

'You Can't Find This Online': Curation and Consumption in Local Record Shops in Stockholm

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As digital technologies democratize the tools of cultural production and create new channels of global promotion and distribution, cultural producers face intense competition to 'stand out' in the growing crowd. In the music industry, where iTunes offers over 30 millions songs, this pressure is particularly acute and geographers have examined the strategies that music producers at different scales use to generate distinction, value and loyalty. Yet it is equally important to consider how consumers find, evaluate, and select specific products from a sea of alternatives. To date, the people who help to make these choices, the interactions between curators and consumers and the physical and virtual spaces where advice is created and distributed remain poorly understood. This presentation will explore these processes by drawing on new interview and observation-based research in local record shops in Stockholm. As firms like iTunes, Amazon and Spotify push the boundaries of e-commerce by using customer tracking data to make personalized recommendations and offering home delivery or instantaneous streaming to mobile devices, this research considers why consumers are willing to pay a premium, in both time and money, to patronize bricks-and-mortar shops. In so doing, it identifies different sources of value, including face-to-face curation, that make some local record shops attractive and resilient spaces in an age of digital distribution and on-demand consumption.