage with anyone else when he first visited record shops.

*Like I only went to Sounds twice before they shut down, and I never really, I was too young to go in and say 'hey what kind of albums do you have and what shall I get?' I just kind of went in and, the first time I went in I just looked at the cover art and picked via that because I was so young. (Mark, FG One)*

As a new employee at a record shop, Hannah remembered feeling intimidated by her boss at the time.

*And, yeah, so when I started working at the music store when I was 22 or something, I, at first I was a little intimidated... (Hannah, Interview Three)*

*Why were you intimidated? (Interviewer)*

*Well, my boss at the time, who's become a great friend of mine now, is very into music. He's one of guys who looks music. Just like had long hair and painted fingernails and piercings, he liked Nine Inch Nails before they were cool... it just makes you really scared about saying things like 'I like Faith No More'. But anyway, I learned to kind of shelve those feelings and just talk to people about music. (Hannah, Interview Three)*

Bob felt outright scared as a young customer in a record shop, while Jack added that after a period of socialisation shop staff appeared to become more accommodating.

*When I was young I was young I was too scared... (Bob, FG Two)*

*Yeah yeah... (Terry, FG Two)*

*I mean only very recently have I had the balls to talk to... because there's the whole pretentious record store clerk thing... (Bob, FG Two)*

*Yeah, I'm OK with it now, but I know exactly what he's talking about. Real Groovy always felt like that. But then when you've been going there for years and years and they all know you anyway it sort of fades out. But yeah, when I was younger going to Real Groovy and stuff, everyone seems like such a dick. Not trying to even talk to them. They're just kinda so cold when you go up to the counter. (Jack, FG Two)*

*But you're saying that after they got to know you? (Interviewer)*

*Well let's say that you're a random dude and you take a record up to the counter. They might... like, the clerk, it might be their favourite album. But they're not going to tell you that or anything. [pretends to scan barcode] Beep. (Jack, FG Two)*

*[laughter]*

*You know... it's just like, now if I take a record up most of the time they're like 'oh wow! I haven't seen this for ages' or something like that. Yeah so that's changed. (Jack, FG Two)*

Participants' range of feelings might be linked to the significance these individuals attach to music in their lives, as it seems unlikely such social anxiety would be attached to shopping for something like groceries. The conversation in Focus Group Three continued to address this topic.

*I think when I first started shopping at Conch, it was terrifying. (Bob, FG Two)*

*Oh... fuck that place. I can't even go in there aye. (Jack, FG Two)*

*Really? Well I found that when I first went in I was like terrified, because I was just... I don't know. It's all in your head I guess. But then as I went in more and more, as you get to know people, the same as Jack said, they'd be like 'oh this is really good' or they'd start finding stuff I didn't know about that they thought I'd like. So I guess it's just like making friends. (Bob, FG Two)*

*I guess that's one of the benefits of online. You don't have to deal with the snooty record clerk... or if you're buying something that maybe you would be embarrassed about someone seeing you buying... (Bob, FG Two)*

*[laughs] (Jack, FG Two)*

*I dunnoh if it's really related but... you asked about the benefits of online. Like I was in Real Groovy a few months ago and I bought a Chaka Khan record. This '80s, you*

*know fluoro... and the guy at the counter was like this hardcore punk and I could tell he was just having the time of his life... 'look at this guy buying this pansy ass record'. And he had it out and he was displaying it... (Bob, FG Two)*

*Showing everybody... 'look! We've finally sold it'. (Terry, FG Two)*

*[laughter]*

*I was like 'put it in the bag! Put it in the bag!' Maybe a little in my head... but hey, if I'd bought it online... but I was like 'put it in the bag! Put it in the bag!' (Bob, FG Two)*

*So you guys, rather than feeling a part of, you kind of feel there's a combative relationship with staff. (Interviewer)*

*Hmmm... not necessarily. Just sometimes. (Bob, FG Two)*

*Yeah. (Jack, FG Two)*

There seemed to be two main forces at play in participants' descriptions of the unease they had felt in brick-and-mortar record shop spaces. Firstly, the sense that a Barry-esque staff member might judge their presence and their musical preferences, and secondly that these spaces represent a physical manifestation of participants' high emotional attachment to music, and this might in turn create a perceived rather than actual sense of hostility from staff and a general feeling of unease. In the case of a Barry being present, some who took part in Gracon's (2010) study of Exiled Records described feeling intimidated by the attitude of the staff, which suggests that 'membership' of communities that form around recorded music requires a certain level of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986), whereby possessing satisfactory music-based knowledge affords people a higher status in these social circles. Indeed in Gracon's (2009) earlier research, record shop patrons expressed the importance of having well-informed conversations with staff as opposed to engaging in anonymous acts of consumption. In this regard communities formed around recorded music often clearly define 'insiders' from 'outsiders', and can be riddled with power relations (Cohen, 1985; Gracon, 2010; Munsell, 2011; Rex & Moore, 1969; Simpson, 2000). Group identity is linked to possessing requisite knowledge, though whether this is ultimately elitist and discriminatory or simply a benign trait of recorded music communities is debatable, and arguably based on individual perception (unless a Barry is actually present).



In terms of perceived intimidation, Mark, Hannah, Bob, and Jack all described feeling this particularly when they were much younger or new to visiting certain shops and thus less familiar with the spaces they were visiting. In these instances, though there was no actual conflict with a Barry-type character, participants felt staff exuded a comparable energy but conceded this might only be their perception of staff behaviour rather than what was actually occurring. Bob stated 'it's all in your head I guess', before talking about 'the whole pretentious record store clerk thing' to which Jack agreed 'Real Groovy always *felt* like that' rather than providing any examples that it actually *was* 'like that'. Similarly Hannah remembered being intimidated by her boss in her first record shop job based on his appearance, 'one of those guys who looks music', though the boss is 'a great friend' of hers now and she did not describe any instances where he actively set out to distress her. Overall record shops appeared to be emotionally loaded spaces for these participants, seemingly linked to music being of particular significance to their lives, and recorded music products in turn being 'symbolic goods' (Bourdieu, 1984), loaded with accompanying cultural and social values for certain individuals. Whether participants had encountered a Barry-esque individual or not, the overall feedback suggested brick-and-mortar record shops can be intimidating or socially awkward spaces. In the following statement, Hannah suggested that the Internet might provide a generally more inclusive platform for audience members.

*...people will drift off to online places where they don't need to try and sound smart about music, they don't need to feel intimidated by the people they are talking to. You know, they don't need to try and think of a really good idea about an album, they can just... the people who used to talk about music who don't any more, it's because they don't need to put so much effort into it. The people who felt like they had to put effort into talking about music, like to go into a music store and buy an album you've got to have in your head something to say about this album, I don't know... (Hannah, Interview Three)*

Whether imagined or not, the intimidation felt by some in brick-and-mortar record shops might be lessened by the relative anonymity the Internet accommodates. Where Weidman et al. (2012) suggested that the inconspicuousness and deindividuation offered in an online setting renders social cues such as physical appearance irrelevant, the same might apply to

anxieties music consumers might have about their particular tastes or level of specialist knowledge. Furthermore for audience members who do engage in dialogue about recorded music online there is foreseeably less risk in doing so, as the degree of anonymity online as well as the lack of pressure to reply immediately makes interacting easier for those who experience difficulty with similar face-to-face interactions. However if people of this disposition often feel intimidated by factors such as shop staff and fellow customers' level of knowledge, then perhaps the Internet is still a potentially threatening environment. The 'equalisation hypothesis' (Christopherson, 2007) typically applies to more visual-based social evaluation cues such as gender, race, age, ethnicity, physical disability, and attractiveness. Arguably a 'Barry' would still be able to denigrate another individual online based on the content of their discourse or their taste in music. Having said that, studies have ascertained that for people with social anxiety or who possess the demographic characteristics that can lead to discrimination in face-to-face environments, the Internet often provides a freer, safer, and more inclusive platform for interaction (Bargh & McKenna, 2004; Christopherson, 2007; Etzioni, 1999; Murthy, 2010; Okdie et al., 2011; Pierce, 2009).

Finally, Eric highlighted a historical limitation of wholly physical-based distribution that is not emotionally and socially loaded, but based on geographic proximity.

*I mean, I never got that experience of going to a record store, because I mean, I'm from Malaysia so music was very very hard to access. I think at most you had like one record store that had decent music. To actually buy physical copies of music in Malaysia was very expensive as well. So we didn't actually have that whole, um, privilege I'd say of going to a record store, talking to that one guy that has, I don't know, a nice band t-shirt or something like that. (Eric, FG One)*

*[Laughs] 'That's a nice t-shirt...' (Vincent, FG One)*

*Like my experience in Nelson! (Mike, FG One)*

In summary, in the contemporary media environment, where scarcity has been replaced by abundance (Anderson, 2008b), it would seem counter-intuitive to purposely withhold stock from customers. However in discussing this past phenomenon, participants' responses revealed generationally distinct mind sets when it came to attitudes surrounding the availability, distribution, and ownership of music. Broadly speaking, participants who

had begun sourcing music in the pre-Napster era saw merits in certain audience members having exclusive access to recorded music, whereas younger participants believed music should be easily accessible as well as easily shared with others. Considering Everett's (2007) observations that digital collections are less concerned with bragging about ownership of music as being able to connect and share music and knowledge with others, and McCourt's (2005) suggestion that the lessening focus on physical recordings deems communities of people interacting and sharing the new focus and commodity, there is the potential for more people than ever before to interact with likeminded individuals on the Internet, as well as greater potential for the sharing and exchange of digital files which may be infinitely duplicated rather than restricted to a limited number of private collections.

Though the independent brick-and-mortar store continues to provide enjoyment for a small niche of recorded music consumers, and participants in this study fitted the demographic that frequent these stores, data gathered reinforced the findings of Bargh & McKenna (2004), Weidman et al. (2012), and Pierce (2009), whereby those with social anxiety often feel more comfortable interacting online. Though the wider implications of shy or nervous people replacing face-to-face interaction with finding solace online are unclear, again the Internet appears to provide a potentially more inclusive space. Further considering 'inclusion', Eric's feedback emphasises the value of the Internet to individuals who would have traditionally had limited access to music and information. Just as Etzioni (1999) discussed, the Internet allows people access to information and communication irrespective of geographic location. Furthermore there is the potential to link people with similar tastes on a global scale rather than just locally, encouraging a greater sense of self-identity amongst a customisable network of like-minded individuals (Everett, 2007), a previously elusive phenomenon for individuals who faced similar restrictions to that Eric faced growing up in Malaysia.

#### **4.9 'It seemed like a unified kind of existence': A general discussion about 'community'**

The following comments from Sean, Jed, Tony, Nasir, and Jim encapsulate the sense of community present in certain independent brick-and-mortar record shops.

Sean and Jed recounted interacting in-store.

*You used to go to a record store and there'd be a community of people who play all different genres and listen to all different genres, you kind of mix and um... (Sean, FG Three)*

*There was the old Real Groovy thing where there was so many people there and I'd see like [inaudible] on the other side of the room and be like 'hey here's one for you'. The old Real Groovy thing doesn't really happen and that was a massive sort of social ground... (Jed, FG Three)*

Tony recalled the social element of not only being in-store, but planning the excursion beforehand.

*I'd say something that's been lost for me is that sense of social... that sense of community that you'd hook up with your mates and you'd be like 'I'll meet you at Groovy on Saturday'... (Tony, FG Three)*

Nasir described the significance of record shops to not only music-based communities, but communities based around specific ethnic groups as well, in this case Jamaicans living in West Yorkshire, UK.

*...that was the first time I went into a really black British Jamaican record store. So I went in, and it was just amazing, I'd never had that experience where you go in...*

*...I had one of the most kind of ecstatic epiphany moments... you know when you go into a record store and wish life could be like that...*

*...It was just before Christmas and people were in there and they were smoking and just enjoying a good vibe. It was packed, you could barely move. It was like, 'wow this is a record store', you know? (Nasir, FG, Four)*

*Do you remember anything like that Paz? (Interviewer)*

*I can't believe it. It's just so irritating because we don't have that in our generation. What's the closest thing we've got? I mean we've got Conch. (Paz, FG Four)*

Sean suggested contemporary record shops no longer have the same ambiance.

*And you don't know the staff. Whereas back in the day with BPM and Beat Merchants you kind of had a rapport with the staff. Now there's a big turnover, and you just don't know these people. And now it is less of a sort of social outing, and they're just sort of doing the sales, you're just in a queue, there's not the same kind of amount of time and banter, and um... (Sean, FG Three)*

*It's just a guy behind a counter isn't it? (Rex, FG Three)*

Jim reminisced about working in record shops in the 1980s and 1990s in Auckland, NZ.

*[On record shops in Auckland, New Zealand in the 1980s and 1990s] Had people in the music scene, you know, it wasn't just a job. They might have been musicians, deejays whatever...*

*...So most of those stores had good imports, and there was a great unity amongst them all, because you're all going to gigs. It seemed like a unified kind of existence. (Jim, Interview One)*

Pat described shopping in a brick-and-mortar record shop recently as an anomaly, seemingly surprised at being in the physical company of others searching for music.

*I was just saying to these guys, you know, like going to Real Groovy for the first time in probably years, after buying online. Going there and actually seeing people that I haven't seen in a long time and just being like 'wow...' (Pat, FG Four)*

Twenty four years-old at the time of the focus group, Rex conceded he had never felt a sense of community in a record shop.

*...well I mean I've never really walked into a record store and felt so at home there, that I know a whole lot of people that are there. (Rex, FG Three)*

These participants' comments could suggest that a community atmosphere in shops is an increasingly historical phenomenon. Sean stated 'you *used* to go into a record store and there's be a community of people' and 'now it is less of a sort of social outing, and they're just sort of doing the sales, you're just in a queue, there's not the same kind of amount of time and banter', Jed referred to 'the *old* Real Groovy thing', Tony admitted the social aspect of record stores is 'something that's been lost' for him, and Nasir reminisced about

being in-store at Reggae Revive in the 1980s rather than referring to a similar experience in the present. Pat described returning to Real Groovy after a number of years shopping for music online as ‘actually seeing people that I [sic] haven’t seen in a long time and just being like “wow”’, while Jim described working in shops in the 1980s and 1990s as not ‘just a job’ and a ‘unified kind of existence’. Younger participants Rex and Paz admitted they had not experienced anything comparable in brick-and-mortar record shops, Paz conceding ‘It’s just so irritating because we don’t have that in our generation’ and Rex noting ‘well I mean I’ve never really walked into a record store and felt so [sic] at home there’, observing ‘It’s just a guy behind a counter isn’t it?’

These sentiments are unsurprising, considering that the Internet now accommodates many of the social facets of the brick-and-mortar store environment that originally drew people to these spaces. The disintermediation that has occurred in the recorded music industry has lessened the significance of a number of middlepersons traditionally involved in the business, placing more power in the hands of artists and audience members and leaving both groups to forge a more direct relationship with each other. This might explain Sean’s observation that many store staff are now ‘just sort of doing sales’ while he is ‘just in a queue’. For the majority of music audiences, particularly younger audience members who have principally existed in a world with Internet connection, stores might seem an illogical and unnecessary ‘step’ in the consumption and connection process. In a world of increased convenience and portability (McIntyre, 2011), engaging in the record shop process might seem just as inconvenient as a large housebound playback device in comparison to a portable file player. Just as Nuttall et al. (2011) found, accessibility to music is of crucial importance to young consumers, more so than ownership. Taking into consideration this attitude, combined with an environment where music piracy has become normalised (Dilmeri et al., 2011; Nuttall et al., 2011; Rojek, 2011; Winter, 2012) and the price of recorded music on average has significantly dropped, leaving home to visit a specific space and pay for what you can access anywhere for low or no-cost might appear counter-intuitive. Consequently, in a climate where frequenting brick-and-mortar record shops is not how the majority of audience members now source recorded music and information about music, and younger participant Rex’s experience of stores is that of ‘just a guy behind

a counter', this section explores how audience members—particularly those highly engaged music consumers who traditionally frequented and supported independent shops—now convene, socialise, and interact with like-minded individuals. Ralph suggested that a similar phenomenon is now occurring online.

*So that sort of community culture vibe I feel has really disappeared quite a lot. I mean there's still like a lot of record stores in Wellington, they're not of that kind of persuasion anymore. (Mike, FG One)*

*You know what though? What's crazy is this whole process you're talking about has been replaced and replicated digitally... (Ralph, FG One)*

*Totally. (Vincent, FG One)*

*...I mean it's funny for me now, where I'm in a position that, say someone who's 25 wants to contact me and talk to me about something, so rather than talking to me in a record store, they'll send me a friend request on Facebook or follow me on Twitter or something, and strike up some conversation related to music. And then depending on how that goes, I mean you might end up going and meeting them for coffee or something like that. So... there is a similar process to it with the way in which it happens, but maybe doesn't feel as rewarding as perhaps the past might. (Ralph, FG One)*

Despite Ralph stating that 'the whole process... has been replicated digitally', in the same exchange he describes a situation where in order for him to complete a social 'transaction', he 'might end up going and meeting them for a coffee or something like that'. This appears to indicate that the *whole* process has not in fact been replicated digitally. Though Ralph did not reflect on the reasons why when he feels a particular affinity for someone he interacts with online he will eventually meet face-to-face with them, it appears doing so somehow validates their relationship. The social process Ralph describes is similar to the findings of Bargh & McKenna (2004), Matzat (2010) and Sessions (2010), whereby a mixture of face-to-face and online interaction establishes a greater sense of trust in relationships. Ralph's comment 'depending on how that goes' echoes in particular Bargh & McKenna's (2004) observations that when relationships formed online get close enough, and specifically when sufficient trust has been established, people will often then meet each other in a face-to-face sphere. Whether Ralph is seeking the extra 'bandwidth' of face-to-face communication in order to form a more complete impression of people (Galston, 2000), or has a desire to

feel closer to those he feels a particular affinity with online (Mallen et al., 2003; Okdie et al., 2011), it appears that for Ralph a wholly online relationship is somehow not entirely fulfilling, necessitating the need to meet in person. Nevertheless Ralph's description of the whole social process depicts a sustained period of interaction prior to meeting for a coffee, suggesting that in an increasingly digitally connected world people may be using face-to-face interactions to supplement online environments, rather than using the Internet to supplement their activities and interests in the physical world as Everett (2007) suggested less than a decade beforehand.

Irrespective of exactly what proportion of contemporary social interactions occur face-to-face or online, there was a consensus amongst participants that recorded music-based communities now principally exist online.

*So, young and old, where is this happening now? Where are music communities coming together? (Interviewer)*

*It's all online. (Lee, FG Four)*

*Online. (Paz, FG Four)*

#### **4.9.1 'Falling into a YouTube wormhole': Counterculture, capitalism & community**

Mike identified user-created-audio distribution platform Soundcloud as a community hub.

*Sites like Soundcloud have a really big community emphasis I guess. I find following and seeing what other people are commenting on.... like you can fall into a YouTube wormhole you can fall into a Soundcloud wormhole in a way... and, sort of comments and that kind of stuff... (Mike, FG One)*

For Hannah, social media sites Twitter and Facebook facilitate music-based interpersonal interaction.

*Twitter is a big source of new music for me as well. And that involves conversations because it's not just like I'm looking at somebody's link and then accepting that. I mean I'll look at the link, but I'll look at the conversation underneath. (Hannah, Interview Three)*



*So there's a sense of community on Twitter? (Interviewer)*

*Definitely. Definitely. (Hannah, Interview Three)*

*So where else online do you feel a sense of community around music? (Interviewer)*

*I... I guess Facebook comes into it. But that's more because the band will post something and because I'm following the band or the artist... (Hannah, Interview Three)*

Mike cited video and photo-based social networking site Instagram as a means of connecting with people with similar interests.

*Instagram is quite big among record collectors, people showing off their finds and stuff, and there's a bit of a community around that. (Mike, FG One)*

Drew suggested similarly.

*Instagram is a funny one. Because pretty much I use Instagram to take photos of records on my shelves, and then I'll tag in the artists. So I've got this one dude he just started liking a whole bunch of my photos. Random guy. Must follow the artist's hashtag. So then I started looking at this, and there's similar photos of records I have, and now I'm following him, and then I'll see he buys something, and I'll comment 'yeah yeah, I've got this!' So there's a, we're, the chances of us actually ever meeting in person are really slim, but I've found there's someone out there with very similar tastes to me buying the same records. I look at his photos... if I did meet him we'd just be geeking out. (Drew, Interview Two)*

Nasir mentioned how much easier it is to share your musical preferences and discoveries now.

*Sharing your tastes with others. It's easier to do that now. I mean, if you're on social media and you want to share a tune on Facebook or Twitter or whatever with your friends, then it's just easy to do right? (Nasir, FG Four)*

Curiously, though popular music is often associated with counterculture, and participants in this study identified themselves as disinterested in mainstream practices, Mike, Hannah, Drew, and Nasir all described interacting with online communities hosted by large media

conglomerates. Whereas Gracon's (2009, 2010) studies suggested that the countercultural and anti-corporate nature of many independent record shops is part of the appeal of these spaces for regular patrons, Mike, Hannah, Drew, and Nasir's suggestions that Twitter, Instagram, and Soundcloud now host similarly likeminded communities presents an arguably McDonaldized (Ritzer, 1993) update of traditional brick-and-mortar 'hang out' spaces, not to mention a potentially exploitative corporate-run environment in which to congregate (Baym, 2015). Those who contributed to Gracon's (2009) study valued the record shop community for fostering an alternative type of human interaction based on a belief system incorporating independence, corporate resistance, and the uniquely local. Gracon's (2009) findings are potentially at odds with embracing and utilising the social networking products of large international companies, though Mike, Hannah, Drew, and Nasir cited these websites and applications as the dominant online community hosts.

Participants' apparently apolitical embrace of corporate-operated social hubs might be a consequence of the research questions not directly following this critical line of enquiry. However there is also scope to suggest that participants' responses reflect that social media usage is now far more embedded in people's lives than it was during Gracon's (2009) study. The social, cultural, and economic ramifications of these relatively new hegemonic media structures are not yet being as widely critically evaluated as more long-standing institutions such as the major recording labels have been (Brown, 2008; Graham et al., 2004; Jones, 2009; Lam & Tan, 2001; Madden, 2009; Rojek, 2011; Taylor & Piper, 2012; Winter, 2012). If spaces like the brick-and-mortar independent record shop counter the more widespread presence of homogenised corporate cultural products and business spaces (Gracon, 2009; Simpson, 2000), but individuals traditionally aligned with the counterculture are increasingly congregating online using a pseudo-individualised social media page, there are questions raised as to what is truly unique, what is uniquely local, and in turn how the concept and value of localness translates in an increasingly globally connected society.

Despite having suggested that transnational social media sites might represent a more McDonaldized (Ritzer, 1993) and pseudo-individualised experience than more independent community spaces, these services do provide the opportunity to construct a customised online profile as well as interact with specific user-defined groups and individuals.

Therefore, though sites like Facebook operate on a global scale with consistency as if the different parts of the planet they operate in are a single entity, the 'unique' experience they provide to individual users might be interpreted as less culturally heterogeneous than the corporate homogenisation of the physical retail landscape Gracon (2010), Steele (1981), and Coca-Stefaniak (2010) deride. Matador Records' (2011) blog described independent record shops as breeding grounds for culture, places where friends and network connections are made, where a sense of community is felt, and spaces where you can exchange, interact and forget about the worries of the day; a similar depiction to that of the social media experience (and an experience debatably more community-oriented than patronising the brick-and-mortar outlet of a global retail group). In an environment where music-based groups (often countercultural by nature) are now congregating on corporate-controlled social media services, the processes of McDonaldization (Ritzer, 1993), and in more general terms globalisation, seemed less concerning to participants than they did to individuals who took part in Gracon's (2009) study of The House of Records.

In this increasingly interconnected and globalised environment, participants suggested that subcultures are now less clearly defined and that individuals are now cross-pollinating influences and styles.

*So if there are less record shops than ever before, how do you think subcultures and the like are staying together? The indie shop throughout history has been a hub for a number of different subcultures. (Interviewer)*

*Um.... online? I reckon a lot of... not me specifically but I see it... I follow people on Twitter... people who might have hung out in shops at a certain time if they're all into the same music... different musicians from different places you see them becoming friends on Twitter. And then you see them playing a gig together. I guess online in general... but also I don't think there's really clear defined subcultures because people can listen to like black metal and hip hop... (Bob, FG Three)*

*I think it's the fashion, you know, with the music in the '70s and '80s there was a certain look for that kind of music. And it was part of the selling of the music, a certain following. Whereas now, it's all on the Internet straight away, you can see what this band in Liverpool look like, and you're not going to copy 'em in Auckland, whereas in the '70s and '80s.... the fashion all over the world is not like it, well, um, like the Manchester one with the baggy scene... (Terry, FG Two)*

*OK so we're kind of coming full-circle. So things seem to be more cross-pollinated now, yeah? (Interviewer)*

*Yeah you can like a lot more and it's not like 'what are you doing here?' It used to be, 'I've got a Mohawk, I'm into punk, this is what I like, don't come near me unless you're a punk.' Whereas now you can do what you like... (Terry, FG Two)*

*Yeah, you show me one hardcore kid that doesn't listen to hip hop. (Jack, FG Two)*

Though participants only referenced apparel and music choices, visual affectations of subcultures often appropriated by those from outside the culture, their core sentiments appeared to be that the connectivity and immediacy of the Internet has led to people drawing from a wider variety of influences when forming and maintaining their cultural preferences, rather than forming or aligning with distinct subcultures which differentiate themselves from both dominant culture and other subcultural groups. This is in contrast to such distinct subcultures historically forming in geographically specific locations such as 'Manchester one [sic] with the baggy scene' ('Madchester' in the late 1980s and early 1990s), or hip hop in late 1970s New York. Jack, Terry, and Bob's suggestion that the relevance of subcultures and geographically specific scenes is waning reaffirms Hill's (2001) observation that modern audience members have less anxieties about conflicting music genres, time periods and value systems, though neither Hill (2001) or these participants appear to have considered the ramifications of this to the preservation of uniquely local cultures and environments. Building on Terry's discussion about the visual elements of local music scenes—Mohawks and baggy pants—if music-based communities now primarily congregate online, and often uniquely local spaces like the independent brick-and-mortar record shop are dwindling in numbers, different regions might lack their own unique incarnations of the old clothing, records, flyers, magazines and photographs that make Blue Chair Records distinct to Ybor City, Florida (Simpson, 2010). Furthermore, physical localities in general might increasingly lack the physical manifestations of 'stories' Davie (2013) argues are increasingly replaced by pepper grinders, moisturisers, and mobile phones on the High Street of many towns and cities.

In the environment participants described, where people predominantly convene on social media websites, and recorded music communities and tastes are less geographically distinct, the findings of Gracon (2010) do not directly translate. Gracon (2010) framed localisation as 'vernacular culture' and globalisation as 'mall culture' (p. 139), however interacting on social media fulfils most elements of his description of what constitutes a vernacular culture. According to Gracon (2010), vernacular culture is a culture that has been developed by a people to express themselves to others, and that encourages cultural forms made and organised by everyday people for their own pleasure. Though social media was not developed by the masses that utilise it, it does allow individuals to express themselves in individual ways to others, as well as organise (post) cultural forms (videos, articles, pictures and the like), including material produced by them or other amateur producers if they wish. Thus Gracon's (2010) sentiments that vernacular cultures counter the negative effects of a globalised culture might now seem problematic, though his proposal that face-to-face vernacular culture expresses localness raises questions as to whether supporting and preserving geographically local communities will maintain relevance in an increasingly globally connected society. Just as Haythornwaite and Kendall (2010) observed, people are now using the Internet in ways that both challenge and reinforce traditionally held notions of community, and transforming both how to define and retain communal identity in both on and offline settings.

If brick-and-mortar independently operated retail businesses have the capacity to support and promote local events and heritage, develop familiarity, and build relationships as well as emotional connections in local communities (Brennan, 2000; Clarke & Banga, 2010; Coca-Stefaniak et al., 2010; Hare et al., 2001; Jen, 2010), but corporate retailers are increasingly replacing them in the retail landscape (Clarke & Banga, 2010), the rapid uptake of social media usage might further diminish people's engagement with and concern for communities in their own geographically specific areas. McIntyre (2009, 2011) suggested that independent brick-and-mortar record stores exist in the physical and cognitive maps of successive generations within local communities. If people's experiences are increasingly digitally-based, then potentially successive generations' cognitive maps will manifest themselves entirely differently, and 'digital' memories and identities will take precedence

over the physical. In this environment the notion of civic engagement may change; analogous to the changes Putnam (2000) described as occurring with the introduction of the television. Putnam suggested less engagement with civil life starts with television, where representations of people have replaced interacting with real people during the already isolating activity of watching the screen. Whether the Internet encourages less or more civil engagement is arguably less significant to current digital-led changes in communication and interaction as defining what individuals now and in the future deem relevant communities to engage with. Geographically, local communities might begin to seem less relevant to people increasingly embracing similarly meaningful yet digitally-based and geographically unspecific communal groupings.

When discussing the social habits of younger music enthusiasts, Hannah and Ralph observed that recorded music communities are now most often being formed online rather than in and around physical spaces.

*They're cultivating their own little communities based on access to communication. And that's great, I think that's awesome. I think it's awesome that my nephew who's sixteen talks to his friends about music online. (Hannah, Interview Three)*

*You have a lot of these younger people in music who are really meeting each other on Soundcloud or Tumblr or Bandcamp. So definitely this thing happens in the real world and online in a similar way. (Ralph, FG One)*

Twenty-two-year-old Eric confirmed that it is easier to 'get to know your scene better' with an independent site like Bandcamp.

*I was gonna say the same thing about Bandcamp. Because I think these days with Bandcamp you kind of attract a younger kind of like an independent crowd at the same time. Kind of like kids that went through that whole phase where you had to sell CDs at the same time... but now with things like Bandcamp it's a lot easier to get to know your scene better, because with comments and all that kind of stuff you can actually find merch and all that linked on Bandcamp. So I think that Bandcamp is a really good platform for these kind of people... especially with indie, indie crowd. (Eric, FG One)*

Hannah and Ralph's observations, as well as Eric's experiences, reaffirm that the socially relevant experiences that traditionally occurred in independent brick-and-mortar record stores (Fullington, 2008; Gracon, 2009, 2010; McIntyre, 2009, 2011; Simpson, 2000) are now predominantly transpiring online. Consequently, McIntyre's (2009) claim that technology has reduced the number of similar public socio-cultural spaces is less convincing. Eric utilises Bandcamp to get to know his scene better, and Hannah's nephew and his friends are interacting together based on access to modern communication technologies. Although commentators have lamented the loss of shops as educational spaces (Gracon, 2009, 2010; Jones, 2009; Marino & Toller, 2008; Taylor & Piper, 2012), the Internet provides access to more information now than what was available historically (as 51 year-old Nasir attested to in Section 4.41 when he stated he had learned more about music in the past decade than ever before). Similarly, the trust that customers place in the recommendations and advice of store employees (Gracon, 2010; McIntyre, 2009) might now be transferred to the advice of online peers, echoing Everett's (2007) suggestion that the Internet facilitates communal connoisseurship. Thus as Ralph described, 'this thing happens in the real world and online in a similar way'; social and cultural spaces have not so much been lost as been reinvented by means of technological change.

In the context of being an artist rather than an audience member, Vincent explained how interacting online had allowed him to connect globally with people with the same specific musical interests, rather than locally with people with more diverse preferences.

*It's such a massive thing, like I remember when record stores started to dry up back in the mid-2000s, um, a lot of us kind of jumped online and it kind of straight away went to a much more global kind of reach I guess. And so instead of going and seeing the same five guys at your local record store every Saturday, you all of a sudden got in touch with 200 people who were all around the world who were possibly even much more focussed into your immediate interests. And so that's become really powerful...*

*... and like you'll get people in a local record store who aren't into the same stuff but they kind of like tolerate it or whatever, and they talk about stuff, but it doesn't really mesh... like you get that face-to-face interaction, but I think what it has been kind of replaced with is something that's even more powerful and more streamlined in terms of getting stuff done. (Vincent, FG One)*

Pat reflected similarly, suggesting online interaction is 'a better experience' where 'you get to pick as well'.

*But, I think having that online presence, and meeting people online, you know, you can to some extent get a better experience of the community you are looking for. I guess you get to pick as well. (Pat, FG Four)*

In terms of meeting people with very similar tastes and interests, Vincent and Pat both described interacting online as an ultimately more productive experience than making connections in traditional music-based face-to-face communities. As a travelling deejay and band musician, Vincent recalled the change that occurred when he began to engage with likeminded people online and 'instead of going and seeing the same five guys at your local record store every Saturday, you all of a sudden got in touch with 200 people who were all around the world who were possibly even much more focussed into your immediate interests'. As a reggae deejay and radio show host, Pat described his experiences similarly, in that online he can more easily 'pick' the people and groups relevant to his preferred genre. Vincent described his experiences with networking before he began utilising the Internet as 'people in a local record store who aren't into the same stuff but they kind of like tolerate it or whatever', conceding 'what it has been kind of replaced with is something that's even more powerful and more streamlined in terms of getting stuff done'. The re-intermediated process (Hawkins et al., 1999) both described is positive in regard to their maximising the potential of their particular musical interests and tastes, though in a more holistic sense may have some ramifications in terms of fewer instances of different music scenes and subcultures cross-pollinating. Brick-and-mortar shops often consist of a cross-section of local music cultures, ideally encouraging cross-cultural interaction, understanding, education, and even musical collaborations. This topic is not raised so as to claim this type of interaction is ultimately more favourable than the approach Vincent and Pat described, rather the topic is mooted in order to suggest that increasingly niched and globalised music communities might ultimately change the directions in which popular music continues to develop.



#### 4.9.2 'Music harks back to a tribal thing': Alone, together?

In this apparently increasingly connected world, Sean described how he listens to music less in the company of other people than he used to, attributing the change to people now spending time in the digital realm in instances when they would have previously interacted face-to-face.

*I'd have to say that the social aspect for me has gone down a lot. I'm more often in my own space. You know, the being in a place where people are discussing music has completely gone. I might have discovered it online, but then I mainly listen to music in my own time away from people. (Sean, FG Three)*

*So do you think that is because you've got older, or is that to do with the online thing? (Interviewer)*

*Well I think we just spend a lot more time in the digital realm, universally. And less time together in groups. (Sean, FG Three)*

*Yeah that's about it. Most of my discussions are online. Facebook or somewhere. Someone throws up a track and I go 'oh that's shit' or 'oh that's good' or that's whatever. And then the debate will ensue with different opinions. (Si, FG Three)*

Sean's observations imply that now people predominantly source their music online, there is not only less need to interact face-to-face when procuring music, but also less inclination to listen to music with others in physical environments. Sean's reflections seem at odds with some of the more celebratory accounts of the influence of technology on modern audience practices. Hill (2001) observed that audience members now have a portfolio of choices and less anxiety, then McIntyre (2011) stated that new technologies offer audience members interpersonal values previously unavailable. Similarly Parry et al. (2012) suggested that the Internet allows greater communication and engagement between audience members. Though these findings are consistent with many of the practices described by participants in this study, they do not account for what interpersonal values or specific types of engagement with fellow audience members may be lost in the contemporary climate. Sean's phrasing 'I might have discovered it online, *but* then I listen to music in my own time away from people' suggests there is interpersonal interaction involved in the online discovery and acquisition process, though for Sean the interaction is not the same as 'being in a *place* where people are discussing music'. The place Sean misses

is presumably a physical environment with face-to-face interaction, but more specifically the phenomenon he misses is listening to music in the company of others. Sean is interacting with other people online, though at the same time he feels alone in comparison to past experiences he has had socially around music.

Conversely, Jed argued that his social outlook has increased as a result of music-based Internet activity, though Sean countered that the style of interaction is not the same as face-to-face discussions and gatherings.

*I think my social outlook has increased because of things like Soundcloud and, even YouTube I've got 400 things which I follow which are generally music. I do a blog of music videos so through Twitter and all of that I'm actually talking to artists and hearing what the artists are listening to and the managers and that sort of stuff, instead of just the people down at the record store. So I think my group is just a bit wider now. (Jed, FG Three)*

*Yeah but I find it's one-to-one though. For me it's less than a group that I will talk to, say one friend and what they've found that day, you know? And we'll discuss that and he'll send me a link, whereas it used to be we'd have a whole group of people discussing music, now it's more of a one-to-one process. And I find that some of the services, you know which show you a lot of data about what people are looking at, and their playlist, is just way too much for me to take in... (Sean, FG Three)*

*... Jed I think you said your social circles have become more global, and then Sean I think you said online has led to a smaller group... (Interviewer)*

*No what I meant was I discuss music on a one-to-one basis, like I still talk to people globally, but one-to-one rather than, like it used to be, in a group of people you know? Seven or eight, you know? Discussing a tune. Listening to a tune together. But now, globally, it's one-to-one for me. (Sean, FG Three)*

*Yeah. That's undeniable. (Jed, FG Three)*

Jed and Sean's conversation highlighted three key changes that appear to have occurred with people interacting online. Firstly, as Jed described, it is now easier to interact and make contact with music industry stakeholders other than fellow audience members. Secondly, as Sean identified, interaction with other individuals is increasingly 'one-to-one rather than, like it used to be, in a group of people you know? Seven or eight, you know?' Finally, as both described, interaction and musical discovery and acquisition now takes place

on a global rather than a local scale. It would seem that Jed and Sean are now able to interact with more like-minded individuals than ever before, but doing so is less about these interactions taking part in groups than being one-on-one from terminal to terminal; 'network-based' rather than 'group-based' as DiMaggio et al. (2001) and Wellman (2001) proposed. Though some early and in turn relatively speculative studies on how the Internet might affect human interaction were fairly pessimistic, and the Internet has linked people in ways not possible less than two decades ago, Sean's feedback does align with some of the findings of these early investigations (Driskell & Lyon, 2002; Kraut et al., 1998). In this network rather than group-based environment Sean describes what Kraut (1998) predicted, where he feels a degree of loneliness before a sense of community online. His comments also echo the findings of Driskell and Lyon (2002), who claimed that online relationships lack the intimacy and emotion of face-to-face relationships.

Discussing other participants' listening habits exposed a similarly solitary existence, where technological change has led to the embracing of devices that encourage private listening, rather than communal engagement.

*I think I'm listening... more private listening. I tend not to listen to—I still do it—but the balance of listening to music with the headphones on compared to out in the room has changed. So a lot of it is private listening now, much more than it used to be, whether I'm in the house, sitting on the laptop doing other stuff, or, you know, walking around with a phone. (Nasir, FG Four)*

*Yeah sometimes you know... my girlfriend's watching her movie and I've got my earphones in on the other side of the bed [laughs] (Craig, FG Four)*

*[laughter]*

*Looking up tunes and shit... (Craig, FG Four)*

*'The light, the light!' (Pat, FG Four)*

*Sounds familiar. (Nasir, FG Four)*

*[laughter]*

*But then we realised, 'what are we doing? Let's just watch TV together'. (Craig, FG Four)*

*'You haven't even spoken to me tonight...' (Pat, FG Four)*

*So Nasir mentioned he is doing more isolated listening. Who else is doing more listening alone now than they would have in the past? Headphones? What else? (Interviewer)*

*Yeah, headphones, earphones. (Nasir, FG Four)*

*Laptop speakers. (Pat, FG Four)*

*On the move or just at home when no one's home and it's turned up real loud. (John, FG Four)*

*So describe what it used to be like? (Interviewer)*

*You'd come together to share music in a sense. (Nasir, FG Four)*

*Sitting around the radio. (Pat, FG Four)*

*Yeah exactly. (Paz, FG Four)*

*Yeah the radio. (Nasir, FG Four)*

*Sounds like a million years ago now, right!?! (Interviewer)*

*[laughter]*

*Sitting around in the shed... (Pat, FG Four)*

*Yeah that's the thing though. Just sitting around with some mates and someone puts on some music. (Paz, FG Four)*

*Drink some beers. (Nasir, FG Four)*

*Yeah, absolutely. (Paz, FG Four)*

In short, the rise in popularity of portable devices with headphone outputs rather than speakers appears to have changed participants' listening habits, and in turn encouraged solitary listening. As Nasir identified 'the balance of listening to music with the headphones on compared to out in the room has changed', and Craig had found himself in close proximity to his partner, though both were privately engaged in separate media experiences, seemingly together but somehow alone. Though a regular occurrence in the not-so-distant past, the final exchange between Nasir, Pat, Paz, and John prompted laughter as listening to music in a group felt like an antiquated activity. Participants humorously attempted to further date the phenomenon, describing 'sitting around the radio' in 'the

shed'. It would seem that portable personal players, described by respondents in McIntyre's (2011) study as allowing them to access music 'out in the world and 'providing a soundtrack to being 'on the move', have encouraged solitary and private listening; even when in the company of others. Craig might have his headphones on listening to music someone has shared with him online, in turn linking him to a music-based community. However he does so in private, despite his girlfriend being next to him.

Craig had further concerns regarding being tethered to technology, suggesting that properly bonding with others when face-to-face might now be a lesser occurring phenomenon.

*For me, I've been severely limiting my exposure to smart phones, like actively and consciously as they've come in because I've seen all my friends just, you know, they're out with their friends and they're just going [imitates head down looking at phone]. You see couples on a date doing the same thing and it's just like 'why are you even going out?' Just go home and get on Facebook or something. And for me I, you know, I come home from an awesome night out listening to loud music and feeling it physically and you get a rush from that, but I'm not really gonna get that same feeling from listening to music on my laptop. It's, for me, you can't compare that. So I feel that's a loss when people aren't coming together to enjoy music and to dance. (Craig, FG Four)*

Craig has made a conscious decision to limit his exposure to smart phones, insinuating there is now less face-to-face interaction as people are increasingly tethered to personal media and communications devices. For Craig, listening to music on his laptop is a very different experience to 'an awesome night out listening to loud music and feeling it physically' and he feels 'a loss when people aren't coming together to enjoy music and to dance'. Thom alluded to the power of 'sharing music in a space'.

*Yeah, sharing music in a space. 'Cause music harks back to a tribal thing. It becomes such a powerful experience. You can only have that with a bunch of people around you. (Thom, FG Three)*

Si described how music can enhance public experiences.

*You go down to Mission Bay in the weekend there's huge groups of families there, someone's playing some music just, that's when you do feel quite alive and part of*

*the community... you know... I've got nothing to do with that family, they're a bunch of Samoans having a picnic, having KFC, no idea who they are, don't know them, but they are playing some cool tunes. You just... that becomes uplifting. (Si, FG Three)*

Like Thom, Craig referenced the long-standing significance of music when people come together in groups.

*And it's quite old in music too, like sound system culture and then that moving to the UK, it actually creates a massive community around those gatherings and stuff. And now we're so dispersed and diversified everyone's just listening in their rooms. (Craig, FG Four)*

Participants' observations regarding the power and impact of music being enhanced in communal settings might explain the recent rise in concert, show, festival, and gig attendance (Anderson, 2008a; Dahud, 2011; Holt, 2010; Masnick, 2012; Mortimer et al., 2012; Rojek, 2011; Shuker, 2013). Whereas the phenomenon has been attributed to artists giving away copies of their music in order to build crowds for their live shows (Anderson, 2008a; Dahud, 2011; Holt, 2010; Rojek, 2011; Shuker, 2013), and piracy of recorded music driving up demand for live experiences (Mortimer et al., 2012), it might also be suggested that in an increasingly digitally connected society, people are 'appointment gathering' at events based on music. Perhaps there is now less necessity to attend places like local bars and venues on a regular basis, as people are now constantly linked together on the Internet which lessens the need for frequent face-to-face interactions. Resultantly, people appear to be more inclined to spending money on less regular but more large-scale events like music festivals, arena concerts, and the like, such that they experience the 'tribal thing' Thom described. Drew described how meeting with others face-to-face is now less serendipitous, and now people need 'a reason for everyone to come together'.

*I guess it's music events, or culture events in which they kind of share a similar interest. So it could be a community of beat makers will all show up when Tall Black Guy does a beat set. I'll look around the room and I can name all the different people. Some of them will know each other, but not everyone does, you just see that community coming together for a particular event. I think it's basically gigs... it's gigs. My first five years in Auckland, everyone I met was through Real Groovy, because all the music heads were still shopping in Real Groovy. And now it's like, I*

*meet them more through Base FM. I think you bump into people, but I think that community or culture of those people's face time is only when there's a gig on there's a reason for everyone to come together. (Drew, Interview Two)*

Paz's feedback was similar to Drew's thoughts, as he reminisced about now defunct venue Rakinos, but did not identify a contemporary physical space that functions similarly.

*I feel like, gigs push it more than online. Like when I was 18 and I started going out to these gigs, and this is Rakinos when Home Brew started, you'd go there and you'd meet everyone. And you'd literally just talk to people. Rakinos was the community hub. You'd go there and you'd meet people, and as soon as you'd meet them you'd know they're going to be there next week as well. So when you go there you see them again and you sort of build a relationship. So I think that was definitely a community, at Rakinos. You'd go there on a Wednesday and even the barmen, you'd sit down and have a drink with him. And in saying that, it was a big reflection on Auckland underground hip hop at the time. Like, I met everyone that I know there... (Paz, FG Four)*

Mark and Eric suggested that musical instrument retailers might foster a similar sense of community to that traditionally found in independent record shops.

*...the most music conversation I've had is places like The Rock Shop or other places that sell instruments rather than albums. I feel like the conversations have kind of moved there. (Mark, FG One)*

*That's very true. I think for the younger crowd the music instrument store is more of the kind of place that you go and have a conversation with like-minded people. (Eric, FG One)*

As the only current 'day-to-day' option suggested, the musical instrument retailer seems a similar social space to the record shop in many ways. Utilising McIntyre's (2009) categorisation of what people derive from patronising brick-and-mortar record shops, individuals who congregate at instrument stores might also seek 'refuge' [emphasis in original] with fellow musicians (that being a sense of 'insiderness' within a sought after enjoyable environment rather than a hiding place from any threat), 'credibility' [emphasis in original] in terms of the knowledge of staff, and 'iconography/mythology' [emphasis in original], such as musical instruments and displays on walls.

#### 4.9.3 'How the person looks in their face': Evaluating face-to-face and online interaction

Echoing points of discussion raised in 4.8.1, Ralph and Nasir pointed out that face-to-face environments are not suitable to all temperaments, and that having a choice between engaging online or face-to-face provides an overall more inclusive set of options for social contact than ever before.

*There are bad things about gigs and clubs as well, you know. Like they're not always the best places to sit, they're not always the best environments for some audience members or whatever. Or the drink thing. So it's not like every social hub for music is always a great place. (Nasir, FG Four)*

*So they could be kind of intimidating places if you were unlucky, just... [to Craig] I agree with you completely that there is something kind of special about loud music, feeling the music, being with people; that communication. But it can also be getting your head kicked in or whatever... (Nasir, FG Four)*

*Not getting in! (Pat, FG Four)*

*Yeah not even getting in. (Nasir, FG Four)*

*It's not even a generational thing; it's just that there are different types of people. Some people in the past didn't have the option of engaging with music the way the Internet and social media allows, so they had to go out and take part to hear music and be part of it. Now they don't have to. And it turns out some of them never actually wanted to do that. Then there's going to be other people who are maybe introduced to music through the Internet, then they're going to get to go and have these experiences in real life, and they're going to go 'wow, this is heaps cooler than just talking to people about music online'. So I think it's more about, there's more of a scope. (Ralph, FG One)*

Nasir's key concern about live venues was that some are not particularly comfortable spaces, both in terms of the physical environment and the potential for problems with intoxicated patrons, or even violence. Considering unprovoked violence committed by an intoxicated patron might be spurred by that individual making undeserved judgements based on factors such as the victim's race, age, ethnicity, or gender, the Internet lessens the likelihood that individuals project judgments on others based on demographic characteristics (Christopherson, 2007). Thus for those who might be marginalised in certain



settings, as the Pakistani youth in Murthy's (2010) study often were as a result of Islamophobia, the Internet provides a potentially more inclusive and ultimately safe environment for people to express themselves and interact with others (Bargh & McKenna, 2004; Weidman et al., 2012). As Ralph observed, 'it's not even a generational thing; it's just that there are different types of people'

In an environment where participants acknowledged they now engage in most of their music-based interactions online, participants were asked to consider the differences between face-to-face and online communication. Roger, Sean, Hannah all described online communication as more limited than face-to-face interaction.

*...while they're both passing information, talking about a record, Facebook chats or talking on forums is a highly filtered means of communication compared to direct face-to-face interaction in which you've got thousands of you know, a thousand times more data coming into your sphere. What the day feels like compared to sitting in your room and typing, you know one finger for most people, compared to discussing and seeing the looks on other people's faces, say getting genuinely excited about a track. Or they recommend things... (Roger, FG One)*

*I think you don't get the physical cues at the end of the day. When you're with someone and everything you actually kind of get to know their sarcasm or kind of wit, and I think there's a lot of trolls online, it sort of just changes the dynamic completely. (Sean, FG Three)*

*... it's fine to read a great summation of what an album felt like to a certain person, but I want to watch how the person looks in their face when they talk about it. (Hannah, Interview Three)*

Participants' feedback about the lack of physical cues when interacting online suggest that the extra information face-to-face interaction provides, including aspects such as visual cues and tone of voice, reduce ambiguity as to the overall intention and tone of the message being communicated (Bargh & McKenna, 2004; Galston, 2000; Mallen, Day, & Green, 2003; Okdie et al., 2011; Pierce, 2009; Weidman et al., 2012). Sean *thinks* there are 'a lot of trolls online', but at the same time might need more time to 'kind of get to know their sarcasm or kind of wit' in order to properly assess others' intentions. Roger described

‘sitting in your room and typing, you know one finger for most people’ compared to ‘face-to-face interaction in which you’ve got thousands of you know, a thousand times more data coming into your sphere’ ‘discussing and seeing the looks on other people’s faces, say getting genuinely excited about a track’. Hannah suggested reading the thoughts of others is ‘fine’ but does not compare to watching ‘how the person looks in their face when they talk about it’. During the following comments Sean conceded that a lack of physical cues might slow the process of meaningfully getting to know somebody, stating that ‘in the flesh, you get a lot more information quickly’.

*I think you get to know someone quicker if... I think... through that process, because of the facial expressions etc, whereas I think it takes a lot more time online to actually get to know someone, where they are coming from... (Sean, FG One)*

*Yeah but I think also, you can kind of gauge as humans in interaction on a social basis, as in, in the flesh, you get a lot more information quickly... (Sean, FG One)*

*He’s right. (Mark, FG One)*

*Quicker, yeah. (Tony, FG One)*

*And you can form an opinion of someone and understand them a lot quicker. Whereas I think with online it takes more time with the language they use, yeah... it takes longer to kind of get your head around someone. (Sean, FG Threee)*

*So we’re in a world that’s quicker, but it’s taking us longer to get to know people properly? (Interviewer)*

*Yeah, ‘cause I think we are still a very visual kind of... humans are still very visual, take a lot of cues visually, and audibly as well in regard to how someone can type something, it’s the tone which can change everything. So even when you just hear it spoken it can change the context. (Tony, FG Three)*

Roger suggested that typing in comparison to talking significantly changes the dynamics of human interactions.

*It takes a lot longer to type. You can totally jam when you are talking to someone, you can discuss, you can see how they are interacting about stuff and that will cue other ideas of where to go... (Roger, FG One)*

These observations suggest that interacting online is not only often a slower process than interacting face-to-face, but also a process that leads to a greater chance for misunderstandings when communicating with others. As Tony asserted, ‘humans are still very visual, take a lot of cues visually, and audibly as well in regard to how someone can type something, it’s the tone which can change everything’. Where Suler (2004) argued that not having to deal with someone’s immediate reaction online leads to social disinhibition, the key problem participants in this study had with the pace of online interactions differed. Participants’ references to the pace of online communication—‘it takes a lot more time online’, ‘in the flesh, you get a lot more information quickly’, ‘it takes a lot longer to type’—suggested much more information can be exchanged in face-to-face settings in a shorter time frame. In other words, participants were frustrated by the length of time it can take to get to know someone online, as well as the potential for misunderstandings during that process. Participants’ feedback on interacting online in comparison to face-to-face echoed the findings of Galston (2000), Mallen et al. (2003), and Okdie et al. (2011), in that the presence of tone of voice and body language in face-to-face settings more easily revealed others’ motivations and identities. In the absence of these social cues, and without the social obligations that interacting with someone face-to-face and in real time present, Tony indicated that he feels little duty of care taken when interacting with others online.

*I gotta put my hand up and say I don’t really... if I’m interacting with people online I don’t actually, who I actually haven’t physically met and don’t know, I kind of don’t really care too much about the intricacy of their personality. Do I like their music recommendations? Do they swear at me? That’s pretty much it. But I think it’s a really good point. When you’re interacting with someone in the flesh then you get all those other subtleties far quicker so... but I’d be interacting with a lot less people online if I bothered trying to get to know them, you know? (Tony, FG One)*

*Or if you had to know them a certain amount before you would share things musically with them... (Rex, FG One)*

*That anonymity that you can kind of get even if you do know each other, like was said before you’re never responsible for what comes out of your fingers if you’re online. (Tony, FG One)*

In turn, Mike suggested that people feel more of a sense of social obligation when interacting face-to-face.

*You pay attention to people face-to-face a lot more, whereas you might field... if you're a specialist and you get some young budding people who really want to learn from you, and they might approach you and you'd be like 'oh I might talk to one'. But if you're all standing around in a group it's going to be more likely that you have a discussion, more likely you will respond. Like if you see a deejay, a big deejay, and you actually corner them in a club, and start yapping to them, they're more likely to respond to you than if you try and meet them on Twitter. There's a sort of social grace... (Mike, FG One)*

Drew described online interactions as more disposable than similar experiences in physical environments.

*There's no emotional... there's no interaction. You could have put a post up to a new Flying Lotus tune on Facebook. I'll just click that, stream that, hear it... I'm not gonna be like 'hey Lewis put me onto this Flying Lotus tune'. Click, click. After ten minutes you can't remember whose page you clicked it off. It's on your feed, you just click it. (Drew, Interview Two)*

*Right, whereas with your record collection I bet you could pull one out and tell me a little story about it... where you were when you found it... (Interviewer)*

*Totally. Sometimes, if I'm scrolling through Facebook on my page and I see a link I want, but can't listen to it immediately, I'll email myself the link. If I don't do that it's like 'who posted that?' You used to go into, you know, there's certain tunes I remember someone playing in the vinyl days... (Drew, Interview Two)*

Tony reasoned 'if I'm interacting with people online I don't actually, who I actually haven't physically met and don't know, I kind of don't really care too much about the intricacy of their personality', akin to Suler's (2004) concept of online dissociative anonymity, whereby some people feel their actions online are separate from their real identity. That is, if Tony is interacting with someone he 'actually haven't [sic] physically met and don't [sic] know' his actions seem separate from the rest of his life. Drew admitted that he is less inclined to remember personal narratives attached to information sourced from others online, indicating the 'social grace' Mike speaks of with face-to-face interaction might be less prevalent online, tending towards the "individualistic solipsism" McIntyre (2011, p. 148) described as occurring in online settings. Tony and Drew's feedback aligns with Driskell and Lyon's (2002) suggestion that there is limited social liability and psychological detachment online, and Nieckarz (2005) observation that people online do not develop a

meaningful sense of reciprocal responsibility or mutual obligation. However Tony and Drew were reflecting on interacting in the more public regions of the Internet, Driskell and Lyon's (2002) research was about similarly general Internet use, and Nieckarz (2005) statement referred to groups where the barriers to entry and exit are low. As the following comments illustrate, when participants interact online in more private 'spaces' similar to the independent brick-and-mortar record shop, the level of intimacy felt by group members increases as does personal accountability; conceivably leading to better behaviour and a greater sense of community. Don and Sean discussed the significance of closed Internet groups in regard to moderating peoples' behaviour and getting to know people better.

*Depends on whether you are talking about open or closed communities as well. Because I do a lot of my interaction around music in closed online groups... forums and the like. A whole lot of people in the mash-up scene are involved. (Don, FG Three)*

*Troll free. (Rex, FG Three)*

*Yeah! It is. It's basically a whole bunch of opinions coming from people you know what they do and where they are coming from and the history of what they have been doing and you go 'OK, they're saying that because of this', and so you get this kind of... (Don, FG Three)*

*And I suppose you know that they actually care, which is probably quite a big thing. (Rex, FG Three)*

*With the closed communities, if you are in them for quite a long time you actually get to know the people, and see where they are coming from. Whereas people who you are just exposed to briefly on the Internet for the first time, you kind of don't know where they are coming from sometimes. (Sean, FG Three)*

Sean and Gen described how a culture develops in such groups.

*So we've got this online world that is more public than it has ever been before, then we've got these private more community oriented groups where people behave better? (Interviewer)*

*Yeah. (Gen, FG Three)*

*Yeah, definitely... (Sean, FG Three)*

*... But there's also a culture. You get to know what's acceptable and what's not. And people who are... like trolls get won't be spoken to. Will be ignored. (Sean, FG Three)*

*Or not invited to some groups. (Gen, FG Three)*

The subsequent conversation between Si, Gen, and Sean further suggest that closed groups encourage community-minded behaviour, including sharing knowledge and socialising new members into a group of like-minded individuals.

*[Speaking about a closed New Zealand circus group] Yeah just through friends, you rock up somewhere with the hula hoop and someone is like 'yo I do fire stuff, come join my thing' and then they'll invite me and then I find out things and good places to buy stuff, performance gigs that could happen. (Gen, FG Three)*

*Yeah and then they'll probably introduce you to other people as well. (Sean, FG Three)*

*Yeah exactly right and it's a pretty big group now. And then they'll have things like they'll put out videos and examples that they've found or videos of themselves and their practice and how to learn... little tutorials, that kind of thing. (Gen, FG Three)*

Similar to Bender's (1982) argument regarding what facilitates well-functioning communities, participants described groups with limited membership, affective ties, and a sense of mutual obligation. Don described interacting with 'people you know what they do and where they are coming from and the history of what they have been doing [sic], Rex replied that 'you know that they actually care, which is probably quite a big thing', to which Sean added 'with the closed communities, if you are in them for quite a long time you actually get to know the people, and see where they are coming from'. In other words, participants described closed groups as having a measured amount of commitment to other members and the group as a whole, a set of shared values, mores, and meanings, and a shared historical identity. These are facets Etzioni (1999) suggested a functioning community needs, irrespective of locality. Further aligning with Etzioni's (1999) model, as well as Baym's (2007) study of fans of Swedish independent music, Sean stated that closed groups have an identifiable culture, where 'you actually get to know the people, and see where they are coming from', unlike more public Internet exchanges where 'people who you are just exposed to briefly on the Internet for the first time, you kind of don't know

where they are coming from sometimes'. Gen's description of the circus performers group she is a member of revealed a community where people exchange advice and knowledge as well as supporting each other and the community as a whole, with the group having shared goals, interests, and a sustained bond where members cooperate and support one-and-other (Parrish, 2002). Finally, Sean observed that 'people who are... like trolls get won't be spoken to. Will be ignored'. This statement suggests that, as well as a shared history and sense of obligation, the behaviour in closed groups is moderated by a common ethos and established set of rules, as Beekhuyzen et al. (2011) found in their exploration of underground file sharing communities, and Nieckarz (2005) found in his observation of closed online tape trading communities. Participants' responses reaffirm the findings of these earlier studies in that closed Internet groups provide a more regulated environment, which in turn appears to offer more meaningful interactions, a shared history, and a greater overall sense of community than that found on web pages and online groups open to the general public.

In the third focus group, Gen mentioned that she became a member of the circus group as a result of face-to-face interactions within that community. Tony described a similar amalgamation of his face-to-face and online activities, whereby though he does not necessarily meet face-to-face with others in his closed Internet group, people in the community provide each other with information that enhances their offline experiences.

*Actually I'm in a couple of closed groups as well as open groups... but we don't just talk about online music, online. We can... often we'll say 'oh I picked up this piece the other day' or someone else will be like 'oh Groovy have put out some new records', you know? So there's kind of still that social interaction, it's just not as a group.... physically. (Tony, FG Three)*

Don's feedback further highlighted that audiences are increasingly neither on or offline exclusively, rather they reside in both spaces simultaneously.

*The difference between physical and online... it isn't there. They're both at the same time for me. I'm quite often in a social environment with friends where it's like 'oh have you seen this' and grabbing music and sharing it. Or even when I'm by myself quite often playing music, streaming it from online or grabbing it from online, and*

*jamming to it and with it, and making other things out of it as part of my creative process. So that is very very hard to say it is one or the other. (Don, FG Three)*

Tony and Don's observations serve to emphasise that in analysing, comparing, and evaluating face-to-face and online interactions and communities, the distinction between 'virtual' and 'real' worlds is increasingly blurred. In less than two decades rapid technological change has spurred similarly extensive changes to human communication and interaction. In 1999 Borgman suggested the Internet was not a part of the real world, yet digital communication technology is now enmeshed in the day-to-day lives of many individuals. Slater (2002) observed early on that distinguishing between on and offline worlds is problematic, owing to the nature of social place and space changing. Though participants identified key differences in face-to-face and online socialising, both environments increasingly complement each other (Bargh & McKenna, 2004; Bennett, 2012; DiMaggio et al., 2001; Hirzalla & Zoonen, 2011; Matzat, 2010; Sessions, 2010; Slater, 2002), and many people now interact day-to-day online via a range of websites, applications, and social network services (Baym, 2015). Just as earlier studies found (Hirzalla & Zoonen, 2011; Wellman et al., 2001), Tony and Don's interest in recorded music promotes a hybrid and complimentary engagement with both face-to-face and online settings, and for Don the 'difference between physical and online... it isn't there'.

Pragmatic as always, Rex pithily summed up the contemporary climate.

*It's all just the means to the end. (Rex, FG Three)*

In summary, contrary to the findings in 2.9.3, where it was observed that brick-and-mortar shop owners in the UK and US are finding success by emphasising the human aspects of the in-store experience, participants suggested experiencing a community atmosphere in shops is now an increasingly historical phenomenon, reminiscent of comments in Section 4.7 where participants described deriving personal rather than interpersonal pleasures when 'digging' in stores. Participants suggested that highly engaged music consumers now predominantly convene online, socialising and interacting with like-minded individuals.



Having said that, Ralph's description of meeting new people online then eventually 'going and meeting them for coffee or something like that' suggests that face-to-face interactions might somehow validate or improve on relationships formed online.

When discussing what sites they utilise most in order to interact online, participants identified the social networking products of large international companies, despite popular music communities often being associated with counterculture and counterhegemonic beliefs. If recorded music communities are embracing the media products of international corporations rather than convening in localised spaces, the concept and relevance of localness might be shifting in an increasingly globally connected society. Participants suggested that communities based on recorded music are often interacting on corporate-controlled social media applications and websites, a seemingly 'McDonaldized' (Ritzer, 1993) and potentially exploitative (Fuchs, 2014) replacement for spaces like the independent brick-and-mortar shop. None of the participants questioned or critiqued utilising such services, suggesting that the social, cultural, and economic implications of people convening by way of such services is not yet being critiqued in the same way similar traditional media structures (such as major record labels or retailers) have been (Brown, 2008; Coca-Stefaniak et al., 2010; Graham et al., 2004; Jen, 2010; Jones, 2009; Lam & Tan, 2001; Madden, 2009; PBS, 2001; Rojek, 2011; Taylor & Piper, 2012; Winter, 2012). If uniquely local spaces like the independent brick-and-mortar record shops provide an alternative to the dominant presence of nationally or globally homogenised retail spaces (Fox, 2005; Gracon, 2009; Jen, 2010; Miller, 2006; Simpson, 2000), but the demographic that traditionally used such spaces are increasingly communicating online, there are again questions raised as to what is uniquely local, and in turn how people might redefine localness as communication technology redefines human connectedness.

In this increasingly globalised communication environment, participants suggested that subcultures are now less clearly defined, and people now tend to cross-pollinate a range of different influences and styles rather than forming geographically distinct 'scenes'. Rather than relative isolation in the past leading to geographically distinct subcultural music scenes forming, it appears there is now a global culture emerging, and individuals may draw from different elements of this culture in order to form their own identity. This may have

ramifications for the preservation of uniquely local cultures and scenes, though at the same time sees 'borderless' cultural groups emerging. Participants' described an online environment where they connect globally with people with the same specific musical interests, rather than locally with people with more diverse preferences, a phenomenon which may alter the directions by which contemporary music continues to develop.

In spite of the increased connectivity discussed, participants paradoxically felt they now spend more time alone. Now that most individuals source their music online, there is not only less need to interact face-to-face when procuring music, but also less inclination to listen to music with others in physical environments. Though they often interact with others online, participants stated that they more often interact one-on-one, terminal to terminal, rather than in groups. Sean described a feeling of loneliness before a sense of community online, while other participants identified new technologies other than the Internet as contributing to a more solitary existence. Specifically, portable personal players appear to have encouraged solitary and private listening, even when in the presence of others. If less casual communal listening is occurring, and more one-on-one interaction is occurring online, this might explain the rise in concert, show, festival, and gig attendance, as people seek 'the tribal thing' Thom described.

Despite participants suggesting engaging online has led to a sense of isolation, Ralph and Nasir revealed that the Internet provides a more comfortable setting for those who experience difficulties in face-to-face environments. Nasir's concerns related to attending gigs, given that venues are not always comfortable spaces for everyone, from the physical layout to negotiating crowds to dealing with intoxicated patrons. Ralph noted that the Internet ultimately caters for a greater cross-section of individuals, in that 'it's just that there are different types of people', and not all music aficionados necessarily enjoy live environments. Echoing Murthy's (2010) findings, those who might feel marginalised or uncomfortable in certain physical environments might find the Internet a more inclusive and ultimately safer environment to interact with others.

When asked to reflect on the differences between face-to-face and online interactions, participants decided that online communication is more limited than socialising face-to-

face. Online communication was portrayed as having less 'bandwidth', bereft of the extra information afforded by observing body language and hearing tone of voice, though as Baym (2015) identified people do find ways to convey non-verbal cues when online. Vocal and visual cues were seen to reduce ambiguity as to the intention and tone of what is being communicated, leaving less room for misinterpretation (Bargh & McKenna, 2004; Galston, 2000; Mallen, Day, & Green, 2003; Okdie et al., 2011; Pierce, 2009; Weidman et al., 2012), as well as potential conflicts that might arise from said misunderstandings. As Sean stated "in the flesh, you get a lot more information quickly".

Participants' observations about communicating online bore similarities to Suler's (2004) concept of dissociative anonymity, whereby some people feel their actions in the digital realm are separate from their real identity. Comments revealed that participants did not feel as much of a sense of reciprocal responsibility or mutual obligation online as when communicating face-to-face, however this apparent lessening of social obligation was far more prevalent when interacting on web spaces open to the general public, whereas more private Internet communities and websites encouraged social graces. Participants described a shared history forming between closed group members, as well as deeper relationships forming in comparison to more casual interactions when browsing the Internet. Closed groups appear to encourage a greater sense of mutual obligation, linked to a set of shared values, mores, and meanings, and a shared historical identity; elements that Etzioni (1999) suggested constitute a functioning community.

## 5 Conclusion

### 5.1 'Richness and reach and richness of reach': Overview of research findings

This thesis has assessed how significant technological changes have affected the social interactions of communities that are based on recorded music. The study has also examined how changing technologies have affected the way in which people engage with recorded music in their everyday lives. This discussion has used the independent brick-and-mortar record shop as the contextual basis for analysis and comparison of shifting audience behaviours, as these spaces have traditionally provided a socially and culturally relevant 'hub' for local music communities. The study has examined the social and cultural implications of recorded music communities increasingly engaging by way of digital technology, particularly 'online', rather than convening face-to-face in physical spaces.

This study has situated the modern music consumer in a media distribution and communication environment characterised by the substantial changes that have occurred since around the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century; changes propelled by rapid technological advancements. Participants' reflections—from growing up with a reliance on one record shop and a radio, to now being able to instantly access a range of music and information on a global scale and with relative ease—tracked the transition from the 20<sup>th</sup> Century music industry model where the availability of recorded music was much more widely dictated by the record company, distributor, and retailer (Graham et al., 2004), to the modern 'post-Napster' media environment where near unlimited selection has replaced the 'hit driven' (Anderson, 2008b) environment many participants described growing up in. The way participants described acquiring and consuming music, as well as interacting with other music fans, was consistent with the recent disintermediation that has occurred within the music industry (Jones, 2002). That is, participants described a contemporary world of choice, characterised by access to a vast amount of music and music-based information, as well as greater potential to directly interact with not only other audience members, but artists as well. Participants also described being able to access music through modern playing technology with relative speed and ease, and in a wider variety of locations than in the past.

Having greater choice in regard to recorded music manifested itself in a number of ways, these options linked to the disintermediation of the music supply chain. For example, when participants discussed format preferences at length, the CD was viewed with overwhelming disdain, despite the format being the dominant music delivery platform in the decade recorded music sales were at their peak (Ogden et al., 2011). In turn, the vinyl record, (which the major record labels phased out in order to popularise the CD) appeared to be the most cherished of formats, and the format which equated with participants feeling the greatest sense of owning music. Discussing format preferences demonstrated a marked shift in the industry-consumer relationship, where the audience is now able to pick and choose, rather than being wholly dictated to by middlepersons in the supply chain. Napster marked the first time audiences had discovered and utilised a music consumption technology autonomously, and 15 years on participants' responses illustrated that audiences have continued to maintain much greater sovereignty than known in the pre-Napster era.

In respect to sourcing music online, participants overwhelmingly celebrated the broadening of the parameters for discovering, researching, sourcing, and collecting music that has occurred, analogous to Hill's (2013) observation that engaged recorded music consumers value the *freed* aspects of Internet-based music acquisition before the *free* element brought about by increased piracy. Participants voiced in various ways that they understood and respected the need to support artists, and most indicated they contributed financially to the music industry in various ways irrespective of whether they pirated music or not (piracy was not discussed in any great detail across the focus groups and interviews).

Participants' discussions about how they now interact with both recorded music and other people further substantiated Evans & Wurster's (1997) concept of 'richness' and 'reach', an idea further explored in the context of the recorded music industry in Graham et al.'s (2004) article. Participants described 'richness' (or the relative ease with which information and data may now be accessed and shared) in a number of ways, from being able to research and sample a wide variety of music before properly acquiring and consuming it, to having access to a wide range of music-based knowledge, as Nasir highlighted when he spoke of having learned more about music in the last decade or so than

ever before. 'Richness' translated to a far greater overall engagement than ever before with music and music-based information. Participants also alluded to greater 'reach', or the now increased ability to connect with other audience members and artists. From Vincent being able to connect globally to other specialists in his genre to enhance his career as an artist, to Gen and Thom being able to regularly access and interact with international musicians and tastemakers' podcasts and websites, to Hannah feeling a sense of connection to US recording artist Jean Grae as a result of her Twitter posts, participants' comments signified that reach has increased considerably, to the point where not only audience members are now more connected, but artists and audience members can now interact more easily too (Parry et al., 2012).

Despite communicating that the Internet, and more broadly advancements in digital technologies in general, have allowed access to vast libraries of music and information as well as increased interpersonal connectivity on a global scale, many participants still valued physical objects, spaces, and processes. Although the informal polling preceding attending the focus groups revealed that participants overall consume more than two thirds of their music online, there was a sizeable contingent who expressed strong feelings about the value of physical format recordings, as well as the physical spaces that house them for sale. As previously mentioned, possessing vinyl records equated to a greater sense of true ownership of music for some participants, linked in turn to the format's size and physicality, as well as accompanying aspects such as extended packaging, artwork, and information. Physicality was also linked to a more measured and controlled music production process, where it was posited that though digital production and distribution technology has led to an abundance of new music being available online, many of these contemporary releases are quickly produced and 'posted', and therefore many are not of suitable quality. This was then compared to the more mediated process involved in planning to and then eventually pressing a record, where it was suggested this might lead to more consideration about the quality and longevity of the release on the part of the artist.

In discussing their fondness for physical spaces, the participants who still frequent brick-and-mortar record stores exhibited the displaced hunter-gather behaviour described (and the motivational categories devised) in McIntyre's (2009) study of brick-and-mortar record

shop customers. Frequenting stores was often linked to collecting, and those who visited brick-and-mortar stores rather than searching for physical copies of music online valued 'the thrill of the chase', as well as the process itself, which was described as both relaxing and rewarding. This process was best described by Terry, who when asked why he did not search for physical copies of music online, said 'it's not the same as finding it' as if 'finding' had a completely different definition when applied to the more prolonged and ritualistic act of searching through brick-and-mortar stores.

Despite many participants identifying with the pleasurable aspects of searching through physical spaces for hard-to-find 'gems', the process (colloquially referred to as 'digging') appeared quite a solitary experience. In terms of the more social aspects of frequenting stores, participants unanimously referred to these experiences in a historical context, seemingly at odds with the discussion in subsection 2.6.3, where the feedback of store owners and staff of independent brick-and-mortar shops in the US, UK, and New Zealand suggested a key aspect of their surviving in the contemporary climate has been emphasising the interpersonal and community building aspects of their business (Campbell, 2011; Matador Records, 2012g; Reid, n.d.). Whether participants' activities and experiences are a uniquely New Zealand phenomenon are unclear, though what seems more clear is that many of the aspects of what used to encourage interpersonal interaction in brick-and-mortar record shops are now satisfied online. During quite lengthy discussions about brick-and-mortar record shops, nobody mentioned these spaces as alternatives to the mainstream media machine (Gracon, 2010), or spaces which encourage the airing of alternative viewpoints (Gracon, 2009), as interacting on the Internet foreseeably now fulfils these aspects of their lives. Likewise, nobody indicated record shops were educational spaces (Everrett, 2007; Gracon, 2009, 2010; Jones, 2009; Marino & Toller, 2008; Taylor & Piper, 2012), and participants had already indicated elsewhere that the Internet was their primary source of music-based information and knowledge. For younger participants who had never engaged meaningfully in the store process, seeking information from such an outlet was not even a consideration. Paz revealed that 'if it hadn't been for the Internet' he could not have found out more about a favourite artist, while Eric explained that he finds all

he needs to know about local artists and gigs by utilising Bandcamp and other similar online resources.

As well as participants' activities revealing that fewer social interactions are occurring instore in a general sense, the influence of the Internet appears to have led to less need for customers and staff to converse for more specific reasons. Just as Hill (2001) noted that digital technology is making audience members as sophisticated as producers, it is also might be making them as 'sophisticated' as record store staff as well. That is, though many participants visit physical stores in order to buy music, nobody mentioned record store staff as a source of recommendations, information, or authority, with Gen and Thom specifically identifying the Internet as their go-to source of knowledge. This significantly undermines a historically significant aspect of the record shop experience; the value of store staff as recognised tastemakers and sources for musical recommendations (Gracon, 2010; McIntyre, 2009). In turn, the trust that customers have historically placed in record shop employees for musical recommendations might now be fulfilled by the advice of online peers, arguably another example of a disintermediated media environment where vertical authority is increasingly replaced by a horizontal system of interaction and exchange, which in turn facilitates communal rather than perhaps more hierarchical connoisseurship. This might explain Sean's observation that many store staff are now 'just sort of doing sales' now while he is 'just in a queue'. It appears the Internet, as well as digital communication devices in general, have considerably reduced the need for people to interact on any meaningful level in brick-and-mortar record shops.

When discussing interacting online, participants described an environment with far greater capacity to share and exchange recorded music, as well as far greater interactivity in general on a global scale. Participants also expressed that the Internet might be a more inclusive communication platform than face-to-face environments, in particular for those who might feel some anxiety or trepidation in physical settings. The Internet also appeared to promote inclusiveness in terms of changing attitudes towards music distribution, exchange, and possession. Discussions about the merits of owning exclusive or difficult to obtain music providing a point of difference for deejays or radio show hosts presented wider themes for consideration, namely that this approach might be a symptom of the 20<sup>th</sup>



Century distribution and acquisition model, whereas the Internet now promotes sharing and exchange, rather than possessive individualism (Shuker, 2004). Considering digital files are easily duplicated and distributed, and comparing modern exchange practices to participants' descriptions of record shops in the past ordering in a limited amount of sought after titles and then distributing these to a privileged few, Rex's observation that 'sharing is more acceptable in the Internet age' suggests an ultimately more inclusive and interactive social process around music than the pleasure of 'finding something else no one has and sticking it in their face' that Henry described. As McCourt (2005) predicted, when the focus is not on tangible finite goods, it is the community of people interacting that become the commodity.

Participants also spoke about the merits of being able to communicate easily on a global rather than local scale. Eric's recollection of growing up in Malaysia, where import and censorship laws had made accessing popular music very difficult, highlighted the marked difference Internet access has made for people in locations where physical access to music is not a given (Etzioni, 1999). Participants in the second focus group spoke of the impact that the widespread connectivity and immediacy of the Internet has had on people's cultural preferences. Participants described less geographically distinct subcultures and styles, and audience members now having less anxiety about combining music genres, eras, value systems, and fashions (Hill, 2001). The Internet's apparent ability to lessen social anxieties was also explored by way of comparing online interaction with face-to-face engagement. Nasir suggested that as live music venues are not always wholly inviting spaces, both in terms of negotiating a busy environment as well as potentially dealing with intoxicated or otherwise agitated patrons, the Internet can provide a more inclusive platform to interact (Christopherson, 2007; Murthy, 2010). A number of participants described experiencing social anxiety in record stores, linked to both recorded music as a symbolic good (Bourdieu, 1984) and staff who appear combative or unhelpful, again suggesting the Internet environment might lessen social pressures.

However, participants were also critical of some aspects of engaging with digital technologies, particularly where it was suggested that modern technology can isolate people. Though previous studies have suggested that the Internet provides more choice, less anxiety, and greater engagement between audience members (Hill, 2001; McIntyre,

2011; Parry et al., 2012), Sean revealed that interacting online has led to his feeling a sense of isolation in comparison to the past. Sean described discovering music online while interacting with others, but then tending to listen to music on his own rather than in a group face-to-face setting as he would have previously. Similarly, when referring to engaging with modern playback technology, Nasir described 'the balance of listening to music' as having changed, whereby he tends to listen to music on headphones rather than 'out in the room' with others. Craig stated that he had been actively trying to limit his use of technology that he had observed tended to isolate people, after often finding himself in the close proximity of his partner with headphones on looking at a screen. Tellingly, this revelation prompted laughter owing to many in his focus group relating to this, the laughter continuing as the conversation antiquated the notion of coming together to listen to music; 'sitting around the radio' and 'in the shed'.

Online interaction was also critiqued in terms of the perceived superficiality of some exchanges. Tony reasoned that if he is interacting with someone online who he hasn't physically met, he does not 'care too much about the intricacy of their personality', while Drew described not paying much attention to detail with online interactions in comparison to similar face-to-face encounters. Tony and Drew's feedback aligned with previous studies suggestions that there is limited social liability and obligation online (Driskell & Lyon, 2002; McIntyre, 2011; Nieckarz, 2005), in turn suggesting a lack of depth in comparison to face-to-face exchanges. Participants observed that the physical cues such as body language and tone of voice present in face-to-face interactions reduce ambiguity as to the intended message being communicated (Bargh & McKenna, 2004; Galston, 2000; Mallen et al., 2003; Okdie et al., 2011; Pierce, 2009; Weidman et al., 2012), whereas the reduced amount of cues when interacting online present far more potential for misunderstandings and unintended conflicts to occur. Participants also described online communication as slower than when face-to-face, stating in turn that it often takes longer to get to know someone online.

Overall, participants' experiences and observations revealed that, against the backdrop of an industry that has experienced significant disintermediation since the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, highly engaged music consumers are now predominantly connecting with both

recorded music, as well as each other, in online settings. There appear to be a great number of benefits in this contemporary communication environment, including audience members possessing more power and sovereignty than ever before, as well as having greater choice and access to information. Participants also described online settings as potentially more inclusive, particularly for those who experience social anxiety in face-to-face social situations, with 'inclusiveness' in turn related to the Internet encouraging the sharing and exchanging of music and information over the possessive individualism (Shuker, 2004) that the limited media environment of the 20th Century music industry model encouraged. Discussions also suggested that a potentially wider range of music fans are catered for now, in that they may choose to interact in either or both online and face-to-face settings, depending on their mood or overall temperament.

Despite the freedoms digital technologies appear to encourage, many participants also valued, and wished to preserve, the 'analogue' independent brick-and-mortar record shop space. However, participants' descriptions of the activities they undertake in these spaces revealed the pleasures they derive while in store are mainly solitary, rather than based on interpersonal interaction and communal exchanges. Furthermore, though the concept of physical spaces for music-based communities to congregate was greeted positively across all data gathering sessions, their existence in the context of brick-and-mortar record stores was referenced in a historical context, and activities participants' now undertake while instore did not appear to foster communication or interaction.

When discussing the brick-and-mortar record shop, as well as changing social behaviours, this thesis has often referred to localness, uniquely local spaces, and variants thereof. The value of localness, as well as being uniquely local, has been discussed in the context of the McDonaldization (Ritzer, 1993) of the cultural and retail landscape, linked in turn to the value of unique local narrative spaces (McIntyre, 2009, 2011; Simpson, 2000), and the need to preserve physical manifestations of 'stories' (in the forms of music, books, and other cultural goods) on the high street (Davie, 2013). The value of preserving localness has also been critiqued in the context of participants' widespread use of social media, in that these products might represent a McDonaldization of the digital landscape, and in turn digital communication. The concept of localness in regard to social media usage has also been

questioned in terms of what 'local' might mean in an increasingly globally connected world. Localness has also been discussed in the context of independent local business like the record shop helping build community familiarity and relationships, encourage emotional connections, and strengthen local communities in general (Brennan, 2000; Coca-Stefaniak et al., 2010; Hare et al., 2001; Jen, 2010). Finally, specific to brick-and-mortar record shops, localness has been considered in regard to these spaces traditionally providing social-cultural hangout destinations where like-minded people can congregate (Fullington, 2008; Gracon, 2009, 2010; McIntyre, 2009; Simpson, 2000).

The capacity for spaces like the independent brick-and-mortar record shop to encourage localised community development and interaction in an increasingly McDonaldized physical environment as well as an increasingly globalised media and communication environment is a worthy proposition, though paradoxically it is unclear at this juncture what might constitute 'local' over time in an increasingly globally connected society. However civic engagement might continue to manifest itself, participants' responses--though emphasising the positive changes that have occurred with respect to how individuals and groups now communicate and share knowledge—revealed a feasibly wider issue that might hinder meaningful community engagement on any scale. Participants described a contemporary media environment in which the Internet has greatly increased the ability for audience members and artists to interact ('reach'), and also greatly increased the amount of music and information that can be shared ('richness') (Evans & Wurster, 1997; Graham et al., 2004). But what is also apparent from participants' discussions is that the increased reach of contemporary communication appears to lack a richness of its own. That is to say, participants' responses implied a dearth of meaningful engagement in many present day social situations.

When describing how a sense of community or interpersonal connectedness manifests itself in the modern-day, participants (unwittingly or otherwise) seemed to be describing a network-based communication environment (DiMaggio et al., 2001; Wellman, 2001), often one-on-one, more often from terminal to terminal. From Sean describing communicating online with another individual, 'rather than, like it used to be, in a group', to Hannah's most promising description of feeling a sense of connection online being one of over 100,000 of

Jean Grae's Twitter followers, descriptions of online communication often did not portray a great deal of depth of connection. Tony explained that when he interacts with others he does not 'care too much about the intricacy of their personality', continuing 'do I like their music? Do they swear at me? That's about it.' Drew revealed he often cannot recall who he has garnered music tracks, recommendations, or other information from online, though he can often recall detailed social and cultural details surrounding historical vinyl record purchases. Ralph stated 'this whole thing is being replicated digitally' in response to Mike reminiscing about the sense of community he used to feel in local record shops, yet he continued by revealing that if he interacts with someone online for an extended period of time he will often meet them face-to-face eventually, implying that convening in the physical world somehow validates their relationship (Bargh & McKenna, 2004; Matzat, 2010; Sessions, 2010). Some participants suggested that closed Internet groups (or other online forums not accessible to the general public) do provide meaningful interactions—a point affirmed both by my own personal observations, as well as previous research. However what seemed apparent in the data gathering sessions was that not many participants were actively involved in such groups. Rather, participants indicated they were first and foremost convening using the websites and applications of far more generalised social media applications.

Participants identified that face-to-face communication provides physical cues that lessen ambiguity during social exchanges in comparison to online exchanges where the exact tone and intention of intended messages can be misconstrued. This was again a supposition confirmed both by my own experiences, as well as in previous research (Bargh & McKenna, 2004; Galston, 2000; Mallen et al., 2003; Okdie et al., 2011; Pierce, 2009; Weidman et al., 2012). However, what participants also revealed is that there seems to be less need or inclination to communicate with others in face-to-face environments than in the past, indicating a similar manner of social interaction now appears to be occurring in physical environments as is transpiring online. In 2002 Driskell & Lyon claimed that online relationships lack the intimacy and emotion of face-to-face relationships. It appears that since then advancements in digital technologies have led to some face-to-face environments possessing a similar lack of 'rich' social interactivity. When discussing

patronising independent brick-and-mortar record shops, many participants described a solitary experience when 'digging' for records. These descriptions reveal that engagement with technology appears to have negated the need to interact with other people in-store on any meaningful level, as any combination of sharing knowledge, seeking recommendations, or discussing issues and topics outside of music are now satisfied on a global scale, with relative immediacy, any hour of the day. Technological advancements have also encouraged more solitary listening; from Sean listening to music alone rather than in a group as he used to, to Nasir listening less 'out in the room', to Craig mainly airing music on headphones even when in the company of others. Again, participants seemed to be describing a physical environment similarly lacking in social 'richness' to that which is occurring online.

Curiously, in their discussions regarding engaging with albums or single tracks, participants may have been unwittingly airing a metaphor for experiencing a lack of meaningful engagement with fellow audience members. Mike said he felt he did not have time to listen to albums anymore, while participants in general indicated engaging with music felt 'sped up' in comparison to the past. Thom stated that he cannot engage with albums as he did in the past because 'there is so much distraction out there'. Correspondingly, participants' feelings about vinyl records celebrated the format for encouraging a great level of engagement, involvement, dedication, and enjoyment of recorded music and popular culture artefacts; a richer listening experience in an environment where there is now far more reach than ever before. Participants' descriptions of how many audience members now interact with recorded music seemed attuned to their less celebratory accounts of interacting with fellow audience members and other music industry stakeholders; a world where social interactions can easily be skipped, shuffled, paused, or deleted forever.

People are adopting new technologies at unprecedented rates. Successive generations' behaviours and preferences as audience members are in a state of flux. It took 30 years for radio to come of age, 20 years for the Internet to progress similarly, ten years for the smart phone to become near ubiquitous, and just four years for messaging applications to do the same. Never before have the media industries been so quickly altered by technology. This

study was conducted at a time where participants were able to relay experiences of being stakeholders in both the 20<sup>th</sup> Century recorded music industry environment and the contemporary recorded music industry environment. Broadly speaking, participants were able to track media and communications from relatively limited and controlled origins to a world with far greater capacity to share and exchange recorded music, as well as far greater interactivity in general on a global rather than local scale. Participants spoke positively about these changes, though at the same time critiqued and pondered the ramifications of the modern music acquisition and communication environment both from the perspective of being music consumers in the present day, and from the perspective of observing changes from a historical perspective.

What emerged from the data gathering sessions is that the independent brick-and-mortar record shop seems to be one of the more desirable remnants of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century recorded music industry, an industry otherwise characterised by relatively far greater control of audience members and in turn less freedom and flexibility. In a contemporary environment characterised by rapid technological change driving rapid social and cultural changes, whether independent brick-and-mortar record shops will survive in their current incarnations remains to be seen, though there appears to be room for some kind of collective lifestyle spaces that encourage people to bond with one-an-other like Thom described, 'sharing music in a space. 'Cause music harks back to a tribal thing'. These spaces may or not may sell physical copies of recorded music, though at this juncture participants' feedback in the data gathering sessions, the commentary from store owners' included in subsection 2.6.3, as well as trade figures showing that sales of vinyl records are increasing, indicate there is still a viable market for physical 'things'. In respect to the commentary from owners in subsection 2.6.3, their observations indicate that stores' continued success is often owing to incorporating store elements that encourage people to come together in store, such as cafes, live gigs, other instore events, and the like.

To suggest that in the modern world that some kind of collective lifestyle space centred on popular music would easily thrive and survive is an exercise in nostalgia, or at least an indication this research was not undertaken by a business studies graduate. However, if people increasingly convening online is creating an environment where people are bonding

with one another less and less, and the physical landscape is becoming increasingly McDonaldized, there is scope for spaces that encourage a greater depth of connection on a grassroots level, as well as counter the hegemony of generically deployed global business operations. How localness will continue to be defined in an increasingly borderless and interconnected society remains to be seen, though the human desire to meaningfully connect will endure as societal structures reinvent themselves. Though still only accounting for about 2% of global music industry revenue, the fact that the popular culture anachronism that is the vinyl record is experiencing a renaissance in sales is perhaps indicative of a wider phenomenon. Despite the unmistakable benefits of rapid advancements in media and communication technologies, vinyl records could represent not only the human desire to stay connected in the physical world, but also a wish to somehow slow the pace of the 'sped up' world participants often described. In the sped up, highly connected, yet somehow disconnected environment participants depicted, people reconnecting or even connecting for the first time with vinyl records might be some kind of 'slow music movement', perhaps also indicative of a wider desire to stay somehow connected in analogue, real time, physical environments while still enjoying the benefits of the 'digital world'. This is a desire that could be further accommodated by people continuing to engage with, or discovering for the first time, whatever incarnation of the independent brick-and-mortar music space and accompanying ethos that might continue to exist.

## **5.2 'Old deejays': Limitations of research findings**

The primary source for the limitations of this research project was the recruitment process for the data gathering sessions. Though I did not recruit people I knew on any meaningful level (for obvious reasons concerning tainting or otherwise influencing the data gathering process), the most public of my attempts to enlist participants for this study did not yield enough attendees, so a number of my acquaintances reached out to people they knew that I did not, some of whom agreed to take part. As a result, there were some observable demographic similarities amongst some participants, rather than the data being



gathered from a potentially greater or more balanced cross section of audience members. These demographic similarities might be traced back to my acquaintances as well as myself, firstly the dominant age group in attendance, but also my background in the music industry, particularly as a working deejay, but also as a radio host, event organiser, and music journalist.

In terms of the age of participants, where the recruitment process sought an even spread of adult participants across different age groups, the majority of attendees were in their thirties, 13 in all compared to nine in their twenties, four in their forties, and three in their fifties. Though the participants who took part provided a wide variety of perspectives and experiences, based in part on the spread of ages present, the data gathering could have perhaps benefited from more people in their late teens and early twenties, such that there was greater input from those who had grown up solely in the 'post-Napster' environment, and thus had only this era to reflect on. A lack of attendees in this age group was most likely reflective of the initial public drive for research participants being conducted by way of signage in record stores rather than online, as well as acquaintances of the researcher sourcing generally older participants.

Many participants identified themselves as practitioners in varying capacities, and as such there were less participants who could provide perspectives from the point of view of being wholly audience members than there were any combination of deejays, music journalists, venue owners, band members, radio hosts, and music educators. Whether this is directly traceable back to my affiliation with the music industry (and in turn those who aided sourcing participants for this study), or whether this is simply a symptom of recruiting highly engaged music consumers is unclear. Similarly unclear is how the data gathered would have been affected by talking to a greater number of participants with no other stake in the music industry other than being audience members, though in one focus group it was observed that one participant appeared slightly intimidated by the level of industry rather than audience-based discussions, and this participant provided little input other than when directly questioned by the researcher, though even then seemed wary as to the perceived validity of his responses.

Also, a high number of deejays took part in the data gathering sessions. Though this might be linked to deejaying being a likely hobby, profession, or interest for a highly engaged music consumer, the 15 participants who identified as deejays were specifically what might be described in most general terms 'dance' deejays, be it hip hop, reggae, house, techno, drum and bass, garage or similar; likely another symptom of some of them being sourced by acquaintances of mine. Again, the exact ramifications of this are unclear, though dance music comes with its own cultural world, which may have skewed the data gathered in the focus groups in a particular way, as was observed in Section 4.8 when the sometimes competitive aspects of sourcing music in this scene was discussed. What was observed is that one participant who only referenced rock music at the beginning of the focus group she attended, began adapting some of the cultural references in her responses to include references to deejay and dance music culture.

Though the data gathering process yielded a suitably diverse variety of responses for analysis and comparison of changing music acquisition and interpersonal communication patterns, to summarise there was a particular concentration of music industry-affiliated dance music deejays aged somewhere between 35 and 52 that attended the focus groups. They were all male. As already discussed, how this affected the data gathered overall was unclear, though there were minor indications (as outlined above) that this demographic cluster may have affected the group dynamics and in turn some of the responses. Overall, recognising a concentration of a distinct demographic grouping presented an observable limitation when the original data gathering objective is considered, which was to have an even range of age groups and music consumer types (both in terms of digital versus analogue consumption as well as genre preferences and associated cultural groupings).

### **5.3 Potential areas for further research**

This thesis has explored how technological change has altered the ways in which highly engaged music consumers now interact with one another, how communities based on recorded music now manifest themselves, and the implications of these changes. This work has also tracked changes in these audiences' everyday attitudes towards, as well as

engagement with, recorded music itself. In order to assess these changes from a contextual starting point, this work has discussed the historical significance of the independent brick-and-mortar record shop as a socially and culturally relevant space, in turn assessing the continued value of geographically distinct spaces where individuals can convene and connect with one-and-other.

There are a range of areas for potential further research. Firstly, if it is assumed that highly engaged music consumers are highly engaged people in more general terms, they might also be early adopters of new technology and media products. If so, then this research might serve as an early examination into habits and practices yet to be adopted by the wider population, and could be utilised in order to study the social ramifications of the general public rather than specialised groups predominantly interacting online. This research might also be useful to investigations of any long-standing organisations, social groupings, and communities who increasingly convene online, from political groups to fans of sport to self-help groups. This work might also be used as a comparative investigation, in that further research could evaluate whether Internet users with other interests, objectives, and outlooks function and behave in a similar way to highly engaged music consumers, assessing how different individuals and communities have adapted to interacting in online settings.

If a researcher were to take on a project with more direct links to this work, there is scope to evaluate the habits of more mainstream music consumers, assessing how these individuals have fared in the modern media and communication environment. There are questions that could be raised as to how less dedicated music consumers now source a wide range of music, how the recorded music industry has adapted to attract these customers in the post-Napster environment, or what value more general music consumers now attach to music in a media environment with more available options than the past. As the participants in this study were all city-based, a future study might assess how the community dynamics and access points to recorded music differ in the provinces, and the ramifications of this. There is also the potential to explore why there is a gender imbalance in most independent record shop communities, in turn examining if women are more present in equivalent online communities, and the reasons for this.

From a musicological perspective, a future study might assess how increasingly globalised rather than localised music communities might affect popular music; for example will traditional geographic associations with music genres and styles be replaced by global equivalents? Will the modern incarnation of the Dunedin sound or Chicago house music be the distinctive musical output of a collective who convene on a Facebook group page? There is also value in further exploring people's increasing interactions with digital files rather than physical 'things', and the social, cultural, and economic ramifications of this. Finally, conversations with participants revealed apparently less concern with the hegemonic media structures that appear now ubiquitous online. For example there is potential to further research people's attitudes to companies like Facebook in comparison to companies like McDonalds, the latter of which has become a shorthand metaphor for questionable business practices across the globe. Perhaps activist groups and scholars will one day refer to cultural, social, and business institutions being 'Facebookized' in years to come, or maybe the Internet has its own rules of engagement that somehow exonerate online corporations from the kind of critique directed at their offline counterparts.

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# Glossary

- **45** Is a colloquial term for a seven inch vinyl record, or 'single', played at 45 rpm, and typically consisting of one track per side.
- **Amoeba** is an independent US recorded music chain store.
- **Artist and Repertoire** is the division of a record label or music publishing company that is responsible for talent scouting and overseeing the artistic development of recording artists and songwriters.
- **Baby Boomers** are people born during the Western post–World War II baby boom, approximately between the years 1946 and 1964.
- **Beatport** is an online music store specialising in electronic music and culture.
- **Big Five** is the collective term for the major recording labels that operated between 1999 and 2004. They were Warner Music Group, EMI, Sony, BMG, and Universal Music Group.
- **Big Three** is the collective term for the major recording labels that have operated since 2012. They are Universal Music Group (most of EMI's recorded music division absorbed into UMG), Sony Music Entertainment (EMI Music Publishing absorbed into Sony/ATV Music Publishing), and Warner Music Group (EMI's Parlophone and EMI/Virgin Classics labels absorbed into WMG on 1 July 2013).
- **CD Baby** is an online music store specialising in the sale of CDs, vinyl records and music downloads from independent musicians to consumers.
- **Digging** is a colloquial term for looking for vinyl records in a non-corporate, non-chain-retail establishment.
- **Digital Age** (also called the information age) is defined as the time period starting in the 1970s with the introduction of the personal computer with subsequent technology introduced providing the ability to transfer information freely and quickly.
- **Digital Native** is an individual who was born after the widespread adoption of digital technology.
- **Freeconomics** is a term coined by Anderson (2008) to describe a business model in which a product is offered free of charge and supported by sales of a premium version.
- **Generation X** (commonly abbreviated to Gen X) is the generation born after the Western Post–World War II baby boom. Most demographers and commentators use birth dates ranging from the early 1960s to the early 1980s
- **Generation Y** is another term for Millennials, the demographic cohort born following Generation X. There are no precise dates for when the generation starts and ends; most researchers and commentators use birth years ranging from the early 1980s to the early 2000s.
- **John Key** is the 38th Prime Minister of New Zealand, in office since 2008. He has led the New Zealand National Party since 2006.

- **Payola** is the illegal practice of payment or other inducement by record companies for the broadcast of recordings on commercial radio in which the song is presented as being part of the normal day's broadcast.
- **Reason** is a digital audio workstation for creating and editing music and audio developed by Swedish software developers Propellerhead Software. It emulates a rack of hardware synthesisers, samplers, signal processors, sequencers, and mixers, all of which can be freely interconnected in an arbitrary manner.
- **Rip / Ripping** is the process of copying audio or video content to a hard disk, typically from removable media such as compact disc (CD) or DVD, although the word refers to all forms of media.
- **Roadrunner** (Records) is a major Dutch record label that concentrates primarily on heavy metal and hard rock bands. It is a division of Warner Music Group and is based in New York City.
- **Serato** is the colloquial term for virtual DJ software 'Scratch Live' and 'Serato DJ', owing to the fact both are the most commonly used products from Serato Audio Research, a New Zealand company that specialises in audio signal processing, production and professional performance tools for DJs.
- **Seven Inch** is a vinyl record format size, also referred to as a 'single' or '45', played at 45 rpm, and typically consisting of one track per side.
- **Soundcloud** is a global online audio distribution platform based in Berlin, Germany, that enables its users to upload, record, promote, and share their originally-created sounds.
- **Torrent / BitTorrent** is a communications protocol for the practice of peer-to-peer file sharing that is used to distribute large amounts of data over the Internet. BitTorrent is one of the most common protocols for transferring large files.
- **Twelve Inch (often simply called 12")** is a type of vinyl record that has wider groove spacing and shorter playing time compared to typical long players. This record type is commonly used in disco and dance music genres, where deejays use them to play in discos or clubs. They are played at either 33⅓ or 45 rpm.