

## **Digital Music Consumption in the era of Big Data and Data Analytics: A Theoretical Approach for Examining Music Recommender Systems as Cultural Intermediaries**

As the rate and scale of digital data accumulation continue to outstrip all expectations so too we come to depend increasingly on a variety of technical tools to interrogate these data and to render them as an intelligible source of information. In response, on the one hand, a great deal of attention has been paid to the design of efficient and reliable mechanisms for big data analytics whilst, on the other hand, concerns are expressed about the rise of ‘algorithmic society’ whereby important decisions are made by computational agents of which the majority of the population has little knowledge, understanding or control. This paper aims to bridge these two debates working through the case of music recommender systems. The enormous volume, variety and velocity of digital music available online has seen the growth of recommender systems, which are increasingly embedded in the everyday music consumption of individuals. These systems help consumers navigate the expanding cultural field in order to discover interesting and relevant music, whilst enabling content providers to market goods more intimately. Combining Bourdieu’s analysis of ‘taste’ with Actor Network Theory’s insistence on the relational ontology of human and non-human actors, we draw on empirical evidence from the social science and computational literature on recommender systems to argue that music recommender systems should be understood as a new form of sociotechnical cultural intermediary. In doing so, we aim to define a broader agenda for better understanding the role and significance of the computational tools designed to manage big data.