

Competing in the 'Crowded' Creative Economy: The Case of Independent Musicians and Fashion Designers

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With iTunes offering over 18 million songs and Etsy featuring over 10 million items of clothing, the contemporary marketplace for music and fashion-related products is characterized by oversupply and intense competition. With new digital technologies and declining entry barriers, cultural producers struggle to stand out in the crowd and command monopoly rents for their 'unique' goods and services. Yet, whereas geographers have examined the capital-intensive strategies that global firms such as Burberry use to brand their products, little is known about how local entrepreneurs monetize their creative content on shoe-string budgets. Using a cross-national and cross-sectoral comparison of independent musicians and fashion designers in Toronto, Stockholm, Berlin and New York, this presentation demonstrates how these producers harness exclusivity to generate distinction and value. By providing illustrative examples, three common sources of exclusivity are explored. These include tapping into the individualization of demand, integrating consumers into the production and promotion process and manipulating physical and virtual spaces. The trans-local flows, effectiveness and ongoing sustainability of these exclusivity-based strategies will also be considered. The findings contribute to our understanding of entrepreneurship and market dynamics in the contemporary creative economy.