REVITALISING THE CONCEPT OF THE EVERYDAY IN INTERNET RESEARCH

Ludmila Lupinacci
University of Leeds

David Hesmondhalgh
University of Leeds

Raquel Campos Valverde
University of Leeds

Ignacio Siles
Universidad de Costa Rica

Luciana Valerio-Alfaro
Universidad de Costa Rica

Arturo Arriagada
Universidad Adolfo Ibánez

Jean Burgess
Queensland University of Technology

Kath Albury
Swinburne University of Technology

Anthony McCosker
Swinburne University of Technology

Rowan Wilken
RMIT University

Introductory statement

Recent internet research in the social sciences and humanities has begun to push back against excessive generalisations and other problematic tendencies by invoking and mobilising the concept of "the everyday" and related ideas of ordinary and mundane engagements with data, platforms, algorithms, and the digital (Kennedy 2018, Livingstone 2019). This panel brings together scholars working in different parts of the world – Australia, Chile, Costa Rica, the United Kingdom – and at different career stages to interrogate the value of such concepts for understanding digital culture, and to share ideas about how to theorise and empirically investigate the issues they raise.

In an academic milieu in which a lot of critical attention is dedicated to the data-grabbing, algorithmically biased, and asymmetrical power of massive techno-corporations, the panel explores ways in which a focus on situated ordinary textures can provide us with a more complex, nuanced, and even at times contradictory account of what happens when pervasive digital technologies are encountered in everyday life.

The idea of the 'everyday' as an object of study is a puzzling and contested one, as the main challenge of studying the taken-for-granted is that it disappears as soon as we approach it or pay attention to it. And yet, scholars across different disciplines have attempted to theorise and empirically capture the experience of everydayness (De Certeau 2011, Felski 2000, Highmore 2010, Lefebvre 1991, Stewart 2007). The everyday is said to be found in routines, cycles, rhythms, rituals; it is also in the feelings, emotions, affects, and moods that sustain and colour those practices and habits. The everyday is intimate, domestic, but also increasingly institutionalised.

From cultural studies and feminist scholarship, the everyday has been conceived as both a site of struggle and powerlessness, and of resistance and imagination (De Certeau 2011, Felski 2000). Over the past decades, internet scholars have also started to pay attention to unveiling the everydayness of being online (Markham 1998), communicating with one another (Baym 2015), downloading, using, and deleting apps (Morris and Murray 2019), sending and receiving emails (Milne 2021) ,dealing with pervasive datafication (Burgess et al 2022), living with algorithmic systems (Siles 2023), negotiating connection and disconnection (Ytre-Arne 2023).

The panel brings together four papers that mobilise the concept of the everyday to understand contemporary digital culture, to compare and evaluate via discussion the value of that concept in challenging problematic assumptions about practices surrounding platforms, datafication, recommendation systems, and generative AI.

Paper 1 takes stock of a major contribution to recent debates about the everyday in internet studies, the Everyday Data Cultures project. It argues that recent discourse about generative AI has sidelined ordinary, everyday practices even more than did an earlier era of anxiety about datafication. It also discusses how the framework developed by the Everyday Data Cultures project might be re-oriented to address new challenges raised by AI hype. The next two papers then address how two major cultural forms, social media and music, might be better understood through the lens of the "everyday",

and how current developments in these areas might be reshaping people's everyday rhythms, routines and experiences.

Paper 2 addresses a pervasive aspect of social media and anxieties about everyday use: scrolling. Drawing on empirical research on users, it challenges assumptions that scrolling is an empty and passive practice by showing how it is often experienced as positive, soothing, interesting, and even at times intense and visceral, and how the construction of scrolling as passive is itself based on certain notions of appropriate behaviour shaped by the tech industry's reliance on data generation (whereby only activity that generates data is understood as active or meaningful).

In a similar vein, Paper 3 uses empirical research to challenge "everyday" critiques of platformisation, this time in the realm of music, where critics have argued that the use of music as an accompaniment to everyday, humdrum activities (waking up, getting going, working, working out, relaxing, going to sleep) is displacing supposedly more meaningful, engaged musical experience. The paper argues that "functional" uses of music co-exist alongside other more "aesthetic" musical engagement, and that the latter remain resilient in people's everyday musical lives.

Finally, bringing social media and music together, Paper 4 investigates users' everyday relationships with recommendation algorithms, defying generalised critique of "black box" opacity by revealing reflexivity and awareness, and challenging research that focuses on uses of specific platforms by showing how everyday platform usage is deeply interconnected - in this case illustrated by how music and social media constantly interact.

Juxtaposition of these topics and approaches, and dialogue between the authors and audience, may, we hope, forefront struggles, disputes, and ambivalences concerning what people actually do with the digital systems that they engage with. As feminist scholars established many years ago, the everyday is trivial and yet profoundly politically charged; ordinary experience is always already gendered, classed, racialised, localised. How can we theorise power dynamics, hierarchies, asymmetries, and emerging modes of governmentality while making sense of the textures and poetics of everyday life, if the everyday is precisely in the unremarkable, the unnoticed, in that which escapes our grasp?

References

Baym, N. (2015). *Personal connections in the digital age*. 2nd edition. Polity Press.

Burgess, J., Albury, K., McCosker, A., Wilken, R. (2022). *Everyday data cultures*. Polity Press.

DeCerteau, M. (2011). *The practice of everyday life*. 3rd Edition. University of California Press.

Felski, R. (2000). *Doing time: feminist theory and postmodern culture*. NYU Press.

Highmore, B. (2010). *Ordinary lives: studies in the everyday*. Routledge.

Kennedy, H. (2018). Living with data: aligning data studies and data activism through a focus on everyday experiences of datafication. *Krisis : Journal for Contemporary Philosophy*.

Lefebvre, H. (1991). *Critique of everyday life*. Verso Books.

Livingstone, S. (2019). Audiences in an age of datafication: critical questions for media research. *Television and New Media* 20,2.

Markham, A. (1998). *Life online: researching real experience in virtual space*. AltaMira Press.

Milne, E. (2021). *Email and the everyday*. MIT Press.

Morris, J.W., Murray, S. (2019). *Appified: Culture in the age of apps*. University of Michigan Press.

Siles, I. (2023*). Living with algorithms. Agency and User Culture in Costa Rica.* The MIT Press.

Stewart, K. (2007). *Ordinary affects*. Duke University Press.

Ytre-Arne, B. (2023). *Media use in everyday life*. Emerald Publishing.

EVERYDAY GENAI? APPLYING THE *EVERYDAY DATA CULTURES* FRAMEWORK TO THE NEW PARADIGM

Jean Burgess
Queensland University of Technology

Kath Albury
Swinburne University of Technology

Anthony McCosker
Swinburne University of Technology

Rowan Wilken
RMIT University

Introduction

First presented at AoIR in 2021, and published a year later, *Everyday Data Cultures* (Burgess et al, 2022) was framed as a response to prevalent public and scholarly concern about datafication, algorithms and surveillance represented by widely discussed books and films like *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism* (Zuboff, 2019) and *The Social Dilemma* as well as trends in the field of critical data studies (e.g. Couldry & Mejias, 2019). By re-centering the analysis of datafication in the practice and politics of everyday life, the book aimed to intervene in an intense period of hype and anxiety around data that seemed to leave ordinary people and their lives out of the picture (Livingstone, 2019).

Firmly grounded in cultural studies approaches to the everyday (Hoggart, 1957; Williams, 1989; Highmore, 2010), *Everyday Data Cultures* aimed to provide conceptual tools for grappling with and charting a research agenda for taking everyday experiences, understandings and practices of Generative AI seriously - a project that is ultimately hopeful, as it situates creativity, agency, and moral responsibility with ordinary citizens and audiences, and not only in global technology companies.

Since then, we have seen a distinct new wave of AI development and debate prompted especially by the release and uptake of transformer- and diffusion-based machine learning technologies such as ChatGPT at the end of 2022 and early 2023 - arguably, ushering in a new paradigm in the development and debates around AI as they intersect with the internet and digital media environments; we frame this set of developments around the organising concept of Generative AI (GenAI).

In this new paradigm, while 'data' may no longer be the term *du jour*, the pathologies to which *Everyday Data Cultures* (EDC) was a response have, sadly, only become more obvious. The current GenAI moment seems to supercharge the tendencies in public

debate to 'big critique' and industry hype to we aimed to counter-balance (Burgess et al, 2022: 11-19). The experiences, practices and capabilities attached to ordinary encounters with Generative AI are evolving rapidly but are poorly understood; industry voices are overwhelmingly privileged; and state-level regulation is racing ahead without ordinary people and their diverse communities at the table.

This paper explores whether, how, and with what modifications the conceptual framework *Everyday Data Cultures* offers could be useful as internet studies responds to the emergence, take-up and integration of Generative AI in everyday life. We build directly on the heuristics proposed by the EDC framework: data intimacies, literacies, and publics; thereby following data-driven systems into their algorithmic, automated and generative applications in everyday contexts, and so offering an alternative to the industry-centric framing of both AI hype and critique.

The everyday intimacies, literacies and publics of GenAI

Intimacies
In the EDC framework, social intimacy incorporates closeness, affinity and care, as well as both mundane and deep knowledge of the other (Berlant, 1998); as datafication extended into formerly private or personal spaces, the book explored how the politics of data and intimacy were co-evolving, looking at data profiling and algorithmic personalisation in the contexts of recommender systems, dating apps and sex tech, as well as the duality of safety and security through practices of data-driven everyday surveillance.

Companions and automated agents are common applications of GenAI that appear likely to remediate intimacy in similar ways. They promise new levels of personalisation as they become intimately involved in our lives. While there have been spectacular failures (e.g. Air Canada), service bots seek to 'know us' to tailor responses and act on our behalf – as in planning holidays or designing a meal based on current fridge and pantry contents. Home assistants and smart speakers powered by GenAI bring intimate personalisation into domestic spaces to predict and integrate with everyday rituals. All of this requires both intimate knowledge and deep trust in data-driven generative systems.

There have already been controversies about human-machine intimacy: when *Replika* discontinued its 'erotic roleplay' function, AI companions abruptly began to rebuff requests for sexual chat from long-term human 'partners' (Cole 2023). There have been other stories of everyday intimacies with companions who offered users' mental health support, or anonymous opportunities for sexual exploration and gender affirmation. We are led now into new sites of inquiry, and a cultural approach to everyday intimacy can help us understand the nature of human relationships with agents, bots and assistants.

Literacies
We understand data (and AI) literacies to be multimodal, historically constituted, systemic, and social. Importantly, they can emerge from vernacular contexts as well as expert ones, and they co-evolve with the information and communication environment. An EDC framework usefully sheds light on the ever-adaptive nature of everyday digital

and AI literacies, in which the creative possibilities of genAI are quick to be explored and exploited. We see this, for instance, in experimental forms of contemporary 'vernacular creativity' (Burgess, 2006), such as Boston-based music producer mimofrl's Instagram posts, which combine AI-generated imagery of fantasy forest scenes overlayed with contemporary slang in text-boxes to create humorous (if often esoteric) slide show style short narratives as accompaniment to his own beats.

While the initially rapid take-up of ChatGPT provoked fears for white-collar and creative industries jobs through the automation of their work (as the Hollywood writers' strike showed), in many professional contexts it looks like a collaborative or 'co-pilot' model is emerging. Meanwhile, workers, school students, researchers and internet users are experimenting with GenAI affordances and developing GenAI literacies. A recent OfCom survey shows young people experimenting heavily, but also reveals clear demographic and cultural gaps in access, knowledge and use (OfCom, 2023).

With these issues of agency and equality in mind, it might be time to shift the language around (individual, human) literacies to (collective, human-machine) *capabilities*, which frames the issue around "a more holistic (rather than individual) set of infrastructures, practices, competencies and goals" (McCosker et al 2022).

Publics
Finally, the EDC framework considered the way data affects collective sense-making practices and how we come to know ourselves as, and to act as, citizens and publics. The synthetic content of GenAI has perhaps irrevocably altered our digital media environment, already impacting human rights and social justice witnessing (Gregory, 2022). This raises questions about how publics might organise in their own interests on issues like content moderation, copyright or platform governance, and whether GenAI platforms, with their 'guardrails' and content moderation rules, might enable or diminish civic agency, activism and protest.

Building on the idea of literacies (or capabilities) as being both collective and collaborative - between humans, and between humans and machines - we can also see how hybrid human-machine publics emerge in and through GenAI in the context of digital media platforms. These may prove useful conceptual tools for understanding phenomena like the community debate and collective learning around controversies surrounding GenAI authenticity or fakery (McCosker, 2022), as well as the ever-more opaque automation of content moderation decisions that comes with the complexity of large language and multimodal foundation models.

References

Berlant, L. (1998). Intimacy: a special issue. *Critical Inquiry* 24(Winter): 281-288.

Burgess, J. (2006). Hearing ordinary voices: Cultural studies, vernacular creativity and digital storytelling. *Continuum*, *20*(2), 201-214.

Burgess, J., Albury, K., McCosker, A., Wilken, R. (2022). *Everyday data cultures*. Polity Press.

Cole, S. (2023). It's hurting like hell: AI companion users are in crisis, reporting sudden rejection. *Vice.* 16 February https://www.vice.com/en/article/y3py9j/ai-companion-replika-erotic-roleplay-updates?

Couldry, N. & Mejias, U. (2019). *The Costs of Connection: How Data is Colonizing Human Life and Appropriating it for Capitalism*. Stanford University Press.

Gregory, S. (2022). Deepfakes, misinformation and disinformation and authenticity infrastructure responses: Impacts on frontline witnessing, distant witnessing, and civic journalism. *Journalism*, *23*(3), 708-729.

Highmore, B. (2010). *Ordinary Lives: Studies in the Everyday.* London: Routledge.

Hoggart, R. (1957). *The Uses of Literacy.* Essential Books.

Livingstone, S. (2019). Audiences in an age of datafication: critical questions for media research. *Television & New Media* 20(2): 170–183.

McCosker, A., Yao, X., Albury, K., Maddox, A., Farmer, J., & Stoyanovich, J. (2022). Developing data capability with non-profit organisations using participatory methods. *Big Data & Society 9*(1): https://doi.org/10.1177/20539517221099882

McCosker, A. (2022). Making sense of deepfakes: Socializing AI and building data literacy on GitHub and YouTube. *New Media & Society*: https://doi.org/10.1177/14614448221093

OfCom (2023). *Online Nation: 2023 Report.* https://www.ofcom.org.uk/research-and-data/online-research/online-nation

Williams, R. (1989). *Resources of Hope: Culture, Democracy, Socialism*. Verso.

Zuboff, S. (2019). *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power.* PublicAffairs.

'SCROLLING NONSENSE': MAKING SENSE OF MOBILE SOCIAL MEDIA IN EVERYDAY LIFE

Ludmila Lupinacci
University of Leeds

Introduction

There seems to be in popular discourse a consensus that people spend too much time on mobile social media. A widespread narrative frames our relationship to these technologies as a simple, but undisputable, matter of addiction – we are glued to our screens, frantically navigating algorithmically-mediated infinite streams of content. Instead of subscribing to prevalent discourses of technological dependency, I argue for an understanding of the interdependency of socio-technical relations (Paasonen 2021) through the lens of habit. I start from the premise that everyday life requires the incorporation of certain rhythms and habits, and that there is theoretical and analytical value in exploring the ambivalences between movement and inertia, intensity and dullness, comfort and discomfort, excitement and boredom. Combining a cultural studies framework with a critical-phenomenological sensibility, I contribute to the understanding of 'scrolling' as a complex, contradictory, and multifaceted habit (Schellewald 2024) that requires particular embodied, material, and symbolic engagements (Docherty 2021).

Habits, routines, and power

By focusing on movement, repetition, and embodiment rather than on neurobehavioural imbalances, habituation paves the way for a more generative analysis of what exactly mobile social media offer to those who willingly (if not always gladly) engage with them in ordinary situations – while also paying attention to the structural role exerted by technologies in these processes (Aagard 2020; Pedwell 2021). The lens of habit also centres mobile social media's taken-for-granted status. If these technologies' power can be attributed to their very banality (Chun 2017), then it becomes imperative to examine more closely how their convenience and naturality are achieved in our ordinary routines.

In other words, in using the lens of habituation to examine people's everyday attachment to mobile social media, I aim to foreground both the frequent taken-for-grantedness of these technologies and the more distributed, normalised, naturalised power structure in which they are embedded (Markham & Rodgers 2017; Pedwell 2021). A critical phenomenology of mobile social media, therefore, should pay attention to the embodied and material conditions of their contested use in everyday life, and the (complex, perhaps ambivalent) experiences that emerge in these contexts (Couldry and Kallinikos 2017).

Crucially, then, privileging the lens of habit should not mean the dismissal of a critical stance – focusing on habituation should not stop us from acknowledging the fact that these habits are often intentionally prompted, oriented, and orchestrated (Highmore

2011) by the technologies and platforms themselves, their interfaces, affordances, and their institutional rhetoric.

Research design
In order to make sense of mobile social media in everyday life, the empirical analysis draws on two separate sets of qualitative material. The first consists of promotional campaigns from mainstream digital platforms – TikTok, Spotify, BeReal – using the rhetoric of temporary disconnection (Jorge 2021, Docherty 2021) and mindfulness in order to encourage their users to 'give their thumb a break'. The second set consists of diary-interview qualitative data collected with 20 London-based users of a range of mobile social media. Through this method, the aim was to turn ordinary users into 'pseudo-phenomenologists', describing in depth their everyday embodied and affective engagements with digital technologies. Through the phenomenologically-informed thematic analysis of those materials, I identify the rhythms and rituals that characterise the practice of scrolling in everyday life, and try to make sense of how scrolling came to be conceived as a social problem.

Findings & discussion
Initially, mobile social media use seems characterised by both the selected campaigns and by my participants as aimless, purposeless, driven by comfort and repetition, in which they feel they are mostly just "scrolling nonsense"– as one of them put it. And yet, the analysis highlights the more fluid, dynamic, and contingent character of body-technology relations with and of mobile social media in the context of everyday life.

Following common platform rhetoric, the participants conceive of certain experiences as 'passive' and marked by a state of mindlessness (Lupinacci 2021, Baym et al 2020). Scrolling through an endless stream of content, for instance, although requiring active bodily movement and 'work' from the user, is generally assumed to be a 'passive', 'absent-minded' task. Such conceptions seem to reflect the normative 'ideal usership' constructed by the platforms through their discursive-material configurations (Docherty 2020) – the ideal user is the one who is also clicking, liking, commenting, sharing. In the case of mobile social media, this also seems to reproduce a separation between mind (assumed to be lethargically inert, empty, void) and body (which is actively, compulsively engaged, scrolling frantically). In practice though, participants say they curate their feeds through selective exposure and 'clicking consciously' (Bucher 2018, Schellewald 2021, 2024) (which would classify as 'active engagement') in order to make it more bearable to spend extended periods of time scrolling ('passive use') – which makes both practices intertwined and their division extremely porous.

Given the prominence of narratives framing the overuse of digital technologies as 'addiction', it is not necessarily surprising that the interviewees make frequent use of terms such as 'obsession' and 'dependency' to characterise their practices. Also, the participants' assumed solution to overcome the issue always seems to be based on self-regulation (as encouraged by the analysed platform campaigns). In this regard, I found that everyday mobile social media use is often marked by 'scrolling guilt', or a feeling of shame, regret, or remorse following extended exposure. The frustration and the sensation of wasted time manifested by the participants seem to be associated with

the lack of relevant, interesting, or 'attention-worthy' content – which is accentuated by certain moods, such as boredom.

And yet, somewhat counterintuitively, the use of mobile social media is eventually framed as a practice of self-care, in which scrolling is described as 'soothing' and is associated with 'me time' – resonating with Ngai's (2012) notion of disinterested pleasure. In these cases, mobile social media use is time well-spent. When you have nothing else to do, there is always the expectation that, through scrolling, you will eventually find something funny or interesting to fill this void – even if only momentarily. Under this conception, mobile social media are understood as tools for directing or deflecting attention somewhere else. Yet, distraction is not always positive, productive, and relaxing. Indeed, the use of mobile social media for distraction purposes seems to be very easily converted into a time-consuming 'promiscuous absorption' (Highmore 2011) – which highlights the fluid and contradictory modalities of attention and distraction that emerge in these now pervasive socio-technical engagements.

Concluding remarks
My analysis demonstrates that what makes mobile social media so appealing is their ease of use and their convenient incorporation into our routines and ordinary practices – often, their incorporation to fill the void and emptiness that emerge between routines and practices. Mobile social media use is often described as unfocused and distracted, being characterised by a generally fleeting, peripheral, almost numb attentiveness. Yet, my analysis challenges the rigidity of these conceptions by foregrounding people's eventually positive, soothing, interested usage, as well as instances of intense, visceral (even if not always deliberate) engagement with these platforms and devices. That is, although mobile social media usage is often characterised by a state of attention suspension, through a critical-phenomenological disposition I have identified that there are different affective modulations and modes of attention being played out.

Finally, I argue that the description of scrolling as a 'passive' practice is reductive, for it does not correspond to how technologies are put to use in everyday life. I argue that this distinction is platform-centric insofar as 'active experience' is reduced to those practices that more clearly generate quantifiable data footprints. This, to me, suggests that 'scrolling guilt' is not only a result of techno-embodied configurations, but also informed by imaginaries and socio-cultural constructs of ideal usership, productivity, self-control, and mindfulness (Docherty 2020, 2021). The lens of habit, I argue, offers us a less 'platform-centric' vocabulary for examining the different modalities of attention afforded by the social media manifold, whilst allowing the examination of how power relations become incorporated into everyday life.

References

Aagaard, J. (2020). Beyond the rhetoric of tech addiction: why we should be discussing tech habits instead (and how). *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences*, v.20.

Baym, N. K., Wagman, K. B., Persaud, C. J. (2020). Mindfully Scrolling: Rethinking Facebook After Time Deactivated. *Social Media + Society*.
https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305120919105

Bucher, T. (2018) *If…Then. Algorithmic power and politics.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Chun, W.H.K. (2017) *Updating to Remain the Same. Habitual New Media.* The MIT Press.

Couldry, N., Kallinikos, J. (2017) Ontology. In: Burgess J, Marwick A and Poell T (Eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Social media* (pp. 149–159). London: SAGE.

Docherty, N. (2020). Facebook's Ideal User: Healthy Habits, Social Capital, and the Politics of Well-Being Online. *Social Media + Society*, 6(2). https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305120915606

Docherty, N. (2021). Digital self-control and the neoliberalization of social media well-being. *International Journal of Communication*, 15, 3827-3846.

Highmore, B. (2011). *Ordinary lives: Studies in the Everyday*. Routledge.

Jorge, A. (2019) Social media, interrupted: users recounting temporary disconnection on Instagram. *Social Media + Society,* October-December 2019, 1-9.

Lupinacci, L. (2021). 'Absentmindedly scrolling through nothing': liveness and compulsory continuous connectedness in social media. Media, Culture & Society, 43(2), 273-290. https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443720939454

Markham, T. and Rodgers, S. (2017). *Conditions of Mediation: Phenomenological perspectives on media*. Peter Lang.

Ngai, S. (2012). *Our aesthetic categories. Zany, Cute, Interesting.* Harvard University Press.

Paasonen, S. (2021). *Dependent, Distracted, Bored. Affective formations in networked media* The MIT Press.

Pedwell, C. (2021). *Revolutionary routines: the habits of social transformation*. McGill-Queen's University Press.

Schellewald, A. (2021). Communicative forms on TikTok: perspectives from digital ethnography. *International Journal of Communication*, v.15.

Schellewald, A. (2024*). TikTok and everyday life:* making sense of the meanings and politics of scrolling. Doctoral thesis, Goldsmiths, University of London.

DIGITAL PLATFORMS IN EVERYDAY LIFE: THE CASE OF MUSIC STREAMING

David Hesmondhalgh
University of Leeds

Raquel Campos Valverde
University of Leeds

Context and significance

Music provides a distinctive way of approaching "everyday data cultures" and other efforts to understand the role of the internet in everyday, ordinary lived experience. This is because music has for a long time combined an ability to provide exceptional and emotionally-charged experiences with a capacity for humdrum, habitual, routinised engagement. The latter tendency has been the basis of a substantial and highly-cited body of research which, perhaps because it emerged before the digital era took shape, has been almost completely ignored by researchers working in internet studies, platform studies and related fields.

From around 2010 onwards, music became the first major cultural form to be thoroughly "platformised", in that the circulation and consumption of music became increasingly carried out via online streaming platforms such as Spotify, Apple Music, Amazon Music and so on. In addition, video and social media platforms such as YouTube, TikTok and Instagram feature music prominently. While radio, television, film and other media remain important as ways of discovering and encountering music, music streaming platforms are now as essential to the recording industry and related industries (such as music publishing) as the purchase of musical artefacts in retail outlets once was.

Basis in existing research and public debate

Music streaming platforms have, however, been controversial. Some of the controversies concern the implications for musicians and other cultural workers associated with music, for example the degree to which streaming makes it harder (or easier) for musicians to earn a living (Hesmondhalgh et al 2021). Others are more concerned with questions of everyday experience germane to the panel proposal of which this abstract forms part. One widely expressed and inter-related set of controversies centre on claims that streaming has diminished musical experience by making it more distracted, background, and "functional"; the latter term is a way of summarising claims that in the streaming economy, music is increasingly used to achieve particular states (such as getting to sleep) or to carry out certain tasks or actions (such as physical exercise). The problem for critics is that this prevents music being valued as an (aesthetic) end in itself.

Moreover, this aspect of music has been seen as reproducing and reinforcing problematic features of contemporary societies. Anderson (2015: 815) for example wrote that "the changing forms and functions of music delivery and the ubiquity of listening adapt and revise Muzak's classic function as an affective stimulant for the industrial workplace. […] In this context, mood management is the quintessence of affective labor in the ever-expanding service economy". And in a widely discussed critical monograph about Spotify, Maria Erikkson et al. (2018) argued that Spotify's promotion of music as a functional entity privileges "a subject determined to strive toward well-being", apparent in greetings and playlist descriptions which position the user "as a boss, a potential conqueror, or someone on top of the world" in ways that are "clearly connected to the notion of music as contributing to enhanced performance".

For other commentators, this kind of functionalism also produces a deficient mode of specifically musical subjectivity, characterised by distraction, by a *lack of attention* (Hesmondhalgh 2021). Pedersen (2020) for example sees Spotify's reliance on the datafication of listening "leads to a situation where the bias shifts towards quantitative criteria, thereby potentially creating a bias towards inattentive (background) listening". The strong implication is that there is a loss here, drawing on longstanding discourses which place a high premium on close listening (discussed in Sterne's historical account of the development of "audile techniques").

Approach and central questions

But in expressing anxiety about contemporary threats supposedly offered by the pervasive adoption of music streaming platforms to close and emotionally-engaged listening, and more generally in developing critiques of the effects of digital technologies, there is a danger of simplifying other people's experiences, distorting their place in the complex and messy lives that people lead.

In the spirit of the recent turn in internet research towards engaging with everyday life, this paper offers empirical evidence regarding the way in which people engage with music in their everyday lives in the streaming era, building on the rich tradition of research in sociology and psychology of music mentioned earlier, and on scholarship on music streaming and social media platforms (Hagen 2015, Kjus 2016, Nowak 2016, Prior 2018, Campos Valverde 2022). Both strands of scholarship avoid the kind of simplifications that are sometimes to be found in much public debate and some critical internet research. We bring them together to consider whether music streaming is making the everyday experience of music more "functional" and, relatedly, more background, more distracted, less attentive. We draw on our own empirical research to question assumptions that this is happening, showing that distracted, background and functional experiences usually co-exist with other experiences where music is more foregrounded, and is listened to aesthetically.

Based on daily diaries kept over a period of three weeks by 22 participants, and initial and follow-up interviews, we investigate the varying ways in which they are intertwined in people's everyday lives. In so doing, we are echoing the approach of music psychologist Ruth Herbert, who shows that musical experiences can involve both close attention and 'multiply directed attention' (Herbert, 2011: 187).

The main empirical part of our paper consists of a series of diary vignettes organised according to a set of functions/uses to which diarists put music. The uses or functions we highlight are *energising and relaxing*, *coping* and *filling the silence*. But in contrast to those critics of streaming who assume that such functional and distracted uses are typical or dominant, we show that the various users who at times engage in such functional engagements also report more aesthetically-oriented, emotionally-charged and attentive experiences – though to somewhat different degrees. This allows us to examine ways in which users mix casual and distracted or "background" musical experience, with more intensely engaged, "foreground" ones, in many cases moving back and forth between different positions on a conceptual continuum between these poles. Examining how these various experiences fit into the routines and rhythms of people's lives over an extended period, we discuss ways in which such variation might depend on the demands of people's lives (paid or unpaid work, family and caring obligations, and so on) as well as the varying ways in which people interpret the capacity of music to enhance their lives, discussing how some users lean more towards one end of each continuum than others.

In our final section, we discuss the implications of our findings and its relations to the strands of existing research and theory outlined above, including reflections on how the sociology and psychology of music in everyday life invite a more nuanced and indeed generous approach to such functional uses of music. Importantly, however, we distinguish our position from previous research strands, whether older work on media audiences and music in everyday life, or more recent work on everyday digital and data cultures, arguing that many researchers in these research traditions risk downplaying the way in which music, for all the varied uses to which it is put, is bound up with problematic aspects of modern societies, in particular limitations on the possibilities of flourishing opened up by music.

References

Anderson, P. 2015. Neo-Muzak and the Business of Mood. *Critical Inquiry*. 41(4), pp.811–840.

Campos Valverde, R. 2022. Online musicking for humanity: the role of imagined listening and the moral economies of music sharing on social media. *Popular Music.* 41(2), pp. 194-215. http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/s0261143022000034

Eriksson, M., Fleischer, R., Johansson, A., Snickars, P. and Vonderau, P. 2019. *Spotify teardown: inside the black box of streaming music*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Hagen, A. 2015. *Using Music Streaming Services: Practices, Experiences and the Lifeworld of Musicking*.[Online] PhD Dissertation, University of Oslo.

Herbert, R. 2011. *Everyday music listening: absorption, dissociation and trancing*. Farnham, Surrey ; Burlington, VT: Ashgate.

Hesmondhalgh D. 2021. Is music streaming bad for musicians? Problems of evidence and argument. *New Media & Society*, *23*(12), pp. 3593-3615. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444820953541

Hesmondhalgh, D., Osborne, R., Sun, H., Barr, K. 2021. Music Creators' Earnings in the Digital Era. In: Music Creators' Earnings in the Digital Era. The Intellectual Property Office. https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/id/eprint/178595

Kjus, Y. 2016. Musical exploration via streaming services: The Norwegian experience. *Popular Communication*. 14(3), pp.127–136.

Nowak, R. 2016. *Consuming music in the digital age: technologies, roles and everyday life*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Pedersen, R.R. 2020. Datafication and the push for ubiquitous listening in music streaming. *MedieKultur: Journal of media and communication research*. 36(69), pp.071–089.

Prior, N. 2018. *Popular music, digital technology and society* 1st edition. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

THE SOUNDTRACK OF EVERYDAY LIFE: MUSIC DISCOVERY, EXPLORATION, AND INTEGRATION THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA

Ignacio Siles
Universidad de Costa Rica

Luciana Valerio-Alfaro
Universidad de Costa Rica

Arturo Arriagada
Universidad Adolfo Ibánez

Introduction

This paper examines music consumption on social media through the lens of everyday practices. Social media platforms have emerged as key sites for fans to listen to music. In short, music is now a constitutive component of stories, shorts, reels, videos, pins, photos, and ordinary posts. TikTok's collaboration with Billboard to establish a "Top 50" chart in September 2023 evidenced not only the app's pivotal role in music consumption but also the increasing significance of music in the design of social media.

Despite the growing importance of social media in shaping music consumption, researchers have focused primarily on the visual aspects of content circulation on these platforms. Concurring with Tintiangko and colleagues (2023), "there has been a lack of attention toward the impact of [social media] [...] [in] the music industry; let alone in the context of the Global South" (p. 2). This paper starts to fill this void of knowledge by adopting an ecological perspective that invites examining the use of music streaming platforms not as independent from but rather deeply connected with social media and other apps and devices (Espinoza-Rojas, Siles, & Castelain, 2023). Drawing on interviews with 25 Costa Ricans, we discuss three specific ways of relating to music across various platforms: discovering resonant songs on social media, exploring them through connections across different platforms, and incorporating them into the temporal and spatial flows of everyday life.

Beyond music, our findings unveil how discovery, exploration, and integration practices on platforms shape broader modes of everyday engagement. These practices unveil how people experience and manage their interactions with platforms by cultivating reflexive relationships with algorithms, aligning the affordances of these platforms with established cultural consumption trajectories, and weaving intricate connections among multiple apps and devices.

Research Design

To further understand how music discovery, exploration, and incorporation unfold in the context of multi-platform ecologies, we investigated the practices of 25 individuals based in Costa Rica. This country provides an ideal backdrop for exploring these issues. 90% of the population regularly use social media in the country, which also leads the Latin American region in the usage of popular platforms like Facebook (85%) and WhatsApp (98%), with substantial engagement on Instagram (48%) and TikTok (45%) as well (Brenes Peralta, Siles, & Tristán Jiménez, 2024). YouTube (80%) and Spotify (25%) are the most favored platforms to listen to music in the country.

We launched a call for participation that circulated across the Facebook and Instagram profiles of the university where our research was conducted. We selected 25 individuals for interviews by privileging sociodemographic diversity as the main sampling criterion. In our interviews, conducted between July and September 2023, we focused on two primary issues: everyday music consumption practices and experiences with music discovery on social media. On average, the interviews lasted 45 minutes. During the interviews, participants were asked to recount their most recent experiences of discovering songs on social media. In the days following the interviews, participants also provided us with reports through messaging apps, which included screenshots of their music discoveries, along with audio notes and written descriptions of these experiences. We employed an abductive approach to examine the data in the context of existing research on music consumption (Tavory & Timmermans, 2014).

The Discovery, Exploration, and Incorporation of Music Across Platforms

Two significant features were common across the everyday music consumption practices of our interviewees. First, these practices were highly diverse, with each individual developing relatively unique sequences of actions for their music listening. Second, these practices were multifarious in that they involved the interconnected use of numerous platforms to fulfill specific purposes in these sequences. Drawing on our abductive data analysis, we developed three main categories to account for this diversity and multifariousness of practices: music discovery, exploration, and incorporation.

Discovery is "an affective response to music that associates it with a set of mediations" (Nowak, 2016, p. 137). In short, "a discovery has to be memorable" (Nowak, 2016, p. 142). Two platform affordances stood out to our interlocutors because of the way they enabled music discoveries: virality and repetition. Our interlocutors valued the possibility to easily identify what songs and sounds were trending on such platforms as TikTok and Instagram. They interpreted virality as a popularity rating, which signaled an opportunity for them to be a part of trends in cultural consumption. Accordingly, many paid particular attention to the features implemented by platforms to indicate that songs were trending.

To decide whether they wanted to keep listening to newly discovered songs, participants engaged in exploration activities. Exploration implies a change in the attention given to music: it is no longer used to accompany other everyday activities (including scrolling social media content) but rather the primary object of people's consideration. Through exploration, interviewees found out what kind of emotions discovered songs elicited.

Some discovered songs then become part of people's everyday life, a process we call incorporation. Incorporation has three related dimensions: utilitarian (songs are "used" subsequently for different purposes), proprietary (songs are "owned" through downloads and purchases), and identitarian (songs become an expression of people's personality).

Concluding Remarks

These music consumption practices illustrate three broader forms of platform engagement in everyday life. First, the experience of platforms is characterized by reflexive relationships with music recommendation algorithms. In contrast to previous studies about users who didn't reflect on how the algorithms of music streaming services work (Lüders, 2021), a focus on everyday life reveals how individuals actively relate to algorithms as an integral aspect of their practices. Living within platform ecologies *demanded* constant awareness of algorithmic actions and active participation in conveying responses to algorithms (Siles, 2023; Siles et al., 2022). These reflexive relationships serve broader cultural goals, with interviewees leveraging them to discover and incorporate music into their everyday lives in specific ways.

Second, a focus on everyday life practices helps nuance the role of affordances in the relationship between our interlocutors and platforms. We demonstrate how users align platform affordances with cultural consumption trajectories, subordinating them to specific practices, histories, and trajectories. Costa's (2018) notion of affordances-in-practice is instrumental in operationalizing this approach, emphasizing that platform affordances only make sense in everyday contexts and situations.

Finally, our study highlights the temporal and spatial flows that underpin the everyday experience of platforms. Unlike scholarly literature that often segregates platform relationships based on affordances or technological logics, our research reveals the interconnected nature of users' practices across platforms and devices in everyday life. This ecological perspective challenges the imposition of analytical categories and invites a deeper interrogation of what these categories mean in the context of people's practices. Whereas it might make sense to independently study how people relate to specific platforms in certain cases, the study of everyday life requires an ecological perspective that privileges the interconnections across them for comprehending cultural practices in a manner that coherently acknowledges their significance to people.

References

Brenes Peralta, C., Siles, I. & Tristán Jiménez, L. (2024). Nuestras apps de cada día 2024: 2do informe sobre el uso de plataformas digitales en Costa Rica. San José, Costa Rica: CICOM.

Costa, E. (2018). Affordances-in-practice: An ethnographic critique of social media logic and context collapse. *New Media & Society, 20*(10), 3641–3656.

Espinoza-Rojas, J., Siles, I., & Castelain, T. (2023). How using various platforms shapes awareness of algorithms. *Behaviour & Information Technology, 42*(9), 1422–1433.

Lüders, M. (2021a). Pushing music: People's continued will to archive versus Spotify's will to make them explore. *European Journal of Cultural Studies, 24*(4), 952–969.

Nowak, R. (2016b). When is a discovery? The affective dimensions of discovery in music consumption. *Popular Communication, 14*(3), 137–145.

Siles, I. (2023). *Living with algorithms: Agency and user culture in Costa Rica*. MIT Press.

Siles, I., Valerio-Alfaro, L., & Meléndez-Moran, A. (2022). Learning to like TikTok… and not: Algorithm awareness as process. *New Media & Society, 0*(0), 1–17.

Tavory, I., & Timmermans, S. (2014). *Abductive analysis: Theorizing qualitative research*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Tintiangko, J., Fung, A. Y., & Leo-Liu, J. (2023). Compelled TikTok creators? The ambivalent affordances of the short video app for Filipino musicians. *Media, Culture & Society, 0*(0), 1–16.