8 Music, Mavens, and Technology

Steven Tepper, Eszter Hargittai, and David Touve

Introduction

Changes in culture are intricately connected to changes in technology (Carey 1988). In fact, the footprint of technology is found on the doorstep of every epochal change in how art and entertainment is produced and consumed. In many cases, new inventions in the way sounds, images, and texts are produced and captured have changed the way that artists and writers work, leading to new styles (e.g., dime novels, Impressionism, talkies, rock and roll) and forms (e.g., photography, synthesized music, new media art). But perhaps even more far reaching, new technologies have dramatically changed the market for art, typically leading to expanded audiences with access to more diverse cultural fare. In short, technology has been the handmaiden for both the expansion and diffusion of culture—more material made available to more people.

But, of course, technology is subject to social, cultural, and political forces; therefore, its impact on culture is not always straightforward

(Neuman 1991; Starr 2004). Throughout history, technology has also been used to censor and restrict art, and technology gave birth to the cultural industries and the mass production of art and entertainment, often replacing diverse, locally based culture with national, homogenous fare. So we cannot assume that technology and culture move along a single path. Every case of technological change requires careful analysis and observation to determine its unique consequences.

This chapter examines the impact of new digital technology on music consumption, a subject that has drawn considerable attention from pundits, scholars, legal experts, and the music industry. The terrain is contested, messy, and difficult to sort out. Traditional social and economic arrangements surrounding intellectual property are breaking down. Business models are shifting daily, and markets are becoming more consolidated. Consumers are facing a mind-boggling array of gadgets and services that allow them to access and enjoy art and entertainment in novel ways. In the face of such a daunting set of issues, this chapter focuses on a much smaller part of the puzzle: How do college students go about finding new music in a digital age?

Why do we care about the discovery of new music? Is there an a priori reason to favor discovery in art? Should we care if people prefer to listen to the same Beatles album day after day or to a country music station that plays the same fifteen songs every three hours? There are two reasons why a healthy art system requires its audiences and consumers to seek out new artists and new sounds. First, innovation and creativity require churn. If demand is sated, and audiences are complacent, then there is little room for new artists and styles to break through. Second, ever since British economist Nassau Senior (1854, p. 14) introduced the Law of Variety, arguing that "our desires do not aim so much at quantity as diversity," economists and psychologists have explored variety-seeking behavior in consumers. They have concluded that pleasure is derived from the act of stimulating choice and discovering something new that satisfies one's preferences. Musicologists and music theorists, of course, have long argued that variety, surprise, and the resolution of the unfamiliar are critical for enjoyment and deep appreciation of music. Therefore, it is safe to assume that there are positive benefits—for artists, for audiences, and for the larger society—when people sample and explore new art.

Of course, it is difficult to generalize from college students to the rest of the population, but they are a decent weathervane for larger currents in the world of music. Music labels have mostly targeted college students as prime suspects in the illegal downloading of music. College radio stations play an important role in promoting diverse and alternative music. College students are frequent early adopters of new technology, as evidenced by the flood of iPods on today's campuses. Finally, music is a particularly important source of identity and social currency for young adults. In short, if new technologies are influencing patterns of musical consumption, college students would be expected to be at the forefront of such changes.

The chapter begins with a brief overview of the historical relationship among technology, diversity, consumers, and art. Then, several theories are outlined about audience behavior, focusing on the use of technology, the effects of the mass media, and the role of taste makers. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the results of a recently administered survey on the musical tastes and habits of college students, and some implications for future research and policy are drawn.

History of Technology and Cultural Change

Scholars have long been interested in how technology has influenced patterns of cultural production and consumption. Sociologist Paul Starr (2004) wrote eloquently about the process by which new technology led to the expansion of readers in the early nineteenth century. He argued that new technology allows cultural goods to be produced more cheaply, leading to a reduction in price and a consequent expansion in the size and diversity of audiences. For example, the inventions of the power-driven cylinder press, stereotyping, and cheap paper all led to an explosion of publishing and reading, including the rise of the dime novel, pulp fiction, specialty newspapers, and other literary forms. More citizens took up reading, niche markets arose, and books became a source of amusement rather than just a means of religious, practical, or political communication.

As books and periodicals flooded private homes, urban night life emerged with the invention of widespread lighting in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As urban streets were illuminated by the new technology of gas and electric lamps, respectable, middle-class

people, including women, emptied out into the streets at night to enjoy such urban places of entertainment as dance halls and clubs. These early amusements created the demand and the urban context that ultimately led to the proliferation of movie theaters.

Around the same time, Thomas Edison invented the phonograph and changed forever the way Americans consumed music. Instead of gathering on the porch or around the piano for sing-alongs, music lovers hovered over music boxes and listened to the professional voices of new recording stars, like John McCormack, the Irish Tenor, or Nora Bayes, the vaudeville singer turned celebrity. Suddenly, Americans were exposed to more artists and types of music than they ever knew existed.

Since the turn of the twentieth century, technological innovation has continued to reshape the way people experience music. The invention of the LP (long-playing, high-fidelity disc) and FM radio led to what the founder of Elektra Records refers to as "an unprecedented flowering of musical styles and sonic experimentation" after World War II (Karr 2002, p. 2). Suddenly major record producers had excess press capacity—each press run could produce four to six songs per album instead of one—and started renting their presses to independent record labels. According to Karr (2002), music fans started new labels to reflect their own tastes and interests, and by the 1950s there were more than 500 different labels. Music lovers would be confronted with every type of music imaginable at their local music store. With the rise of FM radio, which doubled the number of stations, there was plenty of air time to go around. As this brief historical account makes clear, the introduction of new technologies in the early twentieth century was associated with the flowering of new and diverse art forms, expanded choice for consumers, and experimentation.

More, More, and Then Something Extra: The Shifting Landscape of Cultural Consumption

Today, many observers look out over the sea of digital technologies and anticipate similar tectonic shifts in the way people consume art and entertainment. In the realm of distribution and retail, technology has shifted inventories of music, books, and videos first from expensive physical shelf space in local stores to cheap space in national ware-houses and then to virtual shelf space in the online world. In the purely physical world, the average Wal-Mart store offers around 4,000 CD titles, and the average music superstore offers 40,000 (Anderson 2004). Online retailers such as Amazon.com, on the other hand, offer upward of 150,000 unique CDs. Digital storefronts like iTunes, Napster, Rhapsody, and MusicMatch offer upward of 3 million tracks—the equivalent of about 300,000 CDs.

There are equally dramatic changes in the ways people store and access art and entertainment. Digital technologies have made possible the storage of massive quantities of entertainment. In 1998 Diamond Multimedia released the Rio portable MP3 player, which could store about three music albums worth of compressed audio. In 2006, Apple's iPod offered 60 GB of storage and the potential for 15,000 songs on a portable music player small enough to fit into a shirt pocket. Some media players can also handle video and will soon be offering more than 100 GB of storage capacity.

Access to radio and film is also exploding, thanks to technology. In the 1990s two exclusive licenses for satellite radio broadcasters—SatCasters—were issued in the United States, resulting in the creation of Sirius and XM satellite radio. Consequently, more than 200 additional, commercial-free audio programming channels were made available in the United States to those willing to pay the monthly subscription fees. Singular audio channels accessible across the contiguous nation now offer everything from classical music to talk radio, with channel names like "Backspin," "Area 63," and "Boneyard."

Online, the domain of programmed audio and video channels, or webcasts, is continually expanding. There is no reliable estimate of the total number of webcast stations available at any one time, but it is not unreasonable to place the number in excess of 100,000. Live365, one provider of webcasting services to individuals, has approximately 5,000 unique stations. Music@Netscape, a division of AOLMusic, offers more than 1,000 music videos, and online video providers like iFilm and AtomFilms provide access to thousands of short- and long-format digital films.

Beyond this cache of webcasters is a category of content programmers labeled *broadcatchers*, since the audio and video content available can be downloaded and caught. An example of broadcatching is podcasting, whereby user-created audio programming—with subjects

from popular music to science fiction—have been made available for download from sites such as Odeo, Podshow, or PodcastAlley and for playback on popular portable media players such as the iPod. In other words, audience members themselves are curating the musical experiences of other listeners.

Though the rental of films, in VHS or DVD, has been a popular market category in the United States for decades, copyright law did not provide such preformatted potential for music. Recently however, renting music has been made possible by the availability of subscription licenses and services. Music services, including MusicMatch, Rhapsody, Napster, MusicNow, VirginDigital, and OD2, provide subscribers access to large catalogs of music, often more than 2 million tracks, for a monthly fee. The available catalogs for these services continue to grow. Music subscription services are not the only offerings, however, as companies such as NetFlix, Blockbuster, and Greencine provide the subscription-based availability of films on DVD, via the postal system, whereas online film services distribute digital films through the Internet.

Perhaps the most controversial vehicle through which the average netizen has gained access to an ever-expanding percentage of the world's entertainment has been peer-to-peer (P2P) network development, or file sharing. In 2004, Jupiter research found that 42 percent of eighteen- to twenty-four-year olds surveyed had traded music by file sharing (Jupiter Research 2004). By enabling any individual to search and download from the hard drives of their peers easily, these services make millions of unique recordings available to users of P2P services at any one time. Although the Supreme Court ruling in the case of *Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Studios Inc. v. Grokster, Ltd.* may have slowed the growth of unlicensed peer networks, they continue to function, and file sharing persists.

Blurring the edges of P2P and webcasting are applications like Mercora, a service that converts the music collections of connected individuals into peer-based audio streams organized according to the limits of legal webcasting standards. This system allows individuals to webcast with their connected peers directly or to convert the contents of the music collections of myriad connected individuals into a unique programming experience for each listener. Similarly, upcoming portable media players from Microsoft, under the Zune brand name, will enable the streaming of music in local spaces from one portable media player to another.

The development of massive online communities, whether formed around general social networks or user-generated media, has been one of the fastest-growing categories of new cultural consumption, creation, and discussion. In this environment, sites like MySpace, Bebo, and Facebook have grown to include tens of millions of active users. During the month of July 2006, MySpace reported adding 230,000 new registered users each day (Francisco 2006). These social network sites seemingly become so influential that larger media companies now consider these channels crucial to marketing products. Additionally, video-specific sites like YouTube, Revver, and GoogleVideo, along with music-focused sites like Garageband.com and PureVolume, are growing to provide not only the media consumer with a host of options but also the producer with a wider collection of channels through which to develop an audience.

Beyond differentiation, the ability to customize and personalize the entertainment experience is continually improving. Most visitors to Amazon.com are now familiar with the recommendations provided by the company's collaborative filtering system: "people who have purchased this book, have also purchased..." This system relates a buyer with other consumers of similar goods in order to make recommendations for other products. This filtering system provides a simple example of how machines can use human behavior to connect people to new products—even if these new products are similar to ones they have tried before. Internet radio providers, such as LaunchCast, a division of Yahoo! Music, permit the customization of audio programming based on the preselected genres and artists chosen by a listener as well as the ongoing rating of music programmed for each user. Audio providers like Last.fm and Pandora create custom radio programming based on each user's music collection, listening behavior, or individual ratings similarity to a collective of user ratings.

Similar to the trends described in the first half of the twentieth century, the cultural universe is expanding, and technology is allowing consumers and artists to navigate this system better, creating communities of expertise and shared interest, bigger and more accessible catalogues, more personalized services, and more efficient ways of matching preferences to new choices. Chris Anderson, author of "The Long Tail" (2004, p. 2) boldly asserted, "Unlimited selection is revealing truths about what consumers want .... People are going deep into the catalog, down the long, long list of available titles ... and the more they find,

the more they like. As they wander further from the beaten path, they discover their taste is not as mainstream as they thought."

However, not everyone agrees that technology is driving us toward more enlightened consumption. In fact, some scholars raise concerns about many of the customization and personalization devices mentioned already (Negroponte 1995; Sunstein 2001; Turow 1998, 2006). Marketing and advertising are taking advantage of new technologies and methods of gathering and cross-referencing data to create increasingly targeted campaigns. Consumers will soon see advertisements on their televisions, computers, and PDAs that are narrowly tailored to appeal to some predetermined taste category. One person might see ads for foreign films in her edition of the *New York Times*; another will only see ads for romantic comedies in his. This reflects the notion of the "Daily Me," where people increasingly put together very specific portfolios of news, information, and culture that reinforce their existing preferences and views while filtering out everything else (Negroponte 1995).

Thus, collaborative filtering technology, like that used by Amazon, could serve to expand cultural choice, offering people reliable recommendations and reducing the risk of trying new books and music. But if these filters become too precise and customized, they more likely will create ever-more narrow bandwidths of choice, leading people down the "Daily Me" path.

In short, technological innovations could lead to either more or less experimentation and sampling. Of course, there have always been opportunities to sample new cultural goods: Libraries make books available for free, and trendsetters identify novel products and promote them to their friends (e.g., copying records, making mix tapes, dragging friends to see films or music). But very little is known about how these social dynamics work and how they might be changing as the result of new technologies. There is a dearth of empirical research examining the ways consumers sample new books, films, and music. On whom do they rely? To what sources do they go to learn about new artists? What type of person is more likely to experiment? The next section reports on a pilot study of 300 college students that explores how they find new music, how they interact with new technologies, and how they respond to opportunities to wander from the beaten path.

Pathways through which We Find the New

Scholars offer three general explanations for the behavior and strategies of audiences and consumers. First, as noted already, technology is seen as a tool for users to navigate ever-expanding cultural catalogues. Technology is supposed to lead to greater and more diverse cultural consumption in two ways. First, catalogues of books, music, and film have become much bigger, more diverse, and expansive. Some scholars and pundits adhere to the notion that the sheer size of the new virtual catalogues will incite people to experiment and discover new things. Economists agree that technology leads to new patterns of experimentation, but they focus more narrowly on the new electronic marketplace (Bakos 1998). Accordingly, they point out that technology has reduced the cost of searching and browsing by enabling consumers to sample, or rent, music and books for a short period of time at relatively low cost. No longer do consumers have to buy a whole album only to find out that they like just one song. As Cory Doctorow, former Grateful Dead drummer, proclaimed, "The whole point of digital music is the risk-free grazing" (Doctorow 2003). Based on these arguments, the expectation is that technology is a primary tool for students as they seek out new music.

On the other hand, there is a long tradition of scholarship that focuses on the role of social networks for helping individuals find information and make purchasing decisions. Social networks disseminate news about jobs, health services, politics, and culture (DiMaggio and Louch 1998; Granovetter 1995). People regularly rely on friends and acquaintances for recommendations and reviews. In the area of art, culture, and media, *opinion leaders, mavens,* and *trendsetters* play a prominent role in the circulation of information about new products (Katz and Lazarsfeld 1955; Rogers 1995). In the 1950s, Paul Lazarsfeld first pointed out the important role that leaders in a community play in redacting information and often changing citizen preferences. More recently, Malcom Gladwell (2000) wrote about the role of mavens in the diffusion of new cultural trends— for example, a handful of trendsetters in the lower east side in New York City in instigating the widespread adoption of Hush Puppies in the late 1990s. Corporations are increasingly hiring *cool hunters* and mavens to spread the word and to create buzz around new products. Consequently, a second working hypoth-

esis is that social networks and face-to-face exchange remain important avenues for exploring new music.

Of course, consumers continue to be influenced by mass media and advertising. Approximately 150 billion dollars are spent each year by the U.S. advertising industry under the assumption that the mass media are a source of influence and information for consumers. Beginning in the 1950s, psychologists were enlisted by ad agencies to perfect the science of persuasion—convincing American consumers to buy new cars, to try new whiskey or cigarettes, and to switch cleaning detergents. In recent years, there has been a reaction against the idea that consumers are dupes and passive media consumers, as scholars show how audiences actively navigate the marketplace, resist dominant media messages, and take advantage of empowering technologies. But these claims might be overstated and exceedingly optimistic. W. Russell Neuman (1991) found that the development of cable television and the explosion of cultural choice did not lead to interactive consumers who used the medium to try new channels and programming. Instead, he discovered that audiences are habit bound and that cultural practices, like watching TV, labor under heavy inertia. People resist new technologies if they challenge existing media habits. He also found that audiences are quite passive when it comes to cultural consumption; they do not want to work hard for their entertainment. Consequently, network television stations maintained a large share of the market even in the face of a proliferating number of cable programs. Neuman's work suggests that it is possible that new digital technologies will be slow to take hold and that cultural consumers will continue to rely on traditional mass media (e.g., radio, television, newspapers, films) as important sources for the discovery of new music.

College Students' Music-Finding Behavior

To test empirically these theories, a survey was conducted of how college students learn about new music. A paper-and-pencil questionnaire was administered to 292 students on three different college campuses across the United States: one in the Northeast, the Midwest, and the South. Students were asked to report on the ways they find music

that is new to them. Following are presented some of the findings from the study's preliminary analyses.

First, as expected, college students consume a great deal of music (Figures 8.1 and 8.2). When asked how many artists are in their *jukebox*—that is, the number of different artists they listen to in a given week—89 percent reported that they listen to at least five different artists a week, and 53 percent listen to more than fifteen different artists. Students also
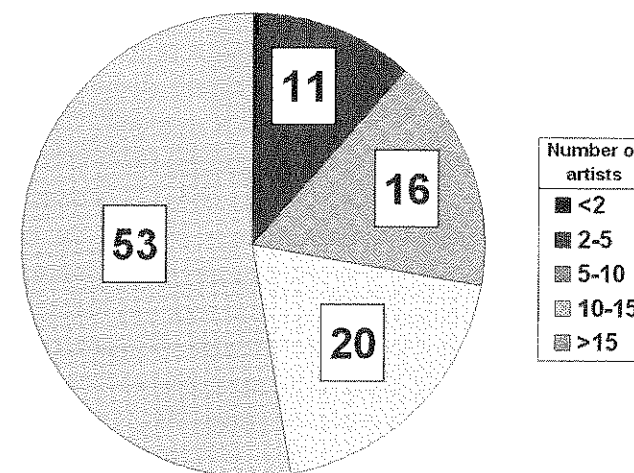

Figure 8.1   Number of different artists listened to each week.
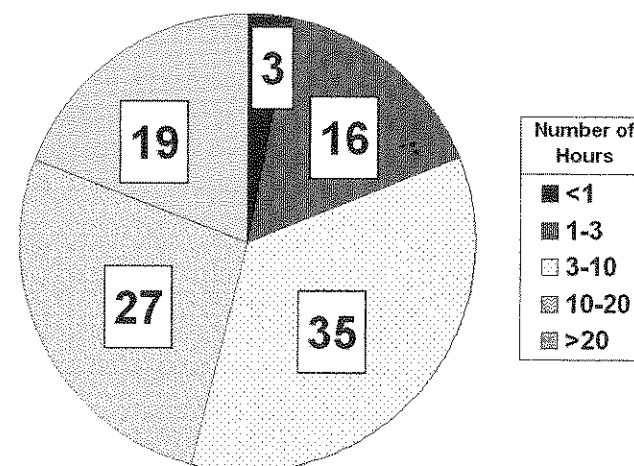

Figure 8.2   Number of hours of music listened to each week.

listen to music often, with almost half listening to at least ten hours a week and one fifth more than twenty hours weekly. Most of this music listening revolves around four major genres: pop music, rock (including classic rock), alternative and hard rock (including punk), and rap and hip-hop (Figure 8.3). Consistent with findings from the National Endowment for the Arts National Survey of Arts Participation, young people are much less interested in classical music, with only 10 percent reporting that classical music is among the top three genres of music to which they like to listen—and only 3.5 percent selecting it as their top choice.

When examining variety-seeking behavior, a central concern of this chapter, the sample of students were almost evenly divided between two statements: 48 percent chose "I generally stick to music I like and know well and will try new things if others recommend them to me, but I do not actively look for new things"; 45 percent chose "I generally stick to music I like and know well, but I am actively looking for new things to try also" (Figure 8.4). These two groups might be characterized as those who are open to variety and those who seek out variety. Very few students (2 percent) shun variety entirely ("always stick to music I like and know well"), and very few (5 percent) are always experimenting and trying new things.
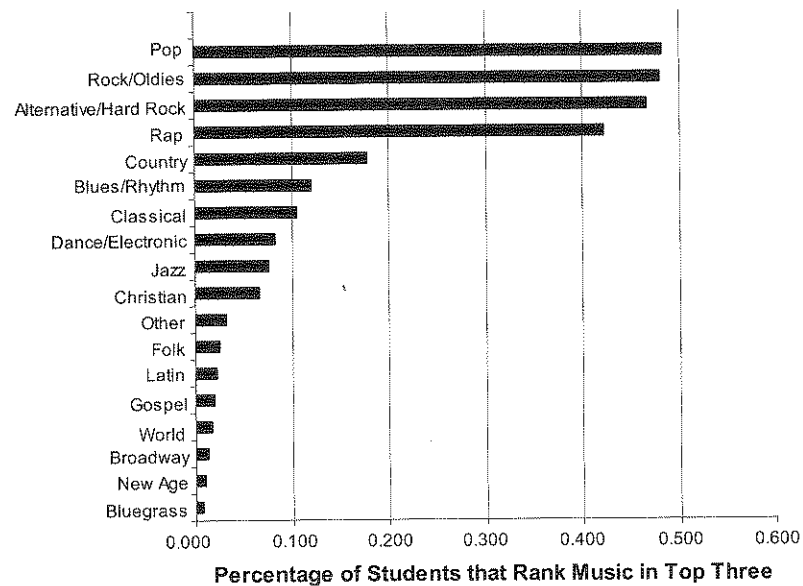
Figure 8.3   Music preferences by genre.
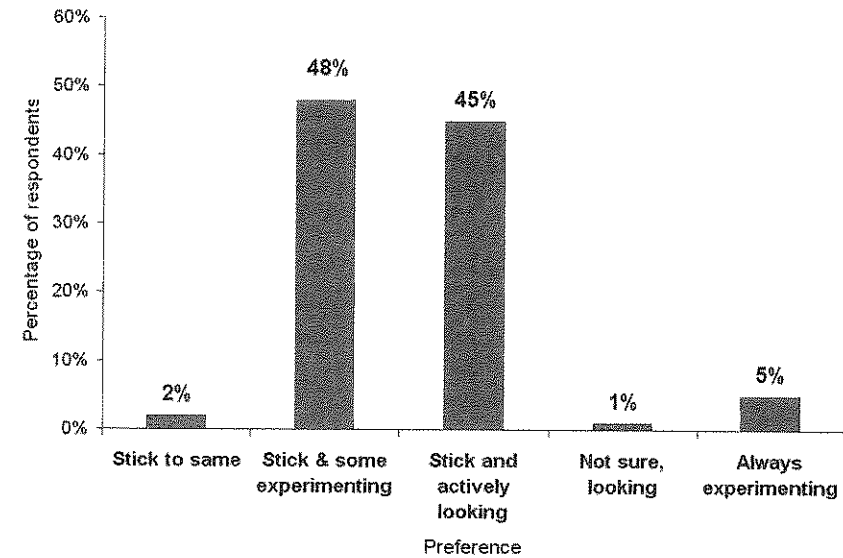
Figure 8.4   Disposition toward experimentation

What are the pathways through which students find out about new music? Do they use new technology, rely on trusted friends and acquaintances, or discover new music through the mass media? Table 8.1 shows the top ten pathways or search strategies. The top ways involve social networks, with personal acquaintances playing and recommending new songs as two of the most frequent pathways for finding new music (54 percent and 36 percent of the students, respectively, choose these as one of their top three strategies). Also, mass media remain an important source—though not as important as social networks. Watching MTV (28 percent) and listening to the radio (40 percent) were among the top four strategies. In general, new technology played a more minor role than expected. Use of P2P technologies (22 percent) was the most popular strategy in this group, followed by browsing a subscription library (9 percent), but both of these were far less popular than discovering new music through friends and acquaintances. The data collected for this study are a few years old, and it is possible that technology has become a more popular search strategy in the intervening years. Nonetheless, recent discussions with students affirm the premise that finding new music remains primarily a social process, and when technology is used, it is often in combination with social networks, as when a friend sends another friend an e-mail with a link to a new artist or album.

Table 8.1   Top Ten of Twenty-Four Total Search Strategies

Strategy	Total Strategies(%)
A personal acquaintance played me the song/album/artist.	54
Listening to a radio station (offline) that I frequently listen to.	40
A personal acquaintance recommended the song/album/artist to me.	36
Watching a music video on television (e.g., MTV).	28
Using a P2P file-sharing network.	22
Watching a film in which the song/artist was featured as part of the sound track.	20
Browsing through multiple radio stations (offline).	18
A personal acquaintance sent me the songs via the Internet.	14
A personal acquaintance made me a CD/tape compilation.	12
Browsing a subscription music library online (e.g., Rhapsody or iTunes).	9

Although most students do not rely exclusively on new technologies to find new music, new technologies still play an important role. How are users of new technologies different from their peers? Figure 8.5 compares technology users with those who do not use technology to find new music. The bars represent two types of technology users: (1) those who use technology, but not as their first choice; and (2) those who use technology as their first choice for discovering new music. Both are compared with the baseline of people (no bars shown in this case) who did not choose new technology (various online services) as one of the three top ways for learning about new music. The bars in Figure 8.5 represent the odds that a new technology user will do any of the five activities listed along the bottom, compared with someone who does not use new technology. So, for example, people who use new technology to discover music are more likely to listen to a greater number of different artists in a given week than nontechnology users (almost twice as likely); they also listen to a greater number of hours of music in a given week (again, almost twice as likely to do so).

In terms of their willingness to experiment and move beyond typical listening habits, technology users are more likely to say that they actively look for new things. Interestingly, technology users are not necessarily the ones who are the trendsetters. In other words, technology users are not more likely to consider themselves mavens (i.e., people who frequently make recommendations regarding new music to their
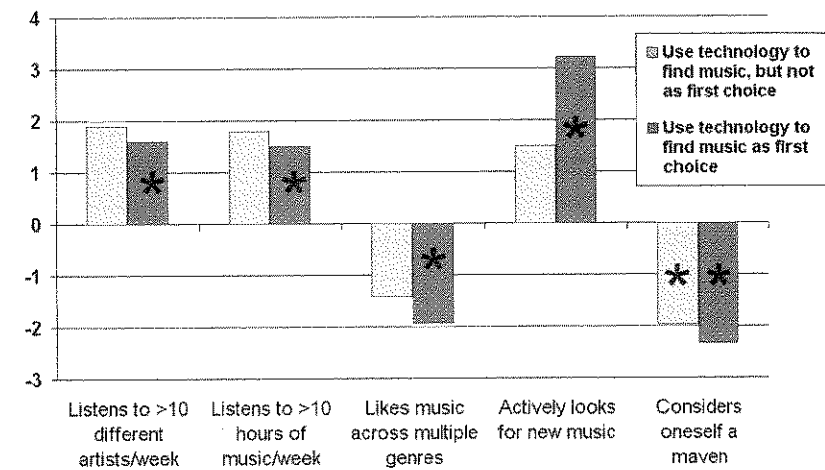
*Indicates that the difference between users of technology and those who do not use technology is statistically significant (at the .10 level), when comparing respondents by the 5 items at bottom of the chart.
Control variables include gender, whether respondent went to a private high school, whether they grew up in an urban area, and the amount of time they spend each week online (logged).
The vertical axis represents "odds"

Figure 8.5   Comparing technology and nontechnology searchers.

friends); in fact, they are twice as likely not to be mavens. Moreover, although technology users say they are more likely to be variety seekers, they are actually less likely to move out of their comfort zones and consume music across multiple genres.

Figure 8.5 shows that people who use technology as their first choice for discovering new music are almost twice as likely not to list their favorite styles of music across multiple genres (e.g., instead of listing classic punk, jazz, and hip-hop, they might list classic punk, mod punk, and new wave). Thus, initial evidence suggests that college students who use new technology to find new music most likely dig deeper in familiar territory—perhaps looking for artists or albums that are new to them but similar to styles they know well—rather than looking for music that would stretch their knowledge and tastes. Technology users act more like connoisseurs rather than true experimenters.

As discussed already, the study's evidence strongly suggests that social contact remains a key strategy for college students. Not only is

social exchange important, but much of this exchange also takes places through key influencers: 32 percent of all college students consider themselves mavens, and the vast majority (95 percent) rely on mavens for their own musical choices. Given the importance of mavens, it is important to try to understand their characteristics. Table 8.2 compares mavens and nonmavens in the study's sample. Mavens are more likely to be men, higher in socioeconomic status (measured by private high school attendance), and slightly more urban. They listen to more music than nonmavens in a given week and to a greater number of different artists. They are also more likely to seek out new music (76 percent of mavens are variety seekers compared to only 37 percent of nonmavens) and slightly more likely to cross over multiple genres.

However, counterintuitively, mavens are less likely to use technology to find new music (Figure 8.5), and they are more likely to rely on professional sources such as critics and journalists: 19 percent of mavens rely often or always on professional sources compared with 12 percent of nonmavens. When they do use new technology, they tend to browse the Internet, whereas nonmavens are more likely to use subscription services like Rhapsody or iTunes, which often have recommendations and staff-picks built into the service. In summary, mavens are important cultural brokers who value novelty. They use a diverse mix of search strategies—

Table 8.2   Comparing Mavens and Nonmavens

	Maven (%)	Nonmaven (%)
Rely on recommendations from professional sources (critics, journalists) when choosing to listen to recorded popular music (often or always)	19	12.4
Listens to more than ten hours of music per week	64	38
Listens to more than ten different artists per week	75	70
Male	54	40
Grew up in urban setting	27	18
Likes to experiment or look for new music and artists	76	37
Went to a private high school	33	20
Likes music across multiple genres	71	65

Note: Mavens are defined as "people who frequently make recommendations to others regarding new music." Of the sample 32 percent identified themselves as mavens.

as do nonmavens—including reaching beyond their own social circles to find music recommended by professional critics, watching music videos, and passing on recommendations that they have received from others.

Overall, the search strategies of mavens and nonmavens are remarkably similar. In general, mavens are not operating in some parallel universe of cultural choice and consumption, connecting their friends to treasures far away. The only significant difference between the two is that mavens are more likely to stretch their tastes further and to share their discoveries more often.

Implications: A Dynamic Model of Cultural Preference Formation

This study's data describe a dynamic community of listeners interacting with new technology, with established media (e.g., MTV), and with each other. This picture differs dramatically from the idea of the individual consumer who has relatively stable preferences and who is influenced primarily by traditional media. Figure 8.6 presents a schematic of such an individual, where marketers can either appeal to existing preferences—an individual's portfolio of favorite artists and genres—or they can try to induce an individual to try something new. Although this model allows room for some experimentation (i.e., trying something new), it conceives of the individual in a relatively bounded social and cultural space. The model does not acknowledge changing social dynamics (e.g., new friendships, new social networks) and how these changes might influence an individual's cultural preferences.

Figure 8.7 presents an alternative way to think about cultural consumption. Here, individuals are not isolated, individual consumers; rather, they are part of an overlapping network of cultural exchange. Each individual still has a set of preferences—likes and dislikes—but many of these preferences are determined by other individuals, especially mavens: those friends and acquaintances who are actively searching for and sharing new music, books, and films.

In this model new culture enters through multiple points—sometimes through traditional media, like *Rolling Stone* magazine, radio, or MTV—and other times through word of mouth. New culture is also actively discovered rather than being acquired by relatively passive indi-
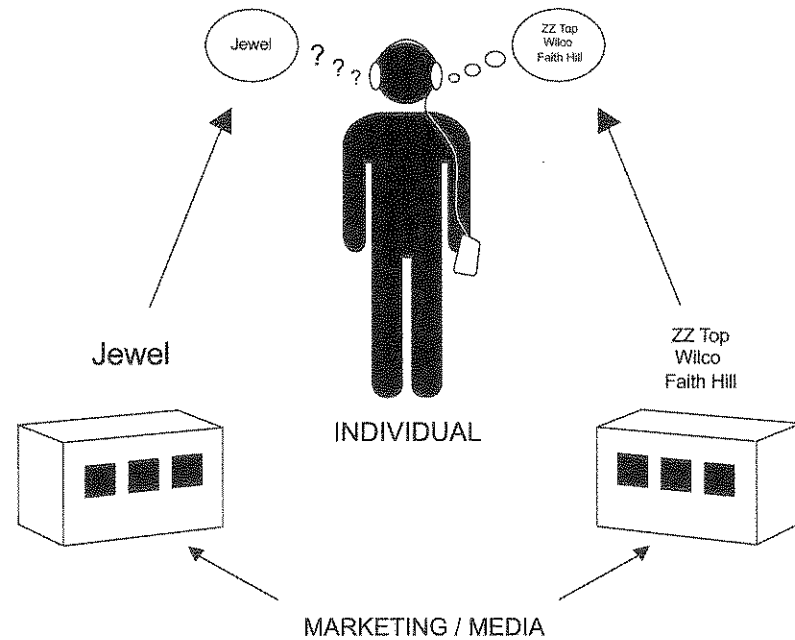
Figure 8.6   Old model: Individuals have stable preferences. Cultural producers must either target existing preferences (e.g., ZZ Top, Wilco, or Faith Hill) or try to create a new preference (e.g., Jewel).

viduals who are the targets of media and outreach campaigns. It is also clear that such an interactive model is highly dynamic. If preferences are connected through a series of overlapping network ties, then as the social world changes (e.g., new friendships, changing relationships, new ways of sharing information), cultural choices and interests will take a variety of shapes and forms. Imagine a popular children's toy, a Hoberman Transforming Sphere, made up of multiple interlocking rings. As one end of the sphere is pushed on, the entire sphere grows, shrinks, or changes shape. Small changes to the sphere can have large consequences. This idea is very much in line with the scholarship on social networks and the diffusion of innovation. An idea introduced in one part of a social network can easily influence the entire network. This alternative model suggests that cultural preferences and choices are socially contingent, relatively malleable, and formed through active search strategies and social exchange.
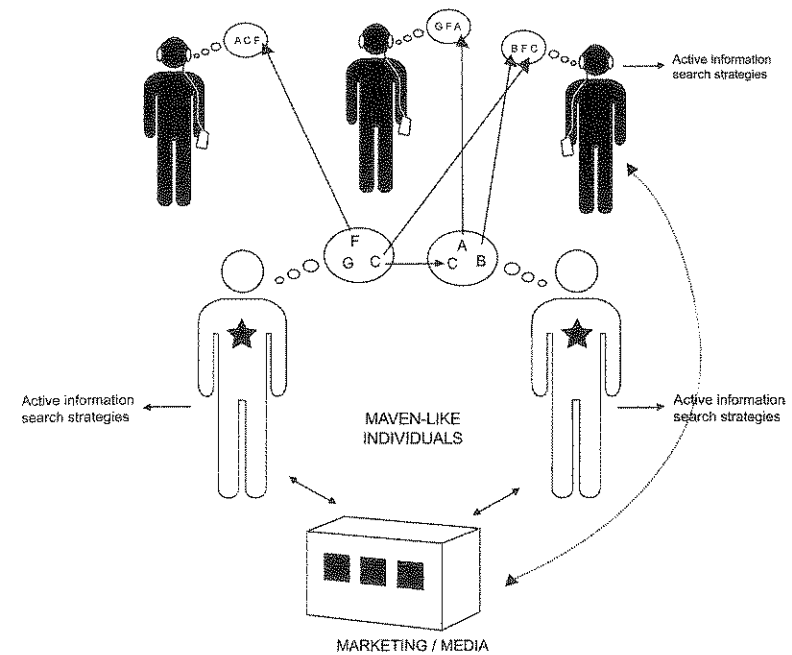
Figure 8.7   Alternative model: Individuals have shifting preferences, which are determined in large part by social networks and the influence of other mavens. (Note: Letters "A," "B," "C," etc. represent cultural preferences or choices e.g., a particular artist, CD, style, or music genre.)

Conclusion

This chapter has explored how college students find new music, but the larger goal is to shed some light on the process of discovery in cultural consumption. To date, leaders who care about arts participation have focused on issues of literacy and access. Can we give people, especially young people, the skills and knowledge to appreciate certain types of art and culture—painting, classical music, theater, and dance? And, assuming a basic foundation of literacy and knowledge, can we ensure access to these benchmark art forms? But this focus has largely ignored the process of discovery. Yet we know from economists and social psychologists that part of the meaning and enjoyment of consuming goods involves wandering off the beaten path.

This research suggests that many young people actively seek new avenues when it comes to listening to music and that many others rely on friends and acquaintances to suggest new paths to them. What encourages this type of discovery, and what tools help young people find new music? It was expected that new technology would be a critically important tool in this process because the number of devices that help people search for, experience, and exchange culture has grown exponentially in recent years. In theory, new technologies should be launching a renaissance of cultural experimentation. Surprisingly, however, new technology is far less important than social networks in connecting young people to new music. Furthermore, traditional media (e.g., newspapers, radio, MTV) remain important sources of information.

It is quite possible that new technology will become more important over time, especially as prices drop and as consumers shift to an increasingly all-digital world. But as with older technologies (e.g., automobiles, the telephone, television), these new technologies are expected to be shaped by the customs, habits, and needs of individual citizens. Discovering new music, books, films, and other forms of entertainment is a social process. It is social both because our friends and acquaintances provide us with valuable information as we navigate a crowded marketplace in search of "the stuff we like best" and because our connection to others is forged, in part, by discovering culture together.

It is suspected that new technology will increasingly make it easier for people to discover art and culture. As this pilot study demonstrates, people who rely heavily on new technology seem more inclined to seek out new music and artists actively, but they are less likely to seek out new formats and genres. Users of new technology, at present, are also less likely to be mavens, meaning they are potentially less invested in sharing their discoveries with others. These last two findings suggest that there may be more evidence for the "Daily Me" argument than the notion of widespread cultural grazing. So, new technology is not a silver bullet, either for consumers or producers of art and entertainment. Policymakers who want to elicit more variety seeking and discovery should invest in or work with those technologies that facilitate social exchange—like P2P networks or social networking sites like MySpace. In addition, they should pay special attention to networks that connect people across different social worlds, thereby increasing the chance that cultural discovery will cut across boundaries rather than servicing existing preferences and tastes.

From the standpoint of those who produce or present art and entertainment, investing in new technology is only one approach to reaching new audiences. Creating electronic mailing lists, streaming content, or producing podcasts are strategies that may increase reach or facilitate the delivery of content. But these strategies alone are not likely to influence, to a great extent, the behavior of individual consumers and participants. Instead, such efforts must be linked to the social process by which people discover new culture. Producers must identify and work through mavens, and they must facilitate the sharing of content—rather than erecting roadblocks through tighter control over intellectual property. In short, enriching cultural participation means stimulating the many synapses by which culture flows between individuals—exchanges that are essential for discovery and experimentation. Technology can create more synapses and can stimulate those that already exist, but ultimately, we wander off the beaten path holding hands with others.

Bibliography

Anderson, Chris. 2004. "The Long Tail." *Wired* 12.10. http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/12.10/tail.html.

Bakos, Y. 1998. "The Emerging Role of Electronic Marketplaces on the Internet." *Communications of the ACM* 41: 35–42.

Carey, J. 1988. *Communication as Culture*. New York: Routledge.

DiMaggio, Paul, and Hugh Louch. 1998. "Socially Embedded Consumer Transactions: For What Kinds of Purchases Do People Most Often Use Networks?" *American Sociological Review* 63: 619–37.

Doctorow, Cory. 2003. "eMusic Turns into a Steaming Pile." BoingBoing. http://www.boingboing.net/2003/10/09/emusic_turns_into_a_.html.

Francisco, Bambi. 2006. "MySpace in Its Own Space." MarketWatch. http://www.marketwatch.com.

Gladwell, Malcolm. 2000. *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company.

Granovetter, Mark. 1995. *Getting a Job: A Study of Contacts and Careers*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Jupiter Research. 2004. "Market Forecast Report: Music, 2004 to 2009." New York: Jupiter Research.

Karr, Rick. 2002. "TechnoPop: The Secret History of Technology and Pop Music." National Public Radio. http://www.npr.org/programs/morning/features/2002/technopop/index.html.

Katz, Elihu, and Paul Lazarsfeld. 1955. *Personal Influence: The Part Played by People in the Flow of Mass Communications.* Glencoe, IL: Free Press.

Negroponte, Nicholas. 1995. *Being Digital.* New York: Knopf.

Neuman, W. Russell. 1991. *The Future of the Mass Audience.* New York: Cambridge University Press.

Rogers, E. 1995. *Diffusion of Innovations.* New York: Free Press.

Senior, Nassau W. 1854. *Political Economy: Library of Economics and Liberty.* London: Richard Griffin and Company.

Starr, Paul. 2004. *The Creation of the Media: Political Origins of Modern Communications.* New York: Basic Books.

Sunstein, Cass. 2001. *Republic.com.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Turow, Joseph. 1998. *Breaking Up America: Advertisers and the New Media World.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

———. 2006. *Niche Envy.* Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

9 Audiences for the Arts in the Age of Electronics

Joel L. Swerdlow

Introduction

The shopping mall security guard, who says her name is Laura and describes herself as "tall with reddish blond hair," sits all day in front of images from security cameras, so she tries to break the boredom. Some days, she uses the cameras to follow the activities of a young shoplifter who has some very effective routines; another time, she leaves the windowless security office to retrieve a wallet that a man had just dropped in the parking lot. Examining its contents, she begins to imagine what his life must be like. She also connects the security cameras to a Web site and allows people to actually control the security cameras, choosing what areas to monitor and what angles to use. Talking to its visitors via computer, she sometimes wears high-heeled shoes that click as she paces back and forth. The security cameras are real, and visitors to the Web site can indeed control them, but they are at the Vancouver

ENGAGING ART

THE NEXT GREAT
TRANSFORMATION
OF AMERICA'S
CULTURAL LIFE

EDITED BY STEVEN J. TEPPER
AND BILL IVEY

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
New York London

CONTENTS