

Standing Out In The Crowd: Competing in the dynamic marketplace for cultural products

Brian J. Hracz – University of Toronto

Geographers have been endeavoring to understand the complex relationships between cultural production, consumption, society and space for some time. In particular, they consider the ways in which cultural products generate and trade on symbolic value and how cultural producers draw from and alter the meaning of place. Recently, however, new technologies, social practices and consumer behavior are changing these relationships. MP3's, digital cameras, creative software and online communities, which facilitate collaboration, file sharing and consumption allow an unprecedented volume of cultural goods and services to be produced and consumed in a marketplace which is becoming increasingly global. This expansion has also been accompanied by the general oversupply of cultural products and the widespread practice of downloading MP3's, movies and video games over the Internet illegally. Together these conditions serve to lower the monetary value of cultural products. As a result of these market dynamics and intensifying competition cultural producers are searching for ways to stand out in the crowd. While geographers have started to explore some of these strategies there is still much work to be done in this area. Therefore, in this paper I explore the strategies indie producers in Toronto are employing to differentiate new and existing products. One example involves intra-sectoral collaborations between indie musicians and indie fashion designers to enhance the visual components of recorded music, live musical performances and merchandise. I also consider how indie producers create value and exclusivity by fusing diverse stylistic and symbolic elements and linking their products to local cultural scenes.