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A STUDY OF PERSONAL STREAMING PLAYLISTS THROUGH DIGITAL  
CURATION

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A STUDY OF PERSONAL STREAMING PLAYLISTS THROUGH DIGITAL CURATION  
DİJİTAL KÜRASYON ÜZERİNDEN BİR KİŞİSEL STREAMING ÇALMA LİSTELERİ ARAŞTIRMASI

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACLS	The American Council on Learned Sciences
CD	Compact Disc
CDL	The California Digital Library
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
DAW	Digital Audio Workstation
DJ	Disc Jockey
DSP	Digital Service Provider
EP	Extended Play
GB	Gigabyte
MB	Megabyte
Mp3	Moving Pictures Experts Group 2 - Audio Layer 3
İKSV	İstanbul Kültür Sanat Vakfı
Kbit/s	Kilobit per second
LP	Long Play
MD	Mini Disc
MPEG	Moving Pictures Experts Group
OAIS	The Open Archival Information System
P2P	Peer to Peer
PIC	Personal Information Collection
PIE	Personal Information Environment
PSI	Personal Space of Information
PARADIGM	The Personal Archives Accessible in Digital Media
PIM	Personal Information Management
RNS	Rabid Neurosis

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## **ABSTRACT**

Music streaming platforms are a contemporary and common way consuming music. Personalization of music consumption by the listener, which manifested itself in ways such as record collections, mixtapes and digital archives in previous eras of music consumption technologies, is today visible in the form of playlists. This dissertation constructs a theoretical framework for playlisting activities using existing concepts and offering new ones at the intersection of previous concepts of information management and collection studies literature. Research in both fields have been conducted on either personal information collections or physical record collections. By studying streaming platforms and personal playlist practices, these two fields are intersected in the context of digital curation, offering further studies to be made utilizing both in tandem. Following the establishment of the foundation for the study through digital curation, analysis of multiple in-depth active interviews (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995) conducted with four participants and five industry representatives are made regarding their playlisting activities on Spotify with the proposed five key concepts to position playlists within digital curation: information needs, adding value, memory, identity and sharing. This dissertation argues that studying personal streaming playlists with the given theoretical framework and through subjective narrative input constructed with the participants, positioning playlisting as a digital curation yields significant results that is usable by fields such as information management, collection studies, musicology and media.

### **Keywords**

Information, Collection, Digital Curation, Playlists, Streaming, Spotify, Music Consumption

## ÖZET

Müzik dinleme (streaming) platformları günümüzde müzik tüketimi için yaygın bir araç. Geçmiş müzik tüketim teknolojilerinde plak koleksiyonları, karışık kasetler ve dijital arşivler gibi biçimlerde tezahür eden dinleyicinin müzik tüketiminin kişiselleşmesi, günümüzde çalma listeleri üzerinden gözlemlenmektedir. Bu tez, bilgi yönetimi ve koleksiyon çalışmaları yazınında var olan kavramlarını kullanarak ve bu iki alanın mevcut kavramlarının kesişiminde yeni kavramlar önererek çalma listesi uygulamaları için kuramsal bir çerçeve inşa etmektedir. Bu iki alanda çalışmalar ya kişisel bilgi koleksiyonları ya da fiziksel müzik koleksiyonları üzerine yapılmıştır. Streaming platformları ve kişisel çalma listesi uygulamaları çalışılarak, bu iki alan dijital kürasyon bağlamında kesiştirilmiş, iki alanın birlikte kullanılarak yeni çalışmaların yapılması olası kılınmıştır. Çalışmanın zemininin dijital kürasyon üzerinden oluşturulmasını takiben, dört katılımcıyla üçer kez ve beş sektör temsilcisiyle birer kez Spotify çalma listesi kullanımlarına dair gerçekleştirilen derinlemesine aktif söyleşiler (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995), çalma listelerini dijital kürasyon dahilinde konumlandırmak üzere önerilen beş anahtar kavram üzerinden analiz edilmiştir: bilgi gereklilikleri, değer katma, hafıza/anı, kimlik ve paylaşım. Bu tez kişisel streaming çalma listelerinin belirtilen kuramsal çerçeve dahilinde, katılımcılarla oluşturulan öznel anlatısal girdiler vasıtasıyla, çalma listelerinin dijital kürasyon olarak konumlandırılmasının bilgi yönetimi, koleksiyon çalışmaları, müzikoloji ve medya gibi alanlar tarafından kullanılabilir kayda değer sonuçlar verdiğini savunmaktadır.

### Anahtar Kelimeler

Bilgi, Koleksiyon, Dijital Kürasyon, Çalma Listeleri, Streaming, Spotify, Müzik Tüketimi

## INTRODUCTION

Streaming platforms are currently one of the most commonly used methods of everyday music consumption. DSPs such as Spotify provide the users with a vast catalogue of music as well as curatorial tools such as playlists. Streaming playlist practices are actions of users on the platform upon the music provided by the platform to create and maintain their own personal catalogue subsets to fit their needs and desires.

In order to attempt to answer the research question, “How can a concept of personal streaming playlist practices be positioned within the context of digital curation?”, this dissertation will look into the history of music consumption, collection and curation practices, discuss their meaning and connotations in a context of digital curation, and analyse narratives of playlist curator participants and representatives in order to provide a possible apparatus of research to study playlisting.

This dissertation aims to widen the borders of information management and collection studies fields and seeks to position personal streaming playlist practices in the intersection. This will be attempted by discussing the information/collectable nature of streaming songs. The structure that will be built on this intersection will be put to test in subjective participant narratives regarding their everyday playlisting practices. A social constructionist and collaborative approach will be pursued for the study in order to construct rich and meaningful findings that do not necessarily aim to develop an overarching and collapsing meta-narrative regarding the practices nor the environment.

In order to provide a background to the study, a brief history of recorded music containers and their respective affordances will be presented and discussed. Technological and historical insight into roots of consumption and personal curation of recorded music will be provided and the general environment of the

streaming music will be established. A brief history and description of the chosen DSP, Spotify, will be given as well as the reasoning behind this choice. A terminological basis and the presentation of five key concepts for discussion of participants' narratives will follow.

To conceptualize these practices, a theoretical framework consisting of two fields, "Personal Information Management" and "Collection Studies" will be used. The intersection of these two fields provide a basis that defines the aforementioned practices as personal information collections and songs as collectable objects. With the terminology and definitions these two fields provide, an understanding of personal streaming playlists as personal digital music curations will be constructed.

Narratives of participants' who engage in personal digital curation activities in the form of personal Spotify playlists will be analysed to offer insight for a better understanding of these very activities. In order to obtain rich, deep, personal and narrative data from the participants, the method of "The Active Interview" as proposed by Holstein and Gubrium will be used (1995). The research methodology chapter will begin with an extensive definition of the active interview method as well as the advantages and limitations that it possesses. Reference to other studies, which utilized the method, will be made and the place of the active interview method in this study and the reasoning behind this choice will be discussed.

Data analysis and discussion will include a thorough study of narrative information — as active interview method suggests — created and co-created with the collaboration of the interviewer and participants and industry representatives within the context of the study themes. Findings will be discussed in five sections, one for each is key concept derived from literature review and participant interviews. These five concepts together are presented as a research approach that allows discussion of personal streaming playlist activities on a foundation of digital curation. By doing this, this dissertation aims to provide a new way of looking at a contemporary everyday activity.

Finally, a general summary of findings within the context of research question will be provided to constitute the general outcome of the study. The implications of methodology and research choices will be discussed in the light of the findings.

Conclusion chapter will include an overall summary of the study and will provide an overview of what has possibly achieved by the study and an interpretive discussion of what may it all mean in the form of possible implications of the outcomes.



# **CHAPTER 1**

## **A HISTORICAL REVIEW OF RECORDED MUSIC CONSUMPTION TECHNOLOGIES**

The pantry of music consumption practices used to be limited by the range and amount of physical or digital music that the listener had physical control over. Thus, the curation practices that allowed the listeners to create meaning and make sense out of their owned collection of music using methods for collection and mixtapes and local playlists for consumption, were constrained. Ever since the materialisation and the development of methods for mechanical reproduction of music, one's ability to design their own music consumption via curation have been a significant part of music culture. Personal utilisation and appropriation of music obtained new and ever evolving definitions via technological advancements that affected and have been affected by social mechanisms of the era.

As a guide to looking at the history of music consumption through a container-based point of view, an approach of "mediality" will be attempted. The term mediality is used by Jonathan Sterne in his study of the mp3 format. (2012) He derives the term from the studies of McLuhan's on the medium (1964) and Bolter & Grusin's term "remediation". (1998) Sterne differentiates this from the term "mediation". He quotes Adorno, "Mediation is in the object itself, not something between the object and that to which it is brought" (Adorno, cited in Sterne, 2012, p.9) and defines mediality of the medium as it "lies not simply in the hardware, but in its articulation with particular practices, ways of doing things, institutions, and even in some cases belief systems... Mediality happens on multiple scales and time frames." (Sterne, 2012, p.9)

With this understanding of the medium and the mediality, the transition from the audio cassette to CD, to digital audio files and then to streaming requires a closer look. To better understand the current personal music curation activities, recent

history of music consumption will be discussed in four sections, one for each proposed era.

1. **Physical** - Cassette & Vinyl
2. **Hybrid** - CD
3. **Digital** - Local mp3, wav, flac, m4a etc.
4. **Streaming** - via online platforms such as Spotify

Each section will look into four aspects of the medium that define music consumption in substantial ways. **Acquisition.** How is the music acquired? What is the “container”? How is it “owned” or “accessed”? **Storability and Mobility.** How are the containers stored? How can they be archived or managed? How can they be carried around? How can the music be shared or transferred? **Technical ease and/or difficulties.** What are the medium-specific advantages or disadvantages of the container that affect the listening, collecting and curating experience? **Curatorial practices and listening habits.** How is the music consumed? What sort of control the listener has over the music? How do the consumption practices change with the changing medium?

### 1.1 Physical

In 1877, mechanical reproduction of music was made available with the invention of the phonograph, which later came to be known as the gramophone. (Hoffmann, 2004) The main principle was to etch the waveform patterns of the sound vibrations on to physical surfaces. The etchings then could be “read” by a needle that follows the waveform pattern on the surface. The “record” was born. A later technological advancement that may be considered as a dissemination of “recorded music” was the pianola, a self-playing piano, invented by Edwin S. Votey in 1895. (The Pianola Institute, 2008) Pianolas were seemingly ordinary pianos with mechanisms inside their cases that would include a paper or a metal roll of “recorded music” that triggers the hammers and strings on the piano to play the sheet music inscribed on

the roll. In later models these rolls could be replaced thus allowing a pianola owner to literally collect music via obtaining multiple rolls.

In 1898, Danish engineer Valdemar Poulsen developed a telegraphone that used magnetic wire recording. (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1998) The sound was imbued on a rapidly moving wire that passes through a recording head that magnetizes the wire at each point with respect to the properties of the audio signal. These wires could be kept in boxes, they too were potential collectibles. In 1928, German-Austrian engineer Fritz Pfleumer, after experimenting with various other materials to magnetize “information” on, found out that coating a very thin sheet of paper with iron oxide powder yielded a successful result. (Mee, Clark & Daniel, 1999, p.48) He received a patent for magnetic tape the same year and produced world’s first tape recorder, Magnetophon K1, in 1935. (Engel & Hammar, 2006, p.1) Magnetic tape allowed music recordings to be multi-tracks. That is, it was now possible to record “over” other recordings. It also revolutionized video and early computer technologies. The magnetic tape could carry all sorts of information after all, not just music.

Throughout the first half of twentieth century magnetic tape and graphite or vinyl discs are used to record and store music. However in 1948, the introduction of 33- $\frac{1}{3}$  rpm vinyl, or as commonly known as, LP (Long-Play) by Columbia Records, made vinyl production and collection more viable. (The Billboard, 1948, June 26, p.18-19) This was due to the increased durability and capacity of this new container. In 1957, Audio Fidelity commercialized the stereo record. (The Billboard, 1957, December 16, p.33) This commercialization affected the way recordings were made as well as the way they were listened. As the technical quality of the content increased, value of the receptacle, thus the motivation to collect soared with it. As magnetic tape technology advanced, using tapes as not just master recording containers but also as commercial units was possible. In 1963, Phillips showcased the first Compact Cassette. (Morton, 2006, p.161) Cassette tapes did not depend on actual physical vibration on a solid surface. It was a magnetic process so if the

mechanism was properly stabilized, it could be moved around. Through this feature, production of portable cassette players as well as the possibility of “mixing your own tape” on a home stereo was now available. Songs from the radio could now be recorded onto cassettes and if the cassette deck had two players, recording bits and pieces from other cassettes as well as completely duplicating them was possible. Mixtaping was the first widely popularised method of creating personalized musical end products using others’ music through curatorial techniques. Additionally compact cassettes could hold almost twice the length of the LP, which allowed a bigger field to run around for the mixtaper.

The main way to get vinyls and cassette tapes published by record companies was to go to a music store. Although music stores and physical containers of music still exist today and they are not uncommon, they hardly are the main way of acquiring recorded music, let alone the only way. This gives me enough courage to write about them as things of the past for the sake of a narrative without having to acknowledge the current diminished prominence of CDs and revival of vinyls and cassette tapes (not solely due to the music they contain), every time I mention their name in this section.

In a record store, you would look through records that were neatly categorized or liberally piled — depending on the type of store you are in — to pick and choose the ones you like. Then you would go to the register, pay for your purchase, leave the store, go home, put the record on and hopefully enjoy. Apart from the radio, through which you would acquire access to a broadcast channel that airs essentially a copy of the same record that you can buy from the record store, this was the main way. So what is the difference between listening to a recorded song on the radio and listening to it on a container you bought? Interactivity is one big difference. You cannot start, stop, change, rewind or in any way affect the broadcast apart from turning the radio on and off, the sound up or down or change the channel. By listening to the radio, what you are getting is a non-interactive access to a piece of music that was not essentially chosen by you. Owning a physical container of

music, i.e. a record on the other hand, allows you interactive access, choice and repeatability. You can listen to a specific piece of recorded music you purchased as many times as you would like (at least until the physical container wears out and the information within withers), start and stop whenever, skip some parts of the record (without precision except from flipping the “sides” which can be considered separate records) and more importantly have choice regarding what to listen and when to listen.<sup>1</sup>

Once you acquired a certain number of physical containers, having them around may require additional thought or action. Vinyls come in big thin square sheets that are often stored in boxes. Storing or shelving vinyls can be considerably easy since they stack much better than cassettes even though they are bigger in volume (12” vinyls in cover  $\sim 270 \text{ cm}^3$  / audio compact cassette in case  $\sim 90 \text{ cm}^3$ ). Even though when put together, they do not take much space; especially the 10” and 12” ones are not easy to carry around. Cassettes, however, are handier. One of the most revolutionary properties of the audio cassette was its mere size and cover. It was much smaller than even the 7” vinyls and unlike the vinyl, the information within was protected by an outer layer of plastic. While vinyls store the music mechanically on them with no protective cover, cassettes held information on magnetic tapes rolled up and stored within a casing only with enough opening for the tape deck to read the information and turn it into mechanical sound. This meant that you could toss them in your bag or the glove compartment of your car and they would still work fine the next time you want to listen to them. Vinyls, in general are more vulnerable to external damage than cassettes. Once the vinyl is scratched, the information is partially unreadable. Some of it is mostly still there however when the needle that follows the etchings encounters the scratch, it derails, making the rest of the information unavailable. Cassettes have sturdy plastic casings that protect the magnetic tape within. As long as the tape and the reel mechanism is

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<sup>1</sup> That would not mean you “owned” the music within the record. Only the container and the interactive access to it. The topic of ownership of the listener will be discussed further within the context of what a song is, in terms of its commodity nature.

intact, superficial damages on the casing do not matter. What can ruin a cassette is a source of magnetism. Something only slightly more powerful than a fridge magnet can ruin your favourite cassette. Apart from this, it is not uncommon to painfully hear the sound go weird as the tape in your cassette gets stuck and rolled up in the deck.

In terms of interactivity, cassettes offered the listener more control over the music than vinyls. Rewinding and fast-forwarding was easier than vinyls depending on the capabilities of the deck that is being used. Although to skip a song is easy on Vinyl since the breaks between tracks are often clearly visible (the dull rings), it is really impractical to find and skip to a certain part of a song. In order to do that you have to drop the needle on the area that you know the track is located and probably give it more than a couple of tries to get to a mark in the vicinity of the part of the song you want to listen to or just wait for that certain part of the song to come in its own pace. This also causes durability problems since the needle is extremely fragile. What cassette decks did was to tie this whole process to buttons. It was still not precise, it could take a couple of tries to get what you want, fast-forwarding could cause tape jams and if your deck is running on battery it would not be wise to fast-forward excessively since it is quite energy demanding (thus emerged the pencil method) but still, it is comparatively easier than the needle drop and offers the listener a bit more control.

Having more control over how you consume music has a different aspect, regarding the monolithic nature of a record. A vinyl is a one or two side record with set number of songs that are safely locked in the container as the musician or the producer intended. Apart from DJs, live mixes and alterations that affect this intended form heavily, regular consumer had and has technical ways of re-recording sections of the vinyl on to other containers to break this monolithic nature. However, in comparison with today's and even cassette era's tools and techniques, these ways were hardly consumer grade. They required niche technical knowledge and expensive equipment. Mixing your own vinyl was not a viable option and still

is not. Cassette on the other hand was a groundbreaker when it comes to personalized sets and customizability through breaking the monolithic nature of the record.

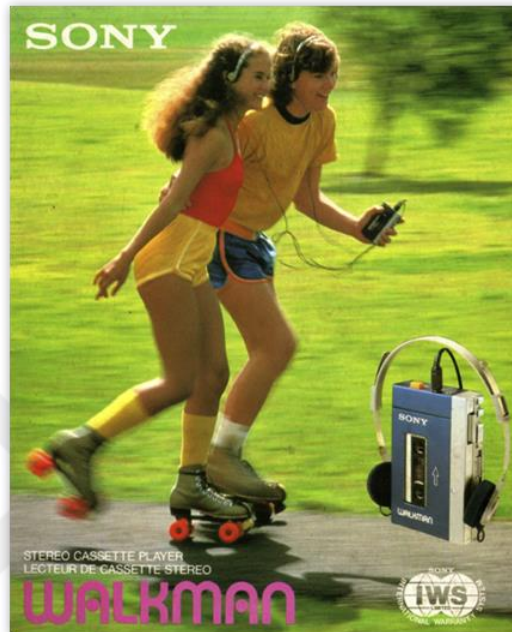
In 1969, Phillips introduced the first boombox, “Radio Recorder” (Foster & Marshall 2015, p.166). It only had one deck so duplicating cassettes or ripping pieces of recordings from one to another was not possible but it could record what is on the radio without the use of any external connection or hardware. It also had built-in speakers and it ran on batteries so you could carry it around.



**Figure 1.1:** Phillips 22RR482 - 1969 - Photo: Cassette Recorder Museum Website

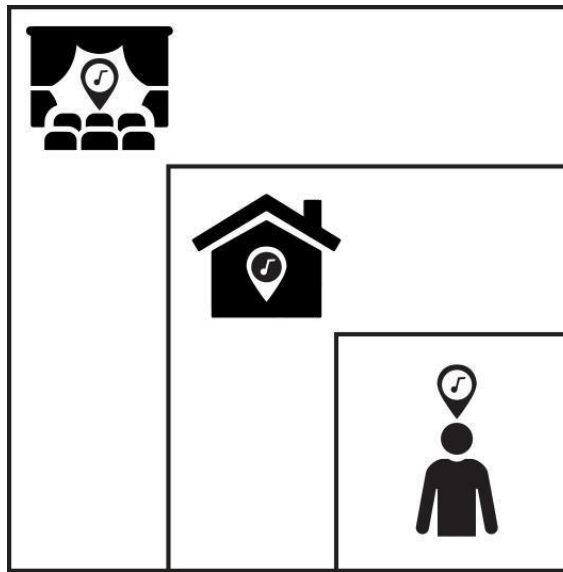
A second step was the dual cassette boomboxes that came around early 1980s. This allowed duplication of cassettes in whole or in pieces. Through popularization of this technological advancement, the term “mixtape” truly found its form. Mixtaping was the first massively popular use of unlicensed recorded music as well. However, recording music from the radio and creating personal mixes, opened new areas for participatory culture in music consumption to flourish. The phenomenon of personalized music consumption through choice — a personal curation of music — transformed into a tradable physical object that was financially accessible to the majority of the public in developed countries. A series of technological

advancements of record reproduction technology through cassette tapes and boomboxes allowed a new understanding of personal music curation and a music sharing culture.



**Figure 1.2:** The Image on the Box of Sony Walkman. 1979.

The last step for the cassettes was the “Walkman”, developed by Sony. The first Walkman was introduced in 1979. Although later versions and adaptations had, it did not have a radio. It was small, compact, it ran on batteries. This was the first representation of the ultimate mobility of music listening. In the historical spatial context of music listening, from open theatres and music halls, to living rooms, to the listener’s immediate vicinity and finally to the listeners own body, personal musical experience space has diminished and arguably became infinitely more personal.



**Figure 1.3:** The Shrinking Environment of Music Listening (Illustration: Melike Özmen, 2018)

By the early 1980s, with the help of the Walkman, cassettes were taking over the industry from the vinyl and the current state of ubiquitous, mobile and personal music consumption was being slowly build upon technological and commercial innovations. (Haire, 2009; Costello, 2018) Since this thesis is interested in digital curation and in a manner regulating one’s own music consumption, gradual personalization of the music listening environment is of some interest. Increasing individualization<sup>2</sup> patterns in music consumption via technology — or vice versa without having to feel the need to identify which caused which, or what sort of a feedback mechanism they have between them — inescapably affected modes of listening. Experiencing a live concert with a crowd and listening to a self-created Spotify playlist have significant differences. Different contexts and different modes of listening can and do point out to different cultural phenomena as well as commonalities due to the nature of the content. Thus the cassette as a semi-open

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<sup>2</sup> It should be asserted that the term individualization is not used to define the nature of the content and the listener’s relationship to it. It is used to define the social changes in music consumption practices where technology allowed for and commercialized an experience of music consumption when alone, by oneself. Thus this should not be confused with what Adorno calls “pseudo-individualization”. (Adorno, 2009, p.289)

medium for personalization and Sony Walkman as an agent of individualization should be noted as an important milestones for personal consumption of music and significant footnotes to understanding personal digital curation of music.

## **1.2 Hybrid**

In 1982, Sony and one month later Phillips released their first commercial Compact Disc players, CDP 101 and Pinkeltje, respectively. (Kretschmer & Muehlfeld, 2004, p.8) The first CD was developed solely for music storage and transfer purposes. The music was to be transformed into digital bits (encoded) and the digital information was to be stored on yet another physical container. From acoustic (live), to mechanical (vinyl), to magnetic (tape) and finally to digital. As recorded music requires an encoding and decoding process for it to defy the temporality and the spatiality of the performance, technological advancements followed the road to better quality, storage and mobility, as it also evolved in the way the society “required”. However, as Sterne (2012, p.6-7) warns, digital information as we understand it, still holds an actual physical space. Data has its own materiality even if the size and scale is undetectable to naked eye. This creates a colloquial yet technically wrong sense of immateriality of the digital. Even though digital will be considered intangible in this context, it will not be considered immaterial.

The reason why this section is titled “Hybrid” is that even though the information was digital, the container was physical. As a matter of fact, all mediums and containers in this manner can be called “Hybrid” in a certain way. For a long time, production of music sustained its physicality with a tangible source of sound that moved through the molecules in the air in a way that was specific to the source, vibrating. The vibration was, in a similar fashion, captured by a microphone — still in a very physical manner, by the diaphragm that moves along with the vibrations to create a linear motion that was transformed into digital information via inducing signals — and turned into mere electromagnetic information, only to be transformed back into mechanical vibrations created by what is simply called a

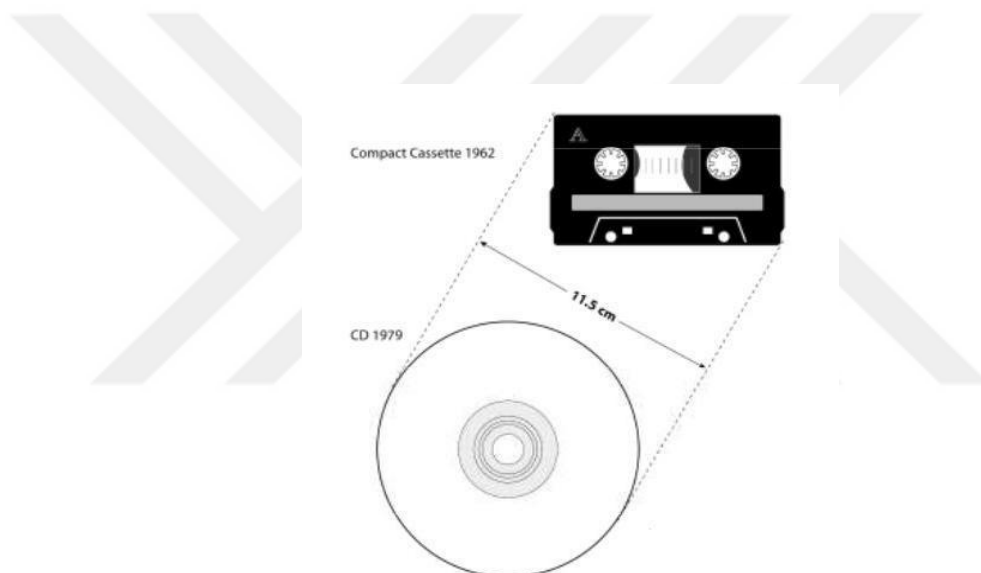
“loudspeaker”. That changed with digitally produced music. With synthesizers and later on virtual synthesizers, directly creating the electromagnetic signal was possible. The consumption of the sound, however, the listening practice, stayed pretty much the same. We still have loudspeakers on our headphones, computers or sound systems. This part of the transmission seems like it will stay safely unchanged until we figure out how to directly transfer the signal to our brains to induce “virtual sound”. That would be the “true digital music”. But for now, omitting the consumption end of the sound, let us call the CD a hybrid form in terms of music containers.



**Figure 1.4:** The Shrinking Environment of Music Listening v2 (Illustration: Melike Özmen, 2018)

As hybrid containers, CDs were obtained the same way vinyls and cassettes were. As tangible products, purchased at stores. The CD was revolutionary and different as a mean of storing information such as music but it also held some physical similarities with its predecessors. It was a disc with a hole in the centre and it came in a square cover just like the vinyl. The circular data line was very similar to the vinyl as well. Just as the needle followed the etchings to read the music inwards from the outer rings as the vinyl rotated around its own centre, the optic reader scanned the data on the surface of the CD the same way. Furthermore, just like one can drop the needle on the dull rings where the breaks were on a vinyl to listen to a certain song, CD allowed skipping the songs back and forth. It also allowed fast-forwarding and rewinding just like the cassette. In that manner, CDs can be thought as a combination of the previous two containers.

In terms of mobility and storability, developers of the CD went with a familiar size. The diagonal length of the compact cassette is 11.5 cm. Apart from never confirmed, some denied myths and stories about the origin of the CD storage size, and this specific isomorphism regarding the physical size was indeed intentional. According to the lead engineer on the project, Kees Immink, the decision to design the new medium roughly around the same size of the compact cassette was due to the opinion that “[it] was a great success”. Immink recalls company executives said, “we don’t think CD should be much larger”. (Immink, 1998, p.458-465)



**Figure 1.5:** Compact Cassette - Compact Disc Comparison.<sup>3</sup> Source: Immink, "The Compact Disc Story," 1998, p.460. As depicted in Sterne, "MP3: The Meaning of a Format", 2012, p.13.

Mobility and storability of CDs were practically similar to cassettes. They had relatively sturdy plastic cases so they could be tossed around, they were small and handy enough to be carried around in bags and they held around the same amount of music (a regular CD holds up to 80 minutes of audio and most common varieties

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<sup>3</sup> Often illustrated this way, wrong by 0.5 cm. CDs are 12 cm in diameter.

of cassettes, C60 and C90, hold 30 minutes and 45 minutes on each side, respectively). CDs had similar durability problems to the vinyl. One scratch is all it took to ruin the whole CD sometimes. Furthermore, the optical reader on the CD player was as delicate as the turntable needle.

The interface of portable CD players such as Sony Discman were similar to the Walkman interface. Skipping songs, fast-forwarding, rewinding was easy. Though, extensive mobility through the stability of the CD and the optical reader was an issue. Discmans were not as trustworthy as Walkmans in that manner. Walking or running with a CD player in your pocket did not always provide the most seamless listening experience. All in all, in terms of physicality, CD was not necessarily revolutionary. What made CDs special was the computer.

The best-selling CD in USA is the blank recordable one. (Kusek & Leonhard, 2005, page x) Just like the way the tape recorder turned the cassette into a pillar of emerging participatory music culture by allowing consumer curation and reproduction, computers with CD drives, media player software and ripping/burning tools turned the CD in to a very popular transfer medium, not just for music but for all digital information. Just like mixtapes, mix CDs had a prominent effect on music consumption behaviour and personal curation practices. What is substantially different in the hybrid era is the source medium. Mixtapes were filled with audio from other tapes (duplication), the radio (capturing) or with personal recordings (production). Mix CDs on the other hand, were mainly filled from a pool of music, i.e. a computer with a digital music archive. What separates the CD from the cassette and the vinyl is that the information stored in the container is digital and thus could be computerized and could be stored as digitally without any technical application of analogue to digital conversion. This is not due to the uniqueness of the CD but rather to advancements in parallel technologies that allowed a different understanding of what music consumption and collection is, by introducing an intangible form of music; music as a digital object.

To create a digital music library one would have to resort to physical media or digital files of others, which too can eventually be traced to physical containers as source. In the CD era and later in the pre-wide spread internet digital music times, almost all music floating online were personally “ripped”. They were digital audio files, copied and transformed from physical containers. This transformation, the process of compressing the information in order to end up with files that are easier to store and easier to transfer defined a good deal of today’s music consumption environment.

### **1.3 Digital**

The mp3 significantly shaped the current state of music consumption. However, digital audio is not that new. A digital audio recording of 16-bits (CD quality) was made as early as 1975 and the results were published in a paper titled *Blind Deconvolution Through Digital Signal Processing*. (Stockham, Cannon & Ingebretsen, 1975) Efforts and experiments on perceptual techniques, computer audio and digital audio compression techniques were existent throughout the 20th century. (Sterne, 2012, p.18) Numerous methods and experiments have been developed, tested and used however, what is arguably more important for this thesis’ purposes is the standardization rather than the stages of development, since that is when we start to see social and cultural implications take stage.

Researchers of applied technologies at Fraunhofer IIS in Erlangen, Germany, Karlheinz Brandenburg, Ernst Eberlein, Heinz Gerhäuser, Bernhard Grill, Jürgen Herre and Harald Popp developed a codec that was later chosen as standard by The Moving Pictures Experts Group. MPEG-1 Audio Layer 3 was standardized as a format in 1993 (ISO/IEC, 1993). In an internal poll at the Fraunhofer IIS, the name and the extension of the format was voted .mp3.

```
Datum: Fri, 14 Jul 1995 12:29:49 +0200
Betreff: Endungen fuer Layer3: .mp3

Hallo,
nach der überwältigenden Meinung aller
Befragter:
die Endung für ISO MPEG Audio Layer 3 ist
.mp3. D.h. wir sollten für kommende WWW-Sei-
ten, Shareware, Demos, etc. darauf achten,
dass keine .bit Endungen mehr rausgehen.
Es hat einen Grund, glaubt mir :-)
```

Jürgen Zeller

**Figure 1.6:** Fraunhofer Institute for Integrated Circuits IIS - The mp3 History Timeline - 1995 (Fraunhofer IIS., 2018)

*Date: Fri, 14 Jul 1995 12:29:49 +0200*

*Subject: Extensions for Layer3: .mp3*

*Hello,*

*According to the overwhelming opinion of all respondents:  
the extension for ISO MPEG Audio Layer 3 is .mp3. D. H. we  
should make sure that no .bit extensions go out for future WWW  
pages, shareware, demos, etc. There is a reason, believe me :-)*

*Jürgen Zeller*

With the standardization of the codec and the format, Fraunhofer released the l3enc shareware and the WinPlay 3 real time audio player the same year. (Fraunhofer ISS, *The mp3 History*, 2018) WinPlay 3 was a very simple audio player software, which allowed the computer to serve as a listening device. This mode of listening eliminated the need for a physical container to consume music interactively, just as long as the digital audio was present in the computer's hard drive.

“Ripping” got massively popularized via an act of “piracy”. At the time, a demo software that can rip and convert was being stored in an unprotected computer at

University of Erlangen. Researchers and marketing people at Fraunhofer and MPEG did not yet think it was ready to be published so the source code was being refrigerated at that time. A hacker with the nickname *SoloH* from Netherlands (Mann, 2000) or Australia (Sterne, 2012, p.27) downloaded the software, revamped the source code, created a ripping software that offers decent quality and shared it with the world. If there is to be chosen a single moment for the emergence and dissemination of participatory music culture of the mp3 era, this was probably it.

After came the “warez” phenomena. “Warez” teams and websites offered free and unlicensed soft“ware” and content. *Rabid Neurosis* (RNS) is considered to be one of the most significant and well-known mp3 warez organizations. Through www and the use of P2P networks, RNS allegedly published thousands of albums, with a signature that went “Rabid Neurosis - Spread The Epidemic” between 1996 and 2007 (Witt, 2015). Throughout the second half of the 1990s, a series of rapid developments occurred in the digital music front. Winamp was released in 1997 (Bronson,1998) and it could make playlists(!), Windows Media Player by Microsoft was introduced and the legendary mp3.com was founded the same year, which was going to get shut down in four years due to a feud with almost all major record labels (UMG Recordings Inc et al. v. mp3.com, 00 Civ. 472 (JSR), 2000).

One of the most well-known, and quite frankly worn-out stories of the legal and economic end results of the unlicensed consumption of recorded music was the case of Napster vs. Metallica. Especially Lars Ulrich, the drummer, was vocal and active about the case. Popularization of Napster and the elevation of the topic to the mainstream channels sparked discussions of democratization of music, ownership of content, copyright and commodity in the digital environment. P2P platforms, unlicensed software and content websites, the torrent protocol and music industry’s increasing efforts to tame the beast ruled the better half of the mp3 era. Indeed, this was a battle against a new mode of music consumption that the industry was trying to defend its hegemony against, however as capitalism goes, adaptation is often parallel to these defensive battles.

Two significant occasions mark October 2001 as a significant month. Apple released the first iPod and Microsoft published Windows Media Player 8 with CD ripping abilities. The iPod and other mp3 players in general define the consumption characteristics of the digital era. It is significant to point out that at that time, iTunes Music Store was yet to be published, in 2003. Thus, by deduction, what was publicly accepted by Apple or large tech and media companies such as Microsoft, Sony, Phillips and others was that their products were being used to consume only the content that was being ripped from the CDs the user physically owned. Because otherwise, it would be a clear enabler for unlicensed music consumption, with no or little licensed digital music acquisition methods available at the time. The first iPod had a storage space of 5 GB, which was advertised to be able to carry 1000 songs or around 100 CDs. Considering Napster reached over 25 million users worldwide by 2001 (Comscore, 2001), a wild guess can be made about the origin of the files that filled most iPods.

The acquisition process of the mp3 player era was via the computer and interface software that allowed communication and transfer between devices. You would either rip a licensed or duplicated CD, copy a mix CD (an mp3 data disc that held around 140 songs if we follow Apple's calculation of ~5 MB a song) to your computer or download from a P2P network/website. Then through iTunes interface, you would transfer the songs of your choice to your device and achieve a sense of ubiquitousness. Apple's first iPod commercial specifically focused on the ability of the device and technology that allowed a transition from the Mac to the iPod. The man in the ad starts listening to a song on his Mac on iTunes. His iPod is connected and he "drags and drops" the song he is listening to his iPod. He unplugs the iPod from the Mac puts on his headphones, plays the same song on his iPod, dances around and leaves the apartment with joy. Mobility, storage and ubiquitousness was the key as the packshot of the ad proclaimed with the punchline that went "iPod. A thousand songs, in your pocket". (Apple - The first iPod ad, 2001) They were small, portable, easy to handle and to carry around. Not unlike the Walkman or Discman.

However, one would not have to deal with mechanical problems of the cassette or the CD player. Yes, technical problems due to the electronic nature of the device was experienced every now and then but all in all it offered an easier listening experience. Also no more batteries, just remember to charge your device before you leave home. Arguably a habit that defines the whole mobile device experience to this day.

Mp3 players had their own file management systems depending on the architecture of the player software and the id3 tags, the metadata carriers that came with the mp3. Artist name, track name or genre were among the most popular filtering and filing parameters and they worked fine. However, for most ripped music at the time, metadata entry was a user-operated task. Which meant it was inconsistent and often wrong in some way. For the filing organization to work properly on the portable device, one would have to edit the metadata of their digital archive. As someone who spent hours of precious teenage time on organizing metadata of ripped digital audio files, I can say that it is an acquired taste and in my case, rooted from a need to order and nurtured by enough time to spend.

This behaviour is a trait of the archiver or curator. In order to go further in this manner, the nature of the digital audio files should be discussed in terms of what it really is. The commodity nature of digital audio files and the access over ownership model to discuss the issue directly as well as the topic of ownership of the consumer will be discussed in larger extent, but prior to that the container nature of the digital audio should be established. Just like the vinyl, cassette and CD, mp3 is technically a container. It contains digital information that when ran through appropriate software and/or hardware, registers as music. Thus, the same argument I have used regarding the ownership of the container should suffice for an introductory understanding of what mp3 is. It is a compression protocol, a husk, a container. Information is put in it. It is acquired so that the information within can be accessed. The information is not unique, nor is it “owned”. The specific container, on the

other hand, is digitally owned. In a cyberspace context, this accounts to unlimited access and interactivity, given the right tools.

One of the main differences between the physical and the digital container is that it is almost always for a single song, while the physical container is not. Physical containers that came with a single song is not uncommon (that are conveniently called “singles” which paradoxically almost always offer more than one song since CDs) it can be confidently said that the image of the physical container is one of the album, not of the single. The breaking of the monolithic nature of the record had been experienced on a mainstream level as early as the mixtape era. However what mp3 did to the structural integrity of the container was to demolish the very idea that recorded music had to come in groups. An mp3 is (most of the time) a song. With this understanding the concept of the album (LP), the EP and the single transformed from being technical necessities to residual remediations of old consumption habits. In the age of the digital, there is literally zero technical reason for an album to be around 10-13 songs or for an EP to hold 4-6 songs. These restrictions of the media that was available at times in the past of the recorded music history and some of them live on in the digital era due to reasons other than technical necessities. Thus in the age of the digital, an album is not a container. It is a cultural format that encapsulates a number of containers within contextual boundaries. Collection and curatorial habits revolved around this fact. Singular songs, instead of albums. Moreover, in order to listen to singular songs for an extended period of time and in an order, one would need a listing. The playlist is born out of the singularity and temporality of the digital audio.

With easy and free access to music, and the freedom to break the bundle and choose the singular item transformed the music industry. CD sales and use of CD as a storage and transfer medium slowly withered, downloading music ripped from physical containers provided by other P2P users, or conventional unlicensed music as we know it, ruled the music industry and defined the consumption of the era.

With the introduction and fast-growing convenience of paid download services that distribute royalty to the songwriters and master right revenues to the labels, the demand towards licensed music began to rise. The iPod, representing the closed-end software and hardware philosophy of its producers, which did not necessarily force the listener to exclusively consume licensed music, but made it or arguably made it look more convenient. It also promised a soon to be meta-defining ubiquity where one can seamlessly navigate back and forth between devices and access their music through the commonality of the iTunes software. Through the almost complete digitalisation of music archives, collection behaviour and personal curatorial practices evolved. Even though concepts such as 10-13 track album and 4-6 track EP, which root from the storage restrictions of previous formats, remediated, the focus shifted to two ends of the spectrum; entire catalogues and single tracks.

#### **1.4 Streaming**

As digital revolution progressed, bandwidth capacities of consumer grade internet access elevated with it. Downloading content meant that the consumer would have to wait until the entirety of the package is transferred to their device. High bandwidth enabled continuous streaming of mp3s without downloading the whole file; now you can have your cake and eat it too, while it is still in the oven. This called for a second industry response. Streaming services that provide paid subscription services and/or ad-supported services were introduced where the listeners pay with their “attentions”.

Similar to what Kusek and Leonhard envisaged in their book *The Future of Music - Manifesto for the Digital Music Revolution* (2005) and coined as **music like water**, these services while adopted the claim of ubiquity, also promised vast catalogues that cannot be easily owned by one single person as digital files or in physical containers due to financial, logistic and operational reasons. This profoundly changed the meaning of a personal music collection. Rather than having

to obtain the building blocks to construct meaning, which even without the building itself was a curatorial practice, now the listener simply chooses the blocks among a vast selection available and what creates meaning is only choice and consumption. Before streaming the ingredients and general characteristic of a constrained musical archive was by itself a signifier of listener's behaviours. Now with the opportunity to stream music, the projection of self into practice takes place in the realm of what one chooses to pick amongst all.

In this manner acquisition turned into a practice of instant gratification. As long as the listener has a working up-to-date internet connection, all that are in the digital service provider's (DSPs) catalogue are at will. It would be reasonable here to dive into a bit of semantics and discuss what "acquiring" really means. If it is to be accepted that this action includes a sense of ownership within itself, than it would be plausible to say that it is not enough just to have access to satisfy the conditions of acquisition. Access over ownership model will be discussed in further detail later, however it is important to realize that in order to talk about acquisition, we may need to consider requirement of a further user action. Different disciplines such as collection studies and the field of personal information management refers to this action as "collecting" (McCourt, 2005) and "keeping" (Jones, 2007), respectively. This action requires conscious choice to select and practical means on the user interface to separate the selected from the rest. On Spotify this practical means are (as of April 2019) "saving" a song to personal library, taking the song outside the platform via sharing or linking and finally adding the song into a playlist. These processes briefly define the outlines of the acquisition process on streaming platforms.

Some streaming platforms allow their users to download songs to consume offline. In this manner, the storability benefits and requirements are the same with the digital era. However, terms of access may show differences depending on the platform being used. DSPs such as Spotify offer a downloading service for premium users (paid subscribers) that allow the listener to download the song via the platform

only to be consumed on the platform itself. It cannot be taken out of the interface, duplicated or edited. In practice, this only takes away the necessity to stay online. Other platform-based restrictions are still in place. If the user is not using more than one streaming service for personal consumption, this transforms the acquisition process into a single target activity. Music is flowing like water but in this case, one tap is used only. However, you can move this tap around quite a bit.

A heightened level of ubiquity is achieved with the widespread use of streaming services and mobile internet technology. In the privileged parts of the world, bandwidth capabilities of mobile internet is more than enough to stream 128 kbps mp3 files, which most streaming platforms offer as base quality. In order to achieve ubiquity and synchronization between devices, you would have to plug your devices in and operate manually, within the boundaries of your devices' storage capabilities. Streaming services offer ubiquity for the entirety of the content they provide, as long as you are online. So it can be said that while streaming did not introduce ubiquity by itself, it transformed and elevated the meaning and implication of ubiquitous music consumption.

Apart from the ubiquity, stream services put continuous effort on their catalogue. A wider and deeper musical archive to be offered to the listeners is important in its essence since the main idea of the one-platform approach is to establish a sense of everything, everywhere. In this topic of "everything", Vonderau offers and discusses the term "aggregation" for the service providers to define the relation between the content and the streaming user. He claims, "Streaming seems most closely linked to an economic belief in a conversion of values." (Vonderau, 2004, p.718) He continues this line of thought using Charles Darwin's terminology (Darwin, 1875) to define aggregation as "not the source of the stream, but the facilitating principle that unites all the distinct data 'particles' into a coherent 'whole'" (p.719) This coherent whole that is discussed by Vonderau is a sense of "everything" when it comes to how it is marketed to the public. An access to "everything" is promised and you would not even have to have much physical or

digital space to hold it. This creates a sense of immateriality around recorded music. Nothing is owned, nothing takes up space. However as discussed earlier, what really happens is the content being physically kept in some servers as physical, tiny yet physical, alterations of material. Digital data takes up very small yet actual amounts of physical space. To these alterations, you are provided access through duplication of information. This information journey, through which signals flow from the servers to your smartphone. Digitally kept knowledge to how to repeat is what takes up space. All is accessed; all you “own” is an *address book*.

Regarding the physicality of music, Jon Pareles, much like Kusek and Leonhard, predicted the current state of music industry and consumption practices in a surprisingly accurate and enthusiastically optimistic manner. He suggests, from the listener’s point of view, this intangible state of recorded music is a return to a natural form. He states, “For listeners, music has never been about its physical form, but about what's in the grooves or magnetic particles or digital pits; it's the information, not the plastic. Digital distribution can turn that sentiment into a reality.” (Pareles, 1998)

As will be discussed in further detail later on, this understanding changes the socio-economic nature of what recorded music is. In similar fashion with Vonderau, Fleischer also has the impression that the definition of DSPs should be discussed in further detail. He inquires, “What if, as already indicated, Spotify is better understood not as a music distributor but as a producer?” (Fleischer, 2017, p.156) He continues to remark on this idea by stating that Spotify provides a “commodified experience, bundled together as one commodity.” (Fleischer, 2017, p.156) Snickars, on the other hand, deals with the issue from a more specific point of view and discusses streaming recorded music on its technological implications. (Snickars, 2015, p.194) He argues, “We are currently witnessing the contours of a gradual transition, where music (bit by bit) is redefined as a data-driven communication form. Rather than being primarily designated as an audible media format, streaming music suggests a variety of interlinked formats, activities and patterns – at least

from a computational perspective.” (p.194) He focuses this computational perspective to the field of collection and archive studies by referencing funk band Vulfpeck’s leader Jack Stratton’s comments about the industry: “content and previous content has become inseparable. For an artist, a new album can easily be promoted together with all prior releases (as long as they have also been digitized). Downloadable or stored online, musicological visions of totality and all-inclusiveness are, thus, common discursive traits, with claims that one is going to ‘through in’ the whole history of recorded music as Jack Stratton admiringly put it.” (p.194)

From the listener’s point of view, the notion of disappearance of the “new album” due to the perpetual availability of the previous ones, creates a diminished or transformed (depending on from where you look at it) sense of “new music”. Although DSPs showcase selected new releases on their storefronts as parts of marketing deals with the labels or distributors, older releases are also on the store, as long as the store is open and the right holders do not decide to take the content down. Physical record stores do not have that much freedom. Although they offer old records and classic releases, the chances of finding the first album of an obscure post-punk band that was released in 1983 would be practically impossible. However, streaming platforms and download stores have that opportunity. This closes the gap between “new music” and “newly discovered” music. The sense of “everything” does not only have a spatial but a temporal meaning as well.

All of this creates a heightened significance for personal curation practices added with the broken monolithic nature of a record. Streaming platforms offer the users to create and manage personal playlists that they can add and remove single songs or whole albums, change the order and listen to in their user designated ordering as well as using the shuffle option. Apart from the “Library” or “Saved Songs” on Spotify for instance, music collecting and curating behaviours manifest themselves in the use of playlists. In the age when access to all or most is achieved, what makes collections personal and unique are the very choices the user makes. This selection

process and the following archival practices are all defined by the availability of a personally unmanageable amount of music. Since everything is accessed, what makes streaming music collections personal are the decisions the listener make on what to keep and how to keep them.

If we approach streaming in terms of mobility, we see that everyday practices regarding consuming and curating music for personal consumption revolves around digital devices. Mobility and the previously shrunk spatiality of music consumption and the almost absolute personalization of listening environment via headphones remains descriptive for the streaming age as well. On the go music is commonly listened to on smartphones. One of the main differences from the previous mobile music players is that smartphones are not designated music players; they are, by definition and design, first and foremost communication devices. Same goes for personal computers which are not practically mobile devices but rather stationary devices which can be set up in different places, with much ease in the case of laptops (In this manner their level of mobility is close to boomboxes). The multi-tasking nature of our times, inescapably affects music consumption practices as well. Free-flowing music, on the go, on a device, which you can check your email or your Instagram or play games at the same time. In practice the same user experience and interaction was common before the “one device to do it all” era also. After all, you could listen to music while reading a book even before the age of recorded music. However, what is significant here is that interactive music consumption is now deduced to an app, a square icon on a screen that is competing with all sorts of other things for your attention. Everything is accessed through the same bottleneck. Even though this bottleneck allows for multi-tasking at certain levels, human attention is limited. Competition for this attention elevated the previously existing significance of “background music” and associated listening modes. The story of the “soundtrack of your life” phenomenon which, took a decisive turn with the Walkman and headphones, unfolded even further with streaming music consumption via mobile online devices.

Apart from the necessity of an up-to-date computer or a smartphone with a working internet connection, the main limitation of mobile music consumption is, as for all mobile music players, is battery. Smartphones of 2018 do not survive as long as Walkmans that run days or weeks on two AA batteries. Furthermore, even in big cities some locations are inescapably bereft of internet connection, such as underground/subway/metro trains and stations. Though, dependency to smartphones and internet connection from a culture industry point of view is crucial for the new business environment (public demand to it is immense as well) and some metro stations or trains offer Wi-Fi or mobile internet through underground placement of cell towers/reflectors, it is not yet available on every step. At least a city of almost 20-million like İstanbul has not manage to provide it everywhere yet, let alone offering a seamless online transition from over to underground. The necessity of this is, of course, a different discussion.

For this possibility of lack of access, streaming services offer the previously mentioned downloading option on platform. If you want to guarantee uninterrupted access to your favourite songs, you have to download it to your device. This is guaranteed too with actual downloading services such as iTunes Store, Beatport or P2P platforms such as Soulseek (mainly for unlicensed music). In the face of the growing dominance of streaming, one of the main use for downloaded songs, in addition to offline access, is the freedom to duplicate or process the file elsewhere. Producers, DJs, videographers etc. who need to operate on the file prefers downloading their chosen content through licensed or unlicensed platforms. This creates a difference of interactivity between the streamer and the downloader. This difference existed previously between the record owner and the radio listener on different terms, but practically with similar implications. The case of interactivity is key, if music collections and personal music curation is of concern. This is due to the back and forth relationship the curator has to have with their own (accessed) content. Without any interaction, without keeping, ordering or archiving it would be quite difficult or even arguably impossible to talk about collections. However, this interactivity gap has evolved to allow the lacking side of the scale to operate

on their content to a level, which offers possibilities to perform curatorial activities. This thesis is mainly interested in the utilization of these possibilities via studying the case of streaming playlists to observe personal digital curation.

To do this properly, this thesis will approach the topic from the perspectives of two fields, Personal Information Management (PIM) and Collection Studies. These two fields are chosen to ground the topic on an appropriate scholarly level through investigating the nature of what the atomic component of the practice is. The following section will root from two different approaches to the question, “what is a song on a streaming platform”. By doing this, developing an understanding of streaming playlist activities is aimed.

## CHAPTER 2

### PLAYLISTS AND DIGITAL CURATION

Music collections and archives have been undergoing a transformation in which local digital files are replaced with personal collections or sub-archives of readily available and massive streaming music service catalogues as a further step to digitalization of physical music containers into local digital files. Apart from the algorithmic recommendation tools and search facilities streaming platforms such as Spotify offer, the ability to create and maintain any number of personal playlists stands out as an interesting field to discuss curation practices as an everyday activity. The process of creating meaning through deciding upon what to include and what to exclude as well as how to place and position the individual information items, intertwined with the consumption practices of music, presents an opportunity to explore contemporary music consumption through Collection Studies and Personal Information Management (PIM) activities.

#### **2.1 Information Item and/or Collectable Object**

In order to have insight on curatorial behaviour on streaming platforms, a contextual framework should be established. Since streaming platforms are considerably new and music consumption went through dislocating changes due to emergence of digital music and then streaming, previous fields of research regarding music collections and curatorial practices present a space for new research and possible upgrades of some aspects as well as possible redefinitions of a few terms. This is partly due to the transformed nature of music as *collectable*.

*Ownership* of the listener was only available as a concept after humanity managed to record sound and save pieces of music on physical forms, which can be purchased and owned. Owning a piece of record, though legally not entitling the listener to the master recording or publishing rights, meant that the listener is in possession of the

physical container and is allowed to consume the content. This made *music* a collectable object first in the form of phonograms, then vinyls, cassette tapes, CDs, MDs etc. Furthermore, commodification of technological advances, caused popularisation of home stereos that can copy pieces of the content in the container to be put into another. Blank ones that can be bought were already available, along with other filled containers, which the listener may decide to record over and lose the previous information. In both cases, the monolithic nature of recorded music content gets shattered to allow listeners and reproducers to pick and choose amongst the whole and consume only the parts they prefer. The fact that there exists technological means to separate a song from an album, EP or a multi-track single, opens songs as collectables to discussion by themselves, free from their containers. Still the music was sold and consumed in physical forms. Now after this brief period of physicality in the history of music, most of the consumption is again through intangible containers.

As McCourt pointed out, “each subsequent format has less physical presence while allowing for more storage and greater possibilities for user programming.” (2006, p.249) Digital CDs ripped audio files, downloaded mp3s as well as songs and playlists on streaming platforms are all intangible examples of music. The main difference is, in the physical era of music collection the listener would physically own the container. Now there is only digital data; when put in context: *information*. The information as to what the recording is in bits, or in streaming, an *address* of the content. On streaming platforms, music is not permanently downloaded to be accessed online and offline, neither it is transferred or altered. Although streaming platforms such as Spotify allow users to download content as an additional feature in order to allow offline consumption, it is only accessible through the platform itself and the songs still cannot be transferred or altered. With streaming, purchase of music, as in buying physical containers, is now transformed into subscribing to a permission to access. Prior to streaming, songs, both in physical containers and in digital form, used to be located physically or digitally in the vicinity of the listener. Now, on streaming platforms, listeners collect what practically are *bookmarks*. An

address book to access online information, which is stored in a singular server or a couple central servers. As stated earlier, in the era of streaming; all is accessed; all you “own” is an address book. Then we may deduce that the nature of a streaming music collection is substantially different from physical music collections. However, the difference is not that in one people collect music and in the other information. Physical music collections are “container collections” and in a similar fashion streaming music, collections are “bookmark collections”. This perspective allows discussing playlist songs both as *information items* and as *collectable objects*.

Discussing streaming songs along the lines of both information and collection studies, allows a study of personal streaming playlist curation that tries to understand the traditional collection aspect of the practice while staying within the bounds of the current context and the technological framework of digital music and streaming. Neither fields of research put extensive effort into this specific area while considering the existence of the other, thus an examination of the streaming playlist with a methodological framework that includes means of both fields, will hopefully contribute to both how information management field studies music collections and how collection studies see digital, *bookmark* collections.

To understand information items and assess personal streaming playlist curation in a solid framework, the field of Personal Information Management (PIM) will be used. PIM deals with the “concept of information itself and the concepts of personal information, the information item (or information object) as an external encapsulation of information to be found, kept, used, re-used, etc. and personal information collections.” (Jones, 2007, p7) Jones goes on to define what an information item is as “a packaging of information” and gives examples of information items under five topics: (1) paper documents. (2) electronic documents and other files. (3) email messages. (4) web pages or (5) references (e.g., shortcuts, alias) to any of the above. He defines the items, the containers in this case on their capability to be interacted with through the information stored within. Information

items, according to Jones, “encapsulate information in a persistent form that can be created, stored, moved, given a name and other properties, copied, distributed, deleted, moved, transformed, etc.” (2007, p9) This definition could easily be used to define a physical container of music.

Not all information items allow their content to be interacted or manipulated in an open way. Some we can only copy but not alter, some can be renamed and transformed but cannot be moved. Some information can be reproduced or copied but would need technological tools or human effort or even artisanship in some cases. As McCourt explains the elevated and/or diminished state of the original digital item, by comparing it to the physical one by stating “while mechanical technology enhances the possibilities for reproducing an original artifact, digital technology increases the possibilities for modifying an original (...) Digital content is not static or universally commodifiable; instead, we engage in ‘dialogues’ with a work by altering the artifact itself or recontextualizing it through mix CDs or playlists. While most of us lack the talent and abilities required for mixing and matching vocals and instrumental tracks into mashups, playlists increasingly serve as a form of personal expression.” (2006, p.251)

The boundaries or rather rules are defined by the capabilities of the tools at hand, nature of the information and the nature of the medium of the information. Before home stereos that can record music from the radio or the ones with multiple players that allow recording from one cassette tape to another, conventional listeners were not able to copy the content without actually hiring a professional studio and an expert technician. Cassette tapes and portable players could be moved but to duplicate the information required an extra tool. Even though information can be utilised (or not) in many different ways, possibly the primary feature of information in our case here, is the storability. In order for anyone to make a collection, to indulge in any sort of curatorial activity on a collection, they should keep the information first. Jones defines three stages of activity of personally managed information as: (2007, p12)

- Finding/Re-Finding
- Keeping
- M-Level Activities

For practical purposes let us look at how one would go about using Spotify, listening to music, showing interest in some songs, albums or artists, wanting to keep some of the songs they liked, then regulating how they would consume their collection, i.e. what they kept. Actively searching or passively encountering a song would be **Finding**. The decision to add the song to a playlist as well as “saving” it to “songs” in for instance Spotify, for further consumption, for preservation or for various other purposes is **Keeping**. Finally, any sort of **Mapping, Managing, Maintaining** and organisation, **Measuring, Manipulation** or sense**Making** activity on the kept songs is an M-Level activity. (Jones, 2007, p16)

The **Personal Archives Accessible in Digital Media** (paradigm) project held between the years 2005 and 2007 by the libraries of the Universities of Oxford and Manchester proposes a model called The Open Archival Information System (OAIS). This model is considered by the project researchers as a “key standard for digital repositories” (Thomas, 2005). Their cycle definition consists of three stages similar to Jones’ PIM approach:

- obtaining information
- short-term information management; and
- long-term personal archiving and preservation.

## 2.2 “Capta”

Danet & Katriel , on their work on aesthetics and the “play” aspect of collecting as a human experience, state that there needs to be a set of rules and procedures in order for the activity to be called “collecting” and for the society to accept this practice as an appropriate endeavour. (1994, p.225) To their view, “for collecting

to be a socially appropriate activity, collectors must create and follow procedures for cultivating the collection. These procedures relate to the ways in which new objects are acquired, the care and display of objects, and the place of collecting in individuals' lives." They quote historian James Clifford's account on the self and object stating: "The self that must possess but cannot have it all learns to select, order, classify in hierarchies—to make 'good' collections" (1988, p.218).

On this section where the singular building blocks, items or objects of the curatorial activity are being discussed, it is suitable to look at a certain section of Danet & Katriel's and Clifford's accounts; this section what Jones call "keeping"; Paradigm project calls "obtaining information"; Danet & Katriel, "acquiring"; and Clifford, "selection". Peter Checkland names the element residing in the centre of this finding, obtaining activity as *capta*. (Checkland & Holwell, 1999; Checkland & Winter, 2000) He explains *capta* as a product of a process in which "we select certain items of data out of the mass potentially available. They are selected as being relevant to our concerns." (Checkland & Holwell, 1999, p.54) *Capta* comes from the Latin verb *capiō* or *capere* that means to capture, seize, take. Bawden further adds to the definition by stating *capta* is "the transformation from data to information as involving the addition of context, and hence meaning". (2001, p. 95)

In order for one to include an item to the collection with a frame and context previously defined by the collector themselves, the search and/or the selection process has to possess intrinsic criteria. If it is aimed by this addition, to elevate or somehow add to the meaning of the existing collection, curatorial practices start from the very beginning, the search process. This postulate seems to be equally essential for both personal information management and collection studies, as both are efforts to understand a human experience of order and preservation in order to create or sustain meaning and knowledge. Any addition or subtraction to a collection is at least somewhat related to the general structure of purpose or meaning previously constructed by the personal collector themselves. According to Russell W. Belk, although collected items "may have utilitarian or aesthetic

appeals, they must have additional significance to the collector due to their importance in contributing to the ‘set’ of items that comprise the collection.” (1994, p.317)

Without self-set rules, it is difficult to call the resulting accumulation a “collection”, even though it still may serve a purpose or constitute a meaning. But the intentional structure and constructed nature of collections, ones this thesis is more interested in without discarding the existence and importance of the others, require a certain cognitive effort and possibly a level of artisanship if not artistry.

### **2.3 Digital Curation**

Even though it is still a work in progress and the extent of the term tend to evolve rapidly, contemporary attempts to give digital curation a definition are being made. Libraries, museums, archive communities and scholars, as well as information researchers appear to take interest in the term in order to provide a basis for their future activities as digital curation concerns data and data is getting larger and harder to manage every day.

One of the central definitions is provided by information researcher Elizabeth Yakel, who seeks to provide a broad view of the recent developments in digital curation via the studies of cyberinfrastructure initiatives. In order to give an outline to the progression of the term, she states, “Digital curation is becoming the umbrella term for digital preservation, data curation, and digital asset and electronic records management.” (2007, p.338) However, since Yakel focuses on institutional efforts, her definition restricts digital curation to “information professionals”. (2007, p.335) As this thesis is interested in positioning personal streaming playlist activities in the context of digital curation, a contradiction appears between the words “professional” and “personal”. Since the title “curator” was being used prior to the developments of digital world and cyberinfrastructure, which took a personal turn

via personal information management tools, some professionals such as Northup who passionately states, “bandaging a wound doesn’t make you a doctor. Snapping non-digital photos of empty train tracks doesn’t make you a photographer. So, guess what? Assembling a group of tangentially related things and publishing them online does not make you a curator.” (2011) Although it is a plausible and very understandable statement which assesses the issue through a professional and meritocratic approach, it fails to provide an opening on what then should we do with personal information management activities, which exhibits strong and unignorable implications of curatorial efforts. If we take these two words, personal and professional, as representatives of two domains where similar activities with contextually similar motivations, we trap ourselves in a situation where any activity that can be defined as a role of the professional is prohibited from the non-professional. This creates a situation where for example the writings of a non-professional author or compositions of the non-professional musician cannot be studied under literature and music respectively.

Museum studies scholar Joyce Ray realizes this controversy and observes “the use of ‘content curation’ and ‘web curation’ to describe the selection and posting of digital content on fashion blogs and social media sites like Pinterest seems to have overshadowed objections to the use of ‘digital curation’ by other professions”. (2012, p.604) However, unlike Northup, she states that whether or not it is accepted, the term is “widely adopted around the world” and expresses that “personally, [she] like[s] it, because it incorporates fundamental archival principles and emphasizes the human role in preserving and managing digital assets.” (Ray, 2012, p.605) Even though I believe there is enough validation to simply use the term digital curation as is for playlisting activities, in order to avoid a possible misconception, I should state that this thesis is interested strictly in the personal efforts and activities of people who are motivated by personal reasons, i.e. personal digital curation, and considers this area a subset of the “umbrella”, as Yakel suggests (2007) of digital curation.

In digital curation literature, preservation and access are repeatedly appearing concepts. Some definitions indicate an understanding where digital curation encapsulates various activities including the ones above while some definitions may position a key concept like preservation outside yet parallel to the concept of curation. An example can be found in the report published by The American Council on Learned Sciences (ACLS) in 2006 on cyberinfrastructure, which does not place preservation under digital curation and rather differentiates it from digital curation by associating it with maintenance. (2006, p.1 as cited in Yakel, 2007, p.336). For a definition of digital preservation, we can see The California Digital Library (CDL) glossary which states preservation is the sum of “managed activities necessary for ensuring the long-term retention and usability of digital objects”. If we are to position personal streaming playlist activities in a digital curation context, we have to be aware that preservation, in its traditional sense, is not taken on by the playlist maker but rather by the platform organization. Thus, concepts such as “usability” and “retention” are not in the workflow of our digital curators. Preservation, on the other hand, can be and inevitably is adapted to a personal context. What do we do with the things we want to preserve? Many things, but first and foremost, we keep them. Much like Jones who considers keeping as the first step of an active PIM process (2007, p.12) as well as Williams, John and Rowland who identified keeping as one of the three actions/non-actions one can take in the face of found or encountered digital object. (2009, p.351) Millar, on her study of archives, stresses on this decision of keeping as well. She remarks on how this selection decision indicates a certain statement of value: “whatever an archivist decides to keep becomes valuable as much because it has been kept as because it was worth keeping”. (Millar, 2010 as cited in Poole, 2014, p.115) So if we consider keeping as a form of preservation, even though the actual preservation of the digital file is handled by the platform organization, the preservation of the context is taken on by the playlist maker. This implies a need for keeping safe and intact. This can be considered in line with the playlist curator’s motivation or desire to not forget. As the term digital curation is evaluated in a personal context, preservation becomes closer to memory and also value as indicated by Millar (2010). In order for playlist

curators to satisfy their needs to consume the content and the context again, they need to save, to preserve.

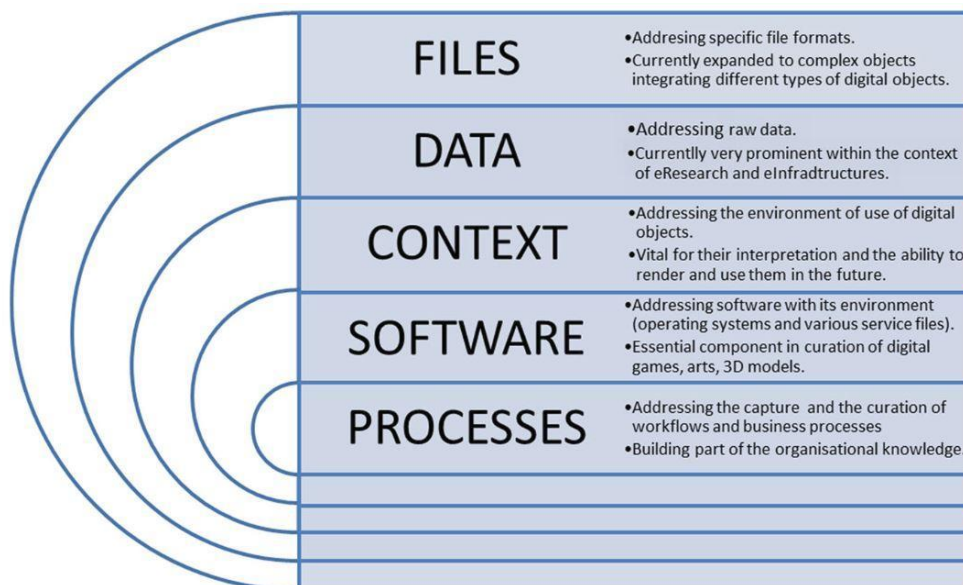
Additionally, following Millar's line of thought for value and adding value, a definition of playlist making sheds light on the issue. Playlist curation is essentially a practice of context creation via putting the provided content together in ways that are meaningful to playlist curators themselves. Thus, the value of a song in one of their playlists and the same song by itself is different in the eyes of the playlist curator. This is due to the nature of the value-laden creation and curation in which the whole is more or at least different from the sum of the components. In this way I argue that by putting readily available components in to personal contexts, preservation in a personal sense is achieved via value addition.

If we seek a definition of curation that excludes preservation in traditional sense, we may have a look at e-Science Curation report, which provides separate definitions of curation, archiving and preservation. e-Science's definition of curation is as follows: "The activity of managing and promoting the use of data from its point of creation, to ensure it is fit for contemporary purpose and available for discovery and re-use." (Lord & Macdonald, 2003) In our context of personal digital curation on streaming playlists, this definition appears to be usable with some re-evaluation. If we put concepts like "managing", "promoting", "point of creation", "purpose", "discovery" and "re-use" in a personal context, it can be seen that this definition adequately encapsulated personal streaming playlist activities.

Let us briefly assess these terms individually in terms of PIM. *Managing, purpose, discovery and re-use* are already key concepts of PIM and they find correspondence in playlist activities effortlessly. *Promoting* and *point of creation* on the other hand needs some further explanation. In a professional sense, promoting means making others aware of the existence and usability of the curation. In a personal context, it can be associated with sharing a playlist or making it available for others. It may not be considered promoting in its pure sense, however personal curations may, as

will be seen in analysis and discussion chapter, serve personal manifestation purposes and this is done via putting a curated playlist forward, in front of the public.

The term *point of creation*, where e-Science curation report states managing and promoting activities start, is the point of creation of the data. If data is considered in this institutional sense, the building block, smallest meaningful element in a contextual curation, then we can re-contextualize this relationship for streaming playlist activities. In order to do that we have to assess what is meant by *creation* for a playlist curator. Is it the creation of a song or the creation of a playlist, or rather is it the addition of a song to a playlist, creating context for the song? Dobрева and Duff, in their paper in which they present an overview of “the ever changing face of digital curation”, state that “the field has moved far beyond its original focus on the preservation of different file formats and the curation of research data to the preservation of the context of digital objects” and provide a figure where they put the complex evolution of digital curation in an easy to understand operational hierarchy. (Dobрева & Duff, 2015, p.98)



**Figure 2.1:** “Evolution of digital curation areas of application” (Dobрева & Duff, 2015, p.98)

Via Dobрева and Duff's explanation and with the help of this figure, a positioning of streaming playlist curation can be made where playlists corresponds to "context" and the whole activity of our interest can be considered vaguely as context curation. In addition to that, Changtao et al. suggest that some platforms (including Spotify) allow users to become "content curators" by putting selected content forward, assorting and organizing content that they did not create per se. (Changtao et al., 2013, p.659) Thus what we end up is a digital curatorial activity which considers context and content primarily at the same time, while not burdening itself with traditional preservation as much.

To investigate contextual practices in digital curation, it is essential to understand what goes in the circle of curation and what is left out. Danet & Katriel states that in everyday language "saving, hoarding and collecting are sometimes used interchangeably". They clarify that when discussing a collection, they "refer to a certain type or future-oriented activity; to collect is to set up an agenda for future action for oneself." (1994, p.224) This future-oriented mind-set of the collector implies planning, decision-making and effort on a level where the collector is satisfied with in order to reach the intended quality for the collection. However, this criterion is not enough to apply the necessary segregation. Danet & Katriel, while accepting that "Hoarding" is future-oriented as well, define the hoarder's interest around quantity over quality. This criterion too is obviously not a clear cut. They state, "even though collectors are often interested in quantity too, the distinctive feature of their activities is their concern with making fine discriminations about items that may or may not enter the collection. Such discriminations are a product both of the general rules that define the collecting 'game' and of individuals' evolving personal tastes." (Danet & Katriel, 1994, p.224-225) This understanding of collection and curation as a "game" allows a more contextual and structural justification of the rules of curating; a set of criteria to define is necessary if one is playing this game specifically.

As this section draws the circumference of the term *digital curation* for this study's purposes, we can now dive deeper into the practices of personal streaming playlist activities and discuss issues regarding the nature of the activities as well as the objects or items.

#### **2.4 Songs, Streaming and Commodity Status**

The notion of collection may include tangible and intangible items. Belk explains that collection items can be material objects, ideas or experiences, "either with or without tangible manifestations of these experiences". (Belk, 1994, p.317) Belk's definition paints a liberal picture of how wide collection studies can go without contemplating much about what counts as a collectable item and what does not. This way of thinking allows a collection to be defined by the act of collecting and not by the items it consists of. We are living in times when physical and digital "things" are alternately effective in our daily lives. Even the border between what is physical and what is digital is getting increasingly blurry with advancing technology, cornering us into a position where all must be defined from the receiver, consumer, interpreter or experiencer point of view to make sense. This may cause some from structuralist backgrounds to take offence in the contemporary culture and stand against these changes with a nostalgic vigilance as a signature Adornian attitude. This being said, it must be admitted that most of the concerns regarding the virtualisation of aspects of human life have valid, often Marxian reasonings regarding the consumerist society, hegemonic culture and commodities. However, even in a hegemonic and capitalistic system of commodities, human action and meaning creation matters. Failing to see the ever so hidden possibility of this may result in valuable meaning going unnoticed.

As Patrick Burkart states in his paper on the current state of digital music archiving, even though he advocates for the idea that assesses subscription models as unviable in general, he states that "the pleasure of music 'consumption' cannot be obtained in its packaging or shelving but "there are new pleasures that come in the game of

obtaining access and consolidating a database of music files.” (Burkart, 2008, p.246) Anja Hagen, in her paper on personal playlist curators on Spotify and WiMP, inspects this issue through the works of Burkart as well author Nick Hornby, known for his acclaimed fictional contribution to the field, *High Fidelity* (Hornby, 1995). She states while comparing streaming practices with earlier music consumption behaviour, one would “encounter [a] dilemma” due to the subscription nature of the platforms rather than traditional ownership. (Hagen, 2015, p.627) She drives this dilemma from Burkart’s account on the possible transition of a physical music container collector’s to a streaming platform. He states for the traditional collector, “it becomes impossible to ‘collect’ digital music, and so symbolic substitutes for collections stand in for the collections themselves.” (Burkart, 2008, p.247) The term “symbolic”, in this case, is used by Burkart to emphasise the loss of physical fetishism due to the current state of physical container consumption. He states, “In the end, digital distribution tries to suspend commodity fetishism, which is at the heart of the collector’s desire to collect.” (Burkart, 2008, p.249)

Due to this non-physical form of streaming music, Pareles preemptively claimed that it “would stop being something to collect and revert to its age-old transience: something that transforms a moment and then disappears like a troubadour leaving town” (Pareles, 1998). The focus on the nature of the collection item instead of the human experience causes an understanding of human experience exclusively defined by the commodity itself, collapsing and diminishing all acts of defiance or uncalculated human intervention under the foot of hegemony. On the other hand, changing environments and the ever in motion nature of commodity (Appadurai, 1994, p.85) has the potential to create an illusion around the technological advances and the flashy presentation of the hegemonic system to make the consumers believe they are in a completely and utterly liberated and personal environment. To better understand any form of cultural consumption without succumbing to this illusion is becoming increasingly significant. However, to rule out any sort of valuable human meaning hidden inside the system just on the basis of the proclaimed absoluteness of the workings of the culture industry is nothing more than yet another illusion.

Digitalisation of the music consumption environment and the current access over ownership situation or rather business model, together with the fluid nature of music as commodity, requires an understanding of how the streaming environment and the streaming song itself is located in this line of thought. Appadurai contemplates on what he calls a “conceit” regarding commodities having social lives and attempts to justify the notion. He searches for the commodity nature of things, unlike Marx, (1969) in their consumption. He states: “let us approach commodities as things in a certain situation, a situation that can characterize many different kinds of thing, at different points in their social lives. This means looking at the commodity potential of all things rather than searching fruitlessly for the magic distinction between commodities and other sorts of things. It also means breaking significantly with the production-dominated Marxian view of the commodity and focusing on its total trajectory from production, through exchange/distribution, to consumption.” (Appadurai, 1994, p.82) He defines commodities as things “with a particular type of social life” and recognises their difference from “‘products’, ‘objects’, ‘goods’, ‘artefacts’ and other sorts of things—but only in certain respects and from a certain point of view.” (p.78) McCourt further supports the idea of fluidity regarding commodities, refers to Marx, and reiterates the fact that the status of commodities depend on movement. (McCourt, 2006, p.251) He defines a cyberspace to discuss the commodity phase of music after the physical distribution and consumption era: “In cyberspace, the old market-based economy of buyers and sellers is replaced by a new network-based economy of servers and clients.” (p.251-252)

McCourt describes further the current situation of music consumption in streaming platforms as a loss of value due to the loss of physical form. With this loss, or rather loss of connection between “the world of commodities and the world of things”, he predicts our notions of value gets separated from the material. (2006, p.250) He claims with this connection lost, with the departure from the tangible, “the support structure itself, cyberspace, becomes the commodity.” (p.252) Driving from this view, it can be deduced that music collections in streaming environments are not

necessarily about collecting commodities per se, but about curatorial activities performed in a commodity environment. The subscription service presents a seemingly endless world of possibilities in reality within limitations, which actually are strictly controlled boundaries. However, the reception and experience of the collector as well as the listener (which can be two not so separate phases of praxis of the same individual) can tell a different story.

Apart from the opportunity to understand what appears to be the defining music consumption, collection and curation environment for the time being through this view of the commodity status, McCourt points out to three reasons or “desires” as he names them, that “heightens our sense of ‘ownership,’ as well as our desire to sample, collect, and trade music in new ways.” He claims this “more intense and intimate experience” is due to the lack of materiality, resulting from the disconnection of commodity from material. (2006, p.250)

- The desire for compacting
- The desire for immediacy
- The desire to customise

He defines “the desire for compacting” as to point out the initial storability as well as the increased storability due to compressibility of audio files. With streaming platforms, this desire is satisfied by default since massive catalogues are provided by the platform as this aspect is one of the most important and sought out feature of these services through which they are judged on a daily basis by a user who could not find a specific item on their platform.

This massiveness of available catalogue may arguably provide an easy fulfilment to the user and can be seen as a reducing effect on the hard-earned satisfaction of the original “desire”. Nevertheless, what is presented is an amount of music that one single person cannot accumulate within their lifetime, all ready to consume and/or curate. This may correspond to what McCourt names “the desire for

immediacy”. Through this, he claims “fluidity becomes more prized than history; speed itself becomes a fetish.” (2006, p.250)

The final desire he proclaims, which heightens the ownership of the digital collector is “the desire to customize”. Customisation in this context can be discussed in two separate aspects: customisation of the song *itself* and the customisation of the consumption. Customising a digital audio file requires a software to edit, cut, paste, remix, “mash”, sample etc. the audio file. These are professionally done by experts of the field, who generally use sophisticated software called Digital Audio Workstations, DAWs. However further advancement of technology or rather further transformation of technology into a more consumer friendly grade, allowed these edits on the waveform to be made by very simple and easy to use software or apps which nowadays may even come by default on newly purchased computers and mobile devices. On the other hand, streaming platforms do not allow users to take the audio file out of the platform (in legal, conventional ways). This limitation set by the platforms are to protect the interests of the capital and the industry to try and put a leash on unlicensed consumption of music; once it’s out of the platform, they cannot track it; if they cannot track it, they cannot charge for it. Resulting from this closed environment on streaming services, those who are interested in manipulating audio files with software of their choices either take their business elsewhere or use a secondary method that would allow traditional downloads.

Regarding the customization of consumption, to explain how collecting behaviour was carried to digital items in cyberspace as McCourt would like to use, Hagen looks back to Benjamin’s portrayal of the book collector in “Unpacking My Library” in *Illuminations* edited by Hannah Arendt. (Benjamin, 2007 as cited in Hagen, 2015, p.626) Hagen choses three very definitive quotations to represent the three main qualities, which are remarked on by Benjamin:

- Ordering:

“For what else is this collection but a disorder to which habit has accommodated itself to such an extent that it can appear as order?” (Benjamin, 2007, p.60)

- Owning:

“The phenomenon of collecting loses its meaning as it loses its owner” (Benjamin, 2007, p.67)

- Desiring:

“To renew the old world—that is the collector’s deepest desire when he is driven to acquire new things” (Benjamin, 2007, p.61)

It can be seen that different conceptualisations and accounts given regarding the nature and practice of collecting, line up to make digital music collections and streaming playlists able to be discussed simultaneously through information and collecting fields. Apart from this overall justification, there seems to be a pattern of the notion of “desire”, used to define the motivation of the collector. This desire, can be seen as a conveyor of experience. The financial boundaries of physical music collections, as well as the logistical requirements, created the concept of music collection that Burkart calls commodity fetishism. (2008, p.249) Shifting away from this fetishistic behavioural pattern that defines traditional collection habits, this breaking of connection between the world of commodities and the world of things, allow for a new understanding of collection practice. With the absence of the material fetish, with the absence of the romanticism of not being able to reach a certain item and the commodity and *sacrificial* value put on items, experience proposes a suitable understanding to the question: why are people still collecting music? Burkart offers an answer contemplating what traditional music collectors find in digital music by stating, “Online music searching is a form of soul-searching that can relieve the collector’s fetishes for packaging, acquisition, and handling of records”. (Burkart, 2008, p.248) McCourt on the other hand, claims that collecting is becoming an activity “based not on the linkage of people to objects, but of the linkage of individuals to others” (McCourt, 2006, p.252). This, he claims, realises

Stallabrass' prediction that states, "experience will become a substance and a commodity." (Stallabrass, 1996, p.63)

## **2.5 Playlisting Makes Sense**

If we perceive the information nature of collected music, if we conclude that the digital realm is fit for a study of collection and if we are willing to grasp and accept these two can be sewed together, then we can say that we have a valid basis to study personal streaming music and curatorial practices, i.e. it is time to talk about playlists as curations.

Throughout the previous sections, while discussing the legitimacy of the status, medium, item and era this thesis is concerned with, examples of several concepts and terms used to describe in what way the collector handles their collection has been used. Hagen, drawing from Benjamin referred to it as "ordering"; Burkart, "desire to customize"; researches at Paradigm, "short-term information management" and "long-term archiving and preservation"; Jones, "M-level activities". These are all terms and classifications to define the activities and practices the collector undergoes to manage their collection in a way that addresses their intended need, purpose or end. These practices sustain even if the item of interest and the activity medium vastly changes (or possibly transforms). However as Hagen points out "users continue to covet, collect, stockpile, and enjoy music in these digital formats as though music remained somehow a cultural object." (Hagen, 2015, p.628)

Belk defines activities such as "caring for, cataloguing or displaying" as curatorial practices, which he feels to need to segregate from the act and study of collecting. (Belk, 1994, p.317) However he includes the act of "keeping", as Jones calls it (2007, p.12), and the choice oriented process behind it in his work. He proposes that when an item is included in a collection as "sacralised" or chosen, to put it less dramatically, it "becomes a vehicle of transcendent experience which exceeds its

utilitarian and aesthetic endowment.” He emphasises the shifting status of the collection item when chosen and collected (not necessarily in that order) by stating that collectors “remove an item from the secular, profane, undifferentiated realm of the commodity, and ritually transform it into a personally and socially significant object.” (Jones, 1994, p.320) Even though this view and consideration of commodity as a static realm where items go in and out contradicts with McCourt’s (2006, p.251) and Appadurai’s (1994, p.85) accounts on the fluid nature of commodity and the idea that the practice of *ritualistic* consumption, simply makes something else or at least something changed out of the original, suggests that putting collected items into defined subcategories within a context, as a game (Danet & Katriel, 1994, p.224) with rules and boundaries set by the collector (and played by the collector), helps us construct an understanding what playlists are in a streaming environment.

Returning back to studies centred around PIM provides suitable definitions of how playlists can be understood, why people create and maintain them, Neil Beagrie coins the term “personal digital collections” and defines it as “the informal, diverse, and expanding digital memory collections accumulated and maintained by individuals” (2005). Since the similarities in certain items, practices and media have been stated and connections between information management and collecting have been made clear, it is not implausible to look at how information is actually managed to try and have a sense of playlist management. Through studying 48 academics’ personal files Kaye et al. deduces five main “reasons for maintaining an archive and storing its contents”: (Kaye et al., 2006)

- Finding it later
- Building a legacy
- Sharing resources
- Fear of loss
- Identity construction

Amongst these, fifth one, “identity construction”, opens up a discussion around the terms “meaning” and “identity.” In the root of collecting and managing objects or information, there is a core defined *by* the consumer *in* the consumer. Belk suggests, “Our self-definition is often highly dependent upon our possessions”. Furthermore, apart from the possessions, which are the signifiers of ownership and can be discussed for non-tangible collections as well, he states the time and effort put in by the collector in order to form and reform the collection “means that the collector has literally put a part of self into the collection.” (Belk, 1994, p.321) Jones, while stating information is a means to an end, most of time and for most people, claims that the item collected and curated serve as a proxy for collectors, allowing them to “project [themselves] and [their] desires across time and space in ways that would never have occurred to our forbearers.” (Jones, 2015, p.10) In order to allow this projection, tools and a structure should be implemented. This structure would ideally be personal, intuitive, ordered and open to modification. For the collector and the curator, establishing a structure that would satisfy the organizational needs is a significant challenge to taken on. Since as Jones states referencing Dervin, “finding the right structure for information helps people in sensemaking”, (Dervin, 1992 as cited in Jones, 2007, p.36) and making sense of things is generally what we are after.

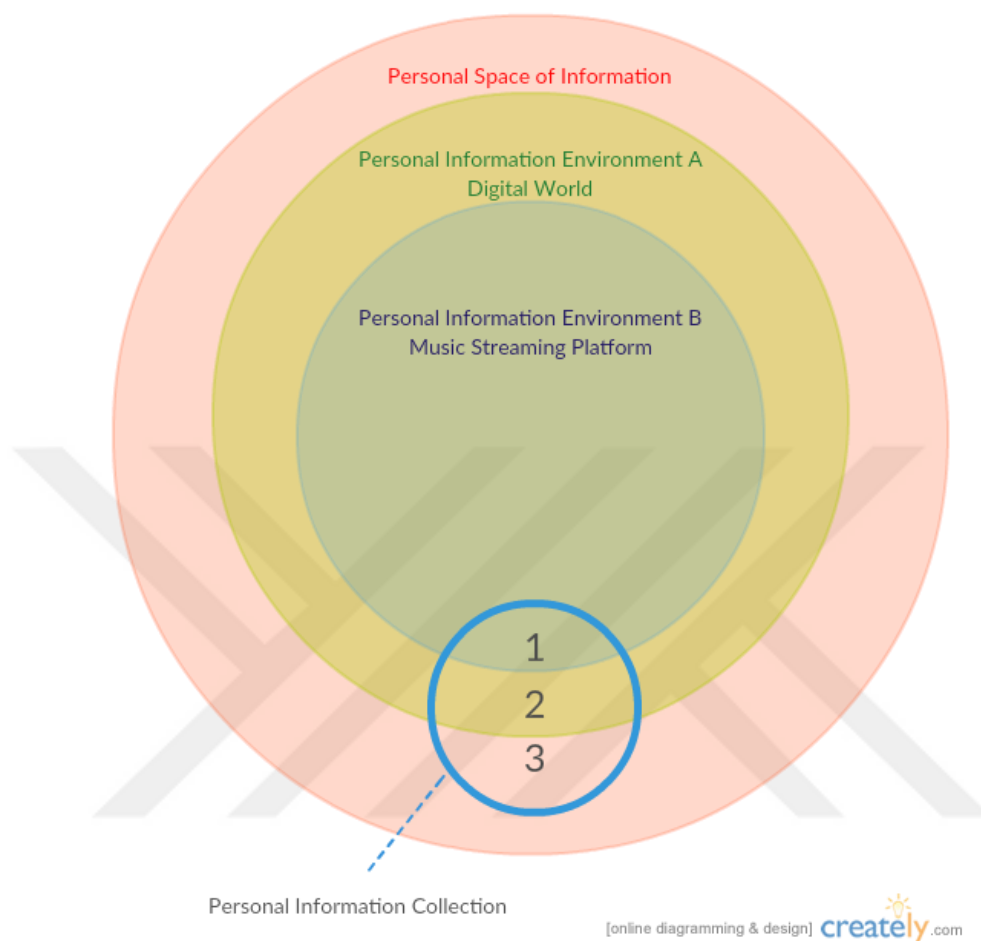
## 2.6 A Model

The field of PIM provides a suitable basis for the exploration of music collections and curation practices. Concepts such as **Personal Space of Information (PSI)**, **Personal Information Environment (PIE)** and **Personal Information Collection (PIC)** constitute a hierarchy of domains of personal information. To define digital curation of songs on a streaming music service within this hierarchy to position connecting elements and the system into the taxonomy of PIM has the potential to serve both the understanding of everyday music consumption and the PIM itself. However, first and foremost the information nature of music should be discussed and appropriate labelling to what a song, a playlist and a music collection

is in the streaming era should be established by the means of PIM. A Personal Space of Information or a PSI of an individual includes, their “everything”, by definition. (Jones, 2007, p.10) It may be more appropriate to say that it contains everything we keep and every bit of information under our perceived control. This control however, should not be viewed as an exclusive dominance but rather a partial reach; the authority and power to include and exclude an information item in any sort of information utilization activity. This is often remarked as an illusion of control, particularly in the studies taking interest in digital music and streaming music platforms. According to Morris & Powers, “the control users have over the choice of music they listen to, over the platforms they listen to music on and even over the files themselves is exchanged for a branded musical experience that foregrounds instant, multi-platform accessibility.” (2015, p.118) Thus, this control should be elaborated in the context of the specific subset of PSI that the curation activities are performed. This should be done without ignoring the fact that the platform itself is a commercial entity that has its own agendas.

A Personal Information Environment, or a **PIE** as previously coined by Goldstein and Malone on separate occasions, is a subset of **PSI** that is constrained by the activities performed via a specific tool, in a specific environment or any other defining and overarching feature of a particular information object or a PIM activity. (Goldstein, 1981, p.6) (Malone, 1983, p.99) Any sort of working space, a desk, a computer etc. is a PIE. An individual can have multiple PIEs. “Digital” as a feature of a set of information items defines a PIE; let us call it the “Digital World” in our case. A PIM tool exclusive to the digital world, which only deals with a specific information item, and is consumable in a specific set of ways among a specific given archive defines a second subset. This subset is a deeper and narrower PIE under Digital World. To separate these two PIEs, let us call the Digital World, **PIE A**. The next step, **PIE B** would be a music streaming platform. It is a part of the Digital World, thus a subset of PIE A and a subset of the main domain of PSI which envelopes everything. PIE B includes streamable songs as information items, only available through the platform itself to be consumed and utilized by the user.

A Personal Information Collection, or a **PIC**, is a set of information items that is compiled together by an individual often to achieve certain goals or regulate certain personal or professional behaviour. Boardman defines a PIC as “a self-contained set of items. Typically the members of a collection share a particular technological format and are accessed through a particular application” (2004, p.15). Through this definition, a music collection is a PIC that includes any sort of physical or digital receptacle of music an individual has control over. A PIC is a subset of any outer PIE, and the PSI as well. The term collection is commonly used in PIM, regarding information collections. (Bruce et al., 2011; Beagrie, 2005; Williams, John & Rowland, 2009; Jones, 2007; Marčetić, 2015; Higgins, 2008) However, since PIM deals with information, approaches and content of the works tend to differ from of collection studies, which mainly deal with objects. This intersection that highlights the dichotomy between object and information finds a common ground in personal streaming music collections as the nature of the song on a streaming platform and the practices of collecting and curating them falls conveniently under the part of both field and creates a binding element out of this intersection.



**Figure 2.2:** A Hierarchical Model for Domains of Personal Information

Through the given definitions and hierarchy, this thesis suggests this visual representation as a model. By successfully defining the environment of personal streaming playlists using the concepts of PIM, studying streaming music finds a basis. This visualization also suggest an ordered hierarchy of PSI, PIE and PIC providing the field of PIM altogether a clearer understanding of personal information domains to be utilized in further studies. Thus this hierarchical model is suggested both as a possible contribution to the field of PIM and as an approach to position music collections to an academic field where it can be studied on a previously existing foundation.

The interest for this thesis resides in the PIC 1 area as depicted in Figure 3.2. In the figure, two PIEs are defined as a subset of PSI and each other. “Digital World” is denoted by PIE A and streaming platforms by PIE B as a subset of PIE A. The blue circle that encapsulates three different regions of the personal information world represents the whole music collection of an individual. This entire circle and the three regions under it are all separate PICs themselves as well. The three different regions denoted 1, 2 and 3 are differentiated as follows:

1. Streaming platform playlists (address books of bookmarks), saved songs (in platform downloads), incorporated local files
2. Unincorporated local files, collected (saved or bookmarked) content on other digital platforms
3. Physical archives and collections as well as arguably memories, the songs you remember.

## 2.7 A User Scenario

To avoid getting lost in terminology and to implement the model into an everyday context let us imagine Rob, as a tribute to Nick Hornby’s *High Fidelity*. (1995) Rob has vinyls, cassette tapes and CDs that he collected throughout his life. He archives and showcases them in “autobiographical” order, just like in the book and the movie. Rob’s collection of physical music containers are represented in the subsection under **PIC 3**. This was the entirety of his music collection before he got his first computer with a CD writer on it. Now it is only a part.

He started to rip music from his CDs to his computer. Maybe not all his collection, but the ones he would want to use in a mix-CD. He also got his friends’ mix-CDs and rips them into his newly created folder hierarchy, which is alphabetical with respect to artists. Meanwhile consumer grade internet had become a thing and Rob wanted to get in on it. He got a contract with a service provider and now he was

online. He could now send and receive songs, albums and even complete archives via primitive P2P networks. Though the bandwidth was not yet enough for him to share liberally and though he is an avid supporter of purchasing licensed products, he still downloaded some music he was not able to get otherwise and opened his own digital archive for sharing to support the online music sharing community. This digital archive, this collection of digital files containing music information is yet another sub-section of his music collection, denoted in the figure by the area **PIC 2**.

A couple of years passed and consumer grade internet had become exponentially faster and more stable. More advanced P2P networks allowed “seeding” and “downloading” of any file on one’s computer. Furthermore, online platforms that offer their vast unlicensed music archives were becoming popular. Rob continued to buy physical containers of music but now he restricted this to vinyls and cassettes of artists that he thought was worth supporting or to releases that were special to him in some way. Other than that, either he downloaded music via these unlicensed music websites and P2P network platforms or he used new and flashy licensed download stores that automatically synchronizes his music on his computer to his new mp3 player when he plugs it in. The mp3 player and his headphones became his dominant way of listening to music. But he still kept giving the old turntable a spin with a classic record every now and then.

Additionally he discovered that, with the advancement of consumer grade internet bandwidth some online platforms were offering songs and music videos to be played on their platforms only and can only be accessed if you were online. He started to use these websites and platforms to find songs and artists he was searching for without any hustle. He did not have to sift through an archive or go to the record store or even manage any download files let alone having to wait for the download after the purchase, if at all purchased. Some websites allowed for a personal profile so the user could keep bookmarks of the songs on the platform, create and manage their own playlists. Meanwhile, the music industry was plotting to put a leash on

this new phenomenon called streaming, just like they tried with the mp3 download. A couple of licensed streaming platforms emerged that offered vast catalogues, user-friendly interfaces and cool curatorial tools embedded in exchange for a monthly fee or a decent amount of audience labour, (Smythe, 2001) i.e. ad supported streaming. Rob decided he would try one of these services; the first month is free anyways. He searched and found most of the stuff he wanted. He created a couple of playlists as well. One is called “Rob's desert island, all time, top five most memorable breakups”. It has more than five songs in it but who cares, really? These playlists on the licensed streaming platform as well as any sort of “bookmark” he kept constitutes the area **PIC 1** on the figure, the sub-section of Rob’s music collection that is restricted to the specific streaming platform.

These three sections come together to form the entirety of Rob’s music collection that includes physical containers, digital files, streaming lists and bookmarks, the PIC of music of Rob the record store owner from *High Fidelity*.

This placement and appropriation of terms that the user scenario hopefully explains, will allow a study of digital curation through digital streaming music playlists (PIC 1) as a practice of PIM, and an m-level activity (Jones, 2007, p.13). According to Jones, digital curation within the context of *m-level activities* may correspond to various sub-definitions including “mapping”, “meta”, “maintaining and organizing”, “managing” or “measuring” that occurs after the “searching” and “keeping” activities that take place in order to obtain the information items to curate and curate *with*. From a collection studies point of view, Belk states curatorial aspects as “caring for, cataloguing or displaying a collection.” (Belk, 1994, p.317)

However, curatorial activities differs in practice from the act of collecting, even though it is often a naturally following process. To conceptualize playlists as PICs and digital curatorial practices, it is important to understand the nature of collecting on streaming platforms. McCourt states that in digital world, “people collect lists rather than objects, and those lists serve as a form of personal expression that

derives from but also supersedes the record collection” (2005, p.251). This transformation of collected items affects the way people interact with the information. Danet and Katriel brings together multiple terminologies and approaches produced under collection studies and uses Michael Thompson’s *Rubbish Theory* that distinguishes objects as “transients, rubbish and durables (symbolic, not physical durables)” (Thompson, 1979, cited in Danet & Katriel, 1994, p.225) If we bring together these two understandings of collecting, it can be said that collections on streaming platforms can possibly be understood as lists of varying temporal and emotional significance to the listener. Rubbish still can be collected but the curatorial practices of a rubbish list and a durable list will unlike be the same.

Even though the activity of curating — as a mean of organizing a given meaning and displaying it, even if it is only to the curator themselves — music stays more or less the same in nature, because of the seminal break of digital music and streaming, the medium of the practice has been shifting significantly. This shift, while affecting the containers or the literal forms of consumption, also provides certain new opportunities. McCourt suggest this new environment of music collection “offers more possibilities for modifying, altering, and recontextualizing original content in ways that heighten utility, power, and control for the users” (2005, p.251). Morris and Powers, on the other hand, suggest an emphasis on the discussion of control or the illusion of it, stating “digital music services no longer sell discrete musical objects, nor do they focus exclusively on content offerings.” (2015, p.107) On their paper titled *Control, curation and musical experience in streaming music services*, they investigate four music services, Spotify, Songza, Rdio and Beats (now part of Apple Music). After indicating these services differentiate in certain aspects to allow the authors to provide their discussion with a satisfactory range, they conclude, “services sell branded musical experiences, inviting consumers to see themselves and their attitudes, habits and sentiments about music reflected by the service they choose to adopt.” (Morris & Powers 2015, p.107) Even though it is on a branded environment where music is “plugged” in

Adorno's terms – being introduced to the listener repeatedly in an effort to “market it” – (Adorno & Simpson, 1941), Anja Nylund Hagen discusses the significance of personal streaming playlists in presenting a possibility to partially break the suggested hegemony, by arguing playlist practices as representatives of personal behaviour to manifest the listener's uniqueness through “berrypicking” – selectively consuming – (Bates, 1989) the content out of a generic platform to construct something individual. (Hagen, 2015, p.642) Hagen further remarks on how personal playlists play an interesting role on breaking the hegemony by stating that “the playlist enables ownership of music even in streaming services because it undermines or narrows the impact of the service's shared features and content in the interests of elevating personal music selection above all else.” (2015, p.643) As discussed earlier, the state of ownership is complicated for streaming music, According to Danet & Katriel, ownership is “essential” for also the “the sensuous aspects of collecting — handling, touching, playing with, caring for the collection” (1994, p.229) Streaming music collections consists of clearly intangible objects or items and they do not allow touching the music itself. However, as stated earlier, neither does tangible music containers. In this manner, the ownership of music as a collectable do not play an essential part in practice. What creates this “sensuous” aspect is the materiality of the container. A collection of containers should not be confused with a collection of music. After all, what seems to be one of the most potent aspects of streaming music collections is the existence of choice. To choose what to keep, how to keep it, what others to keep it with etc. i.e. personal digital curation.

It should be noted that alongside allowing a listener to consume music through personalized practices – even though it is via forms that by nature carry the agendas they follow at least to a certain degree however personalized they are – the sole practice of “berrypicking” or curation may be considered as a way of dealing with the vast amount of information on a personal, day-to-day level. Even though as Burkart proposes that such platforms offer vast amounts of raw material to fuel the listener's activities towards self-reflection, Liu states, “the concept of curation is a

constructive model and metaphor offering a solution to the issue of information overload online.” (Burkart, 2008, p.248; Liu, 2010, p.3) Considering, for instance Spotify has “+35 Million Songs” (Spotify Press, 2018) in their catalogue as of July 2018, a filter to consumption is more than necessary. Danet & Katriel distinguishes two types of collectors on the basis of how they apply filters. Belk cites the two types as, “‘Type A’ collector employs affective criteria to choose items for the collection. Such collectors try to improve their collections, but have no sense of a series needing completion. The ‘Type B’ collector uses cognitive criteria to choose items that add to a series and help improve their knowledge rather than the beauty of the collection. (Danet & Katriel, 1986 as cited in Belk, 1994, p.320) It should be also noted that discussion on control over consumption is deeply marked with the question of whether this filterings, are being provided to the listener by a commercial body – be it by the platform itself or a third-party affiliate – or the “berrypicking” is done by the listener themselves.

With the establishment of personal music streaming playlists into the field of PIM and adoption of the appropriate terminology, the opportunity to discuss the very practice of playlists through the term digital curation becomes available. To further focus on a more precise area, the study will take Spotify as the PIE B, as defined in Figure 3.2 and assess opportunities, limitations and possibilities of Spotify as an environment that offers PIM tools – personal playlists in particular. Spotify is chosen amongst other platforms for various reasons, the first being the availability of it in Turkey.

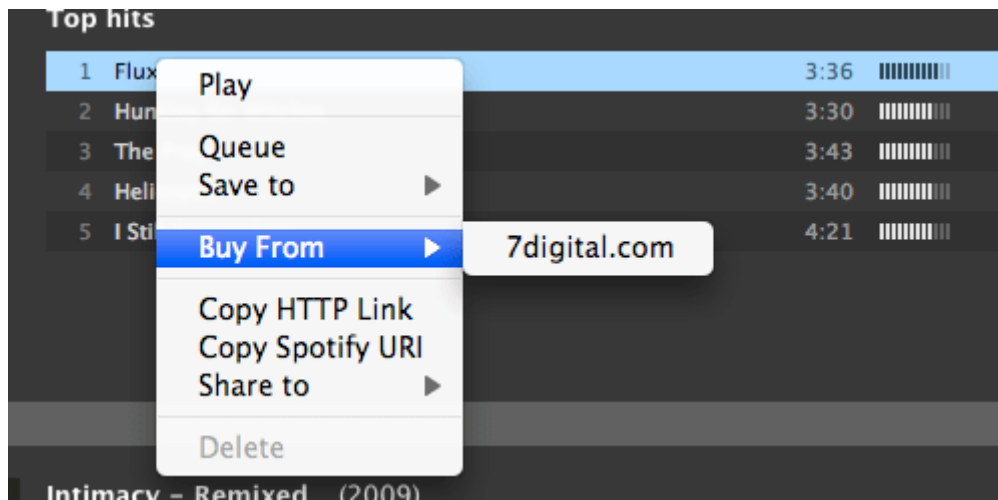
For practical reasons, the platform that is going to be studied needs to be present and widely used in Turkey. Another reason for this decision is that Spotify offers the opportunity to use playlists in both tiers of consumptions, subscription and ad-supported, unlike other possible streaming alternatives such as; Apple Music, which do not have a free, ad-supported plan as well as Fizey and Muud, which are sponsored by telecommunication companies that exclusively offer service to their own customers, Turkcell and Türk Telekom respectively. This makes Spotify more

suitable than other widely used streaming platforms available in Turkey with the possible exception of YouTube. Although YouTube may be considered as a platform where the practices of interest can be observed regarding music curation, the fact that YouTube unlike Spotify, does not function primarily and exclusively as a music consumption service, may result in a contaminated (with video consumption practices) understanding. To achieve a more focused understanding within the boundaries of the study, YouTube will not be discussed and the research will focus on Spotify as the primary DSP (Digital Service Provider) as a PIE (Personal Information Environment).

## **2.8 A Brief History of Spotify**

Spotify is a music streaming platform which was developed in 2006 in Stockholm, Sweden and launched two years later in 7 October 2008 with the conclusion of deals with music industry giants Universal Music Group, Sony BMG, EMI Music, Warner Music Group, Merlin, The Orchard and Bonnier Amigo. (Spotify News, 2007 & 2008) “Freemium”, that is the double tier subscription strategy that allows “free” and “premium” membership was implemented from the start, however, free accounts were only available via invitation while paid subscriptions were available to all. Loiacono argues this application of “music like water” model initiated in Sweden, possibly due the quality of the broadband Internet, “as well as [Sweden’s] very liberal attitudes towards copyright laws”. (Loiacono, 2014, p.10)

On March, 2009, Spotify announced a collaboration with digital music retailer 7digital to offer music downloads (of files that can be taken out of the platform) in UK, France and Spain and then in Sweden in August, 2009. (Spotify News, March & August 2009)



**Figure 2.3:** “Buy From” download option via 7digital (Spotify News, August 2009)

This service then later was discontinued by the company in 2013. On 31 January 2013, “Sam” from Spotify replied to a community forum topic that was opened by a user (with the nickname Superpanic) who was having trouble using the download service with a statement that goes: “Superpanic - The download store is no longer available, I'm afraid. We recently updated Spotify to further simplify the service and pave the way for new features announced at the end of last year. In-app purchases aren't part of this update but we're not ruling out their return. Credits/gift cards already purchased are still redeemable.” (Superpanic & Sam, 2013 & Brian, 2013)

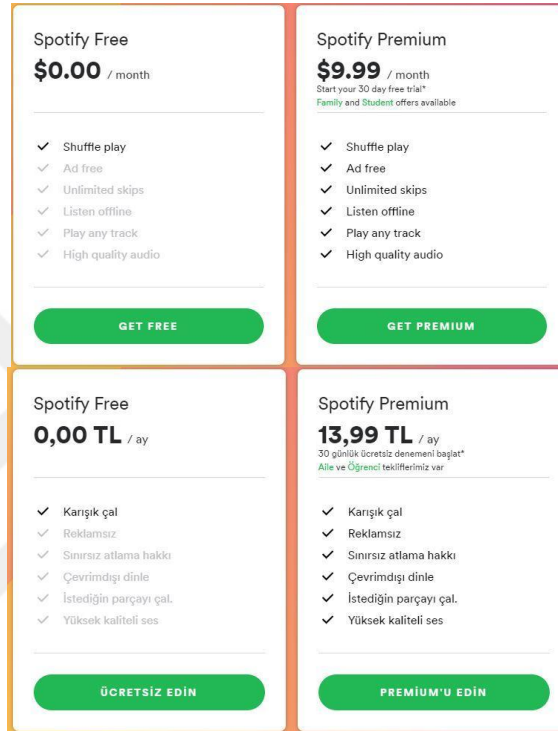
One interesting note regarding the early dissemination of Spotify is Napster co-founder and Facebook former president Sean Parker’s involvement in the company. In 2009, Parker was made aware of Spotify’s existence and was intrigued. He has sent an e-mail to Spotify co-founder and CEO Daniel Ek stating his interest in Spotify also stating Facebook co-founder Mark Zuckerberg “liked” it too. (Sawers, 2011) In his first e-mail, he said:

*“I’ve been playing around with Spotify. You’ve built an amazing experience. As you saw, Zuck really likes it too. I’ve been trying to get him to understand your model for awhile now but I think he just needed to see it for himself”.*

Parker became an investor and later a board member to Spotify between the years 2010 - 2017. (Levy, 2011; Nicolaou, 2017) What seems to be Parker’s biggest contribution as a board member was the deals he made with Warner and Universal on behalf of Spotify, prior to its release in US in 2011 and the early integration of Spotify and Facebook (Simon, 2011), which practically transformed but still in place. (Group playlists with Messenger, 2018). One other significant business move by Spotify was the acquisition of The Echo Nest in 2014. (Snickars, 2015) The Echo Nest is a data company who claims “[their] music intelligence platform synthesizes billions of data points and transforms it into musical understanding...” (The Echo Nest, 2018) This development can be considered as a big step in Spotify’s transformation from a music platform to an experience provider. (Morris & Powers 2015) Fleischer read this transformation through Spotify’s changed mottos: “Spotify began as a streaming service based on the on-demand doctrine, tailored for individuals who already knew exactly which pieces of music they wanted to hear: ‘Millions of tracks, any time you like [...] Just help yourself to whatever you want, whenever you want it.’ This was soon to change. In 2013, the company adopted a new slogan: ‘The right music for every moment’. The current aim is to provide a programmed soundtrack to each ‘moment’ of the user’s day. Asked to explain the core of his business, Spotify’s CEO Daniel Ek explains: ‘We’re not in the music space—we’re in the moment space’.” (Fleischer & Snickars, 2017 as cited in, Fleischer 2017; Seabrook, 2014 as cited in Fleischer 2017)

Spotify offers two tiers of membership. As of July, 2018, Spotify Premium is 13.99 TL a month in Turkey and apart from all the other functions you get with free, ad-supported option, you get unlimited skips, offline listening (platform bound downloading), the ability to select and play any song (not just shuffle albums or

playlists) and “high quality” audio. There are three tiers to the quality of audio that the user can change or set to automatic — switching to extreme where the connection is strong enough. Normal corresponds to 96 kbit/s, High to 160 kbit/s and Extreme for 320 kbit/s streaming.



**Figure 2.4:** Spotify’s Two Tiers of Membership. Turkey on the bottom, USA top. Screenshots taken from Spotify.com/tr & Spotify.com/us, 2018

Both tiers get to create, maintain, edit, delete and share playlists or make collaborative playlists with other Spotify users. Though, there is one more perk that comes with the premium membership that is less advertised to the community. In 2017, Spotify caved in to the pressure from a major player of the music industry, Universal, to make it available for Universal releases to be only offered to the Premium members during a “release window” i.e. first two weeks after the release. (Roettgers, 2017) All other differences between the two tiers are regarding interactivity; this one however, directly affects the curatorial affordance of free users, by making some of the content unavailable for a period of time. This deal

with Universal damages the integrity of Spotify since as Daniel Ek previously expressed his future plans for the company, “Spotify will always be free” (Captain, 2012) — of charge. There is a difference. Even though this development does not mean that there is no longer a free of charge Spotify tier, it changes the philosophy of the platform where the user is offered the content free of charge and the interactivity was sold. Since April 2017, some of the content is “sold” as well. Spotify has been using the ads to disrupt the experience they are providing to free users to get them to subscribe. Since as Fleischer argues, “Spotify’s current “freemium” business model, advertisement revenues are arguably less important than the annoyance that users experience when the music is interrupted by ads. The main function of the ads is to prompt users to pay for a subscription.” (Fleischer, 2017, p.154) On Spotify, exclusive content was not a method of “encouragement” to subscription before this deal; it now seems to be one. However, more plausibly, the agreement signed with Universal is aimed to “protect” the labels’ and the musicians’ rights since one ad-supported stream does not make nearly enough money as one subscription stream. That is because Spotify has a two-tier pro-rata payment method. That means that on the payment level, it operates as two different platforms:

- On subscription tier, **payments from all subscribers** are summed, the collecting society, tax (different for each region) and Spotify’s own percentile deduction is made. The remainder is then **divided to the number of all subscription streams** to determine the payment for one subscription stream. Then the payment is made to the label or distributor by **multiplying this fee per stream with the actual number of subscription streams** the product of concern had.
  
- On ad-supported tier, **all ad revenue Spotify made that month** in a specific region is summed, the collecting society, tax (different for each region) and Spotify’s own percentile deduction is made. The remainder is then **divided to the number of all ad-supported streams** to determine the payment for

one ad-supported stream. Then the payment is made to the label or distributor by **multiplying this fee per stream with the actual number of ad-supported streams** the product of concern had.<sup>4</sup>

What this means is that, there is never a set per stream fee — much like YouTube. These two per stream fees are determined each month by the amount of subscription and ad revenue obtained. The problem is, the gap between these two pools of revenue is often extremely large. In 2013, Spotify made 90% of its money from subscription revenues. (Peoples, 2014) This creates an “understandable” desire for the industry and Spotify itself to disincentivize ad-supported consumption, even if it means the implementation of paid exclusivity.

## 2.9 Affordances

An “affordance” coined by James Gibson is a concept to discuss what objects can *afford*. (1986) Nowak derives from this notion and adapts it to music consumption technologies by using the terms as the capability of the medium to be interacted with and utilized. (Nowak, 2014)

As of April 2018, Spotify homepage “Browse” overview in Turkey<sup>5</sup> offers daily changing staff curatorial playlists, both local and global and on a slider bar, genre or mood based categories of playlists as well as the following subsections (with slight design differences between mobile and desktop applications):

- Charts
- New Releases

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<sup>4</sup> The geographical source of the stream and the country of the payment recipient play key roles in here as well. Ad and subscription revenues are not the same in every region. This causes a difference in per stream fees from region to region as well.

<sup>5</sup> The contents of the interface may show differences between regions due to the range of services Spotify chooses to offer in that country and the application of copyright laws, which are far from being internationally applicable.

- Podcasts
- Concerts (via 3rd party application Songkick Tourbox)
- Discover

Charts section consists of Global Top 50, Local Top 50, Global Viral 50 and Local Viral 50. Top charts are playlists prepared with songs that are listened to most and viral charts are prepared via an algorithm and editorial vision that includes criteria such as how many times the song is shared out of the platform. Accordingly, top charts showcase listen counts while viral charts do not. New Releases is a local (where available) editorial section that gets updated every Friday, which includes picks from Spotify curators. The section showcases the two marketing playlists “New Music Friday” and “Release Radar”. “New Music Friday” is in essence similar to the whole section but instead it is a playlist that can be followed which includes editorially picked songs from recent releases. “Release Radar” on the other hand is ultimately an algorithmic playlist, which includes “all the new releases from the artists you love, in a single playlist” (Spotify News, 2016) Podcasts tab offers a selection of featured podcasts that were uploaded via designated 3rd party distributors (Spotify - FAQ, 2018) and Concerts tab showcases popular concerts as well as recommended ones in your region (which can be changed to see concerts elsewhere). These recommendations, like others on the platform derive from your listening data on the platform and the app suggests, “To see more concerts near you, play or follow the artists you love”. (Spotify, 2018) Discover tab is an algorithm based recommendation section, which showcases “New Music Friday” and “Release” Radar on the top of the page and rows of release recommendations all titled as “Suggested for you based on...” “Because you listened...” or “Similar to...” At the bottom of the page, the curatorial slider on the overview page reappears.

The second main section “Radio” offers a series of algorithmically prepared “radios” which stems from chosen song, artist or genre. On Spotify the “radio” function corresponds to a seemingly and maybe practically endless stream of music

that takes the initial data you provide it (song, artist or genre) and puts songs together that suits the initial data.

The Search section is offered as a main tab on mobile and as a search bar on desktop. When clicked, a list of recent searches appear which can be cleared. The search bar can be used to filter the catalogue with various parameters such as song, artist, release, record label, genre, user, playlist, podcast, video<sup>6</sup> name or release year. Parameters can be combined and filtered via “and”, “or” or “not” keywords. (Spotify Search, 2018) These search capabilities are directly related to the affordances of the medium. The selection process and the capta is achieved through a process of searching as well finding/re-finding (Jones, 2007). However, a second and passive part of these finding practices is encountering via recommendation algorithms, which on Spotify, often manifest themselves as playlists. This means that what one encounters and end up “collecting” is presented through a control mechanism. Considering music industry has been an avid user of arguably manipulative marketing techniques even before the digital age of music, this control is not much different in essence from the campaigns that ran and still run on the radio, music magazines, billboards, storefronts, TV channels etc. The trick here is not to assume that Spotify or any other commodified experience provider is exempt of the — updated — workings of culture industry and not to fall into the trap of treating streaming music as the face of a liberated music industry. As this is thesis is interested in personal playlists and how users utilize these platforms and their content for their personal use via digital curation, it will not discuss the algorithms being used nor the nature of algorithmically created playlists. These will be treated as sources that curators may or may not choose to feed from, without denying the fact that even if these algorithmically created playlists are not sought out for finding new songs, other aspects of the recommendation system still interferes in the acquisition process. That is to say, if the environment is commodified and the content is controlled, consumption on it cannot be studied without taking the nature

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<sup>6</sup> As of April 2018, Spotify does not offer a video service in Turkey.

of the medium into account — while also not ignoring the possibility of personal creative behaviour and deeming all practices under the generalizing and collapsing approach of Adorno’s pseudo-individualization. (Adorno, 2009) In this sense, it would be reasonable to assess streaming platforms like Spotify as industry’s response to the “piracy problem” which according to Snickars also contributed in a sense to the problem itself, due to its ad-supported model and unsatisfactory (according to a part of the industry and musicians such as Taylor Swift<sup>7</sup>) payments resulting from this specific type of consumption. (Snickars, 2015, p.206) The nature of Spotify, states Snickars, “lies within the file sharing culture so abhorred by the music industry (something Ek has also admitted) ... Sweden is, after all, the home of both Spotify and The Pirate Bay.” (p.206)

The third main tab is titled “Your Library” and includes “Your Daily Mix” which consists of algorithmically created playlists from your previous consumption, “Station” which hosts the “radios” you have created previously, “Podcasts” which lists the podcast stations you are following and individual episodes you have downloaded. Apart from these three, the songs and albums you have saved are showcased under “Songs”, “Albums” and “Artists”. These can be either downloaded ones or just the ones you have “kept” without adding to a playlist. As will be seen on the participant accounts later on, using the “Songs” subsection is not an uncommon way of “piling” songs on Spotify. These piles then can be filtered and distributed to playlists or used as a primary listening mode. In addition to these tabs, a “Local Files” section is available on the desktop app, which lists the independent audio files on your computer that you have incorporated to Spotify to be potentially used in streaming playlists as outside elements. The local files you add to your streaming playlists can be synchronized across your devices once they are all on the same Wi-Fi network.

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<sup>7</sup> Taylor Swift took her whole catalogue down from Spotify in 2014 due to royalty issues. This feud lasted only three years and ended with Swift’s content on store in 2017. (Sweney, 2017)

Followed as well as owned playlists are shown chronologically as a list on the right side of the desktop and as a separate tab under “Your Library” on the mobile. Personal playlists that are public can also be accessed through the user profile alongside a tab for recently played artists and follower/following tabs.

This section of the platform and the playlisting tool it offers is the centre of the field study, made available by contributions of volunteer participants, will be focused on in the data analysis chapter right after the presentation of the methodological framework.



### **CHAPTER 3**

## **SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONIST ONTHOLOGY AND ACTIVE INTERVIEWING AS METHOD**

As this thesis aims to position personal streaming playlist activities in the provided digital curation context, an approach that seeks active personal playlist curators' narratives and experiences to explore the concept was chosen. By making this choice, the aim is to obtain and interpret personal, subjective data from people who have utilized the practices of concern in their everyday life through which personal narratives regarding positioning of these activities and the possible motivations of the participators will be made visible. Statements of participants' experience who engage in personal digital curation activities in the form of personal Spotify playlists will be used for data analysis and offer information for an in-depth understanding of these very activities.

In order to obtain rich, deep, personal and narrative data from the participants, the method of "The Active Interview" as proposed by Holstein and Gubrium (1995) will be used. The active interview method is constructed around the basis of "treating interviewing as a social encounter [which] leads us rather quickly to possibility that the interview is not merely a neutral conduit or source of distortion but rather the productive site of reportable knowledge." (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995, p.3) The authors of the method suggests that "both parties to the interview are necessarily and unavoidably active" and meaning is "actively and communicatively assembled in the interview encounter." (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995, p.4)

This chapter begins with an extensive definition of the active interview method as well as the advantages and limitations that it possesses. Reference to other studies, which utilized the method, will be made and the place of the active interview method in this study and the reasoning behind this choice will be discussed. Following this, the workings and reasonings of the two auxiliary data sources will

be discussed. First, the observation made on the Spotify playlists of the participants in order to provide narrative guidance to the second interview will be explained and then the semi-structured active interviews with five music industry representatives in Turkey that were conducted in order to enrich the possible meanings and widen the perspective of the study will be presented.

The chapter will continue with a detailed description of the study to answer the questions of how the interviews, questions and topics were conducted as well as how the sampling was made along with the reasoning behind it. After that, description of the Spotify profile observation that was used to provide talking points to the interviews will be explained. Then, the participants will be introduced within the confinements of mutually agreed anonymity terms. A categorized list of questions and topics according to the study themes will follow and finally possible concepts the interview data suggest will be presented and explained.

### **3.1 The Active Interviewing Method**

Holstein and Gubrium construct the method of the active interview on the claim that “all interviews are interpretively active”, thus yielding the meaning making process a collaborative effort. (1995, p.4) The active interview is one of the responses of social constructionism to the traditional understanding of the interview. Denzin positions this response into a larger historical framework and identifies seven movements in social sciences that utilized the interview in different forms and gave different meanings to it. (2001, p.25) He attributes the first three movements to the structured, semi-structured and open-ended interview formats of the modernist era that sought to design an objective format. The fourth and the fifth movement is defined by criticisms of the previous approach by feminist researchers, namely, Denzin states, in works of Anne Oakley and Shulamit Reinharz. (Oakley, 1981; Reinharz, 1992, as cited in Denzin, 2001, p.25) The next two movements represent the auto-ethnographic interviewing practices, which can be considered a

step to a post-modernist direction. Finally the last movement is reserved for what Denzin calls “post-experimental performative” approaches to the interview. Even though, Denzin states that, by 2001, the time he published his article titled *The Reflexive Interview and a Performative Social Science*, the interview has evolved past the initial post-modernist reactions and some researchers have taken a performative turn in social sciences. He does not fall short to include Holstein and Gubrium’s work in his definition of his interpretive project. He groups his main method, the reflexive interview, together with the active interview and the dialogical interview. (Denzin, 2001, p.304)

Denzin seeks to establish a new interpretive form, resulting from his views of the interview not as a commodified information-gathering tool but as interactions that “arise out of performance events [which] transform information into shared experience.” (Denzin, 2001, p.24) He applies this method to obtain performance narratives regarding racial memories in cinematic society and emphasizes the significance of what can be achieved through performative social sciences through a different understanding of the interview that does not view the interview as a commodity that can be bought and sold. (2001, p.43)

This view is in line with Rapley’s understanding of “interview-data-as-topic”, instead of the traditional “interview-data-as-resource”. (2001, p.304) He states that a view that sees the interviews as only reflexive of the interviewee is in target for criticism by constructionists who understand the interview as reflexive for both the interviewee and the interviewer. Similarly, dialogical interview, as named appropriately, deals attentively with the interactions, change and “transformation” the constructionist approach allows for the interview. (Way et al., 2015, p.721) Way et al. identify themselves as qualitative researchers and via utilizing the dialogical interview in their study, present their view of the interview by referring to Denzin who takes on the issue of interviewing by treating it as a “way of writing the world ... [and] bringing the world into play” via collaboration. (Denzin, 2001, p.24, as cited in Way et al., 2015, p.729)

Patton categorizes these interpretive interview approaches under the term “the informal conversational interview”, in a way that connects them through the general techniques they utilize. (2002, p.342) He states that these interviews are setting oriented, flexible approaches that “must go with the flow” in order to achieve their goals. (p.342-343)

Holstein and Gubrium develop their approach of the active interview to this flexible “flow” via referring to earlier critics of the traditional and rigid interview settings, such as Ithiel de Sola Pool, who views interviews as developing interpersonal dramas (Pool, 1957, p.193 as cited in Holstein & Gubrium, 1995, p.14) and Dorothy E. Smith who sets her interviews’ general point as engagement in meaningful conversations regarding everyday life which are derivations of the participants’ real life experiences. (Smith, 1987 as cited in Holstein & Gubrium, 1995, p.77) The active interviewer, through the very act of interviewing the participant, takes part in the meaning making process, which is constructed through narrative efforts of the participants on their everyday feelings, thoughts and experiences. This, however, does not suggest a purpose to dictate interpretation. The active interviewer’s main objective is only to provide a context and environment for the participant to express and construct narration regarding the topic of interest without being bounded by previously mediated agendas. (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995, p.17) This is aimed in order for the process to make “linkages and horizon” apparent in the narrative co-construction between the interviewer and the participant and utilize these linkages and horizons to establish subjective meaning. (p.58-59)

This understanding of the interview inevitably sparks conversation of bias and contamination both for the interviewing and the analysis process. Holstein and Gubrium state that trying to rid interviews of the interaction outcomes between the researcher and the participant, as the modernist approach would seek is “futile”. (1995, p.4) Their solution to the issue of contamination is to acknowledge the contributions of both sides of the interaction and “conscientiously incorporate them

in into the production and analysis of interview data.” (p.4) They claim that the active interview deals with a different understanding of informant/respondent/interviewee, do not partake in production of pure and informational commodity as knowledge. Thus bias is not a meaningful concept, if the interview responses are seen as “products of interpretive practice (...) They are practical productions.” (1995, p.18) They reiterate that what are deemed as contaminants in an interaction are “virtually impossible” to remove. Additionally, according to Dingwall the interview as a collaborative accomplishment and “its relationship to any ‘real’ experience is not merely unknown but in some senses unknowable”. (Dingwall, 1997. p.56)

Socially constructed meaning is by definition an effort of collaboration and all those who participate inevitably take part in meaning making process. (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995, p.18) Following this understanding, all those who were interviewed in this study will be considered participants to the construction of meaning and understanding through my interaction with them and will be referred to as accordingly. One elegantly put definition regarding this is made by Way et al.. They state that their perspective views the participants as “allies who offer perspectives that enhance and enrich data and should be addressed as such.” (2015, p.728)

Holstein and Gubrium suggest the active interview method for researchers who are taking a subjective interpretation approach, since active interviewing puts “meaning and its construction to the foreground.” (1995, p.73) Apart from this epistemological reasoning, one of the key aspects of the virtue of the active interview and one of the main reasons it has been chosen for this study is that it rejects the notion of participant as a static vault of knowledge that the interviewer needs to crack open. The fact that active interviewing understands participants as allies, co-creators of knowledge, liberates both the interviewer and the participant to collaborate in the narrative and construct subjective meaning.

This stance to designate the participant as the narrative creator allows for improvisational interaction. Holstein and Gubrium suggest the previous knowledge of the interviewer on the subject may at times, prove useful in assisting the participants to provide additional description of the context of their narratives. They state: “Indeed, citing shared experience is often a useful way of providing concrete referents on which inquiries and answers can focus.” This approach is in line with the dialogical method as well as yet another interpretive approach; Jack D. Douglas’ definition of creative interviewing. Douglas seeks to form a basis on “friendly feelings and intimacy, to optimize *cooperative, mutual disclosure and a creative search for mutual understanding.*” (Douglas, 1985, p. 25, emphasis in original as cited in Holstein & Gubrium, 1995, p.9)

The general understanding of the constructionist point of view and the interpretive interviewing that follows, seeks contribution from active participants who narrate their experiences, thoughts and feelings. However, the participant may not always be considered as a representative of one single point of view. Narrative construction stems from the contextual positions the participants are situated in and these positions has to potential to shift.

### **3.2 Stock of Knowledge**

The active interview incorporates Alfred Schütz’s concept of stock of knowledge in order to further understand and present the shifting positions of the participant. Holstein and Gubrium state that since the participants are viewed as narrators in active interviewing, they are considered to possess a “stock of knowledge that is simultaneously substantive, reflexive, and emergent” (Schütz & Luckmann, 1973; Holstein & Gubrium, 1995, p.30) In an active interview, participants’ stocks of knowledge emerge in a way that they access and utilize their whole spectrum of knowledge to narrate in a way that does not only give a pure and directly

corresponding answer to a question, but construct their own subjective narrative and diverse meanings regarding the given topic and evolving context.

Holstein and Gubrium address to the fact that the existence and availability of the participants' stock of knowledge is in relation to the position they take while responding. They claim, "The complex contents of the respondent's stock of knowledge are intertwined with the identities partaking in the interview." (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995, p.31) This basically means that with each separate identity position participants take, they access a possibly different narrative output form and a possibly different portion of their stock of knowledge as well. Holstein and Gubrium observe that changes in position like such are sometimes verbally signalled and can be spotted. They give examples such as "speaking as a mother,' 'thinking like a woman,' 'if I were in here shoes,' 'after I heard what he said,' 'wearing my professional hat,' 'on second thought,' 'when you bother to think about it,' 'now that you ask,' 'I'm not sure about that one,' and 'I haven't really thought about it.'" (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995, p.33)

These changes in position inevitably let a possibly different field of constructed knowledge for the study to take interest in manifest. Different perspectives a participant may take while telling their stories or responding to an answer, offer a possibility to try and understand that participant as well as the topic in question on a new sample. Taking into account and carefully incorporating these shifts in position, it can be said that the corpus grows richer. If the participants are not discouraged or even encouraged, as Holstein and Gubrium advise (1995, p.37), to shift positions and approach the subject from a different point of view, making available a different portion of their stock of knowledge, the narrative that is created benefits from it in terms of richness.

Each new statement has the potential to stem from a different part of the participant's stock of knowledge, thus as Holstein and Gubrium put it, "the subject behind the respondent may change virtually from comment to comment." (Holstein

& Gubrium, 1995, p.74) These shifts are valuable in the active interviewing processes as they make available “new ways of knowing” (1995, p.37). However, these advantages may be thought to come with a price of contamination. Nevertheless, as stated before, through epistemological assumptions behind socially constructed knowledge and with an understanding of interviews as “practical productions” (1995, p.18), an occurrence of this type of contamination is not entirely applicable. Holstein and Gubrium suggest, “If one rejects the model of the passive vessel of answers, the notion of contamination is not so compelling.” (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995, p.50) Instead of this view, through understanding the inevitably collaborative nature of interviews as social interactions and significance of the contextual participant position, an analysis of these conversations that does not identify it as “defiled and tainted” is available. (1995, p.50)

This space made available for alternate perspectives in addition to the collaboratively constructed narrative aim of the method, point to a source for validity that is different from the traditional approach. Holstein and Gubrium state that a traditional approach to the interview may be subject to assessment to a point where the questioning yields exactness in terms of repeatability and reproducibility. (1995, p.9) However, active interview, being a “dynamic, meaning-making occasion”, produces narratives that puts the meaning and the meaning construction process and environment with the linkages and horizon it entails into centre. (1995, p.9) Since the circumstances of every interaction are not entirely reproducible due to the temporal nature of life and dynamic nature of society, the results cannot be expected to be replicated with a sense of traditional reliability in mind. Consequently the active interview, seeks validity in the answers of the participants “not from their correspondence to meanings held within the respondent but from their ability to convey situated experiential realities in terms that are locally comprehensible.” (1995, p.9)

### **3.3 Analytical Strategy and Contingencies**

Holstein and Gubrium categorize communicative contingencies that influence the narrative construction of the participant with shifting positions as whats and hows of the interview. (1995, p.14) They define whats as the substantive contingencies of the interview that “provide orientation and framing resources for developing both the subject and his or her responses” and hows, the communicative contingencies as “standpoint from which information is offered [which] is continually developed in relation to ongoing interview interaction. (p.14-15) This understanding allows an analysis of the interview which enables the researcher to develop and operate an interview driven by the research interests of the study, while at the same time taking the shifting contexts and narrative decisions of the participant into careful account.

Allowing the hows of the conversation to occur and analysing them with a heightened awareness of contextual shifts requires an interview process that does not silence and suppress reflexivity for the sake of data fidelity. The participants are free and encouraged to make connections to the subjects to construct their narrative in a subjective and interpretive way. The interviewer may direct the participant to a context to explore a potential that may enrich the narrative structure or invite the participant to the initial central issue in the course of the interview, but a suppression that may conceal reflexivity is strictly avoided. (p.55 & p.76)

Considering the form and theory that active interviewing suggest to make visible the complex, constructive, subjective and discursive meaning the participants produce, it is suitable for this study. This is due to the complex mechanisms of everyday music listening and information management activities that are in question. These practices are, intricate and personal and thus should be studied in an interpretive framework that allows meaning creation of the participants without a restricting and suppressive intervention from the researcher. In order to follow this path, I will take Holstein & Gubrium’s suggestion to the active interviewer that states “make interpretive practice paramount. All strategic considerations follow

from this.” (1995, p.78) Consequently, works that utilize the active interview method are observed to do so. Thus, they are studied for possible guidance and new points of view.

### **3.4 Example Uses of Active Interview and Its Place in This Study**

Holstein & Gubrium, on their work to answer the question “What is Family?” as an interpretive practice, assess the topic in the same way they advise others, “making interpretive practice paramount.” (1995, p.78) They maintain that family is constantly under construction and it acquires its defining characteristics through interpretive practice. (p.4) The active interview is precisely formulated to be utilized under a social constructivist approach such as this understanding. They state that through this view, “an ethnomethodologically-informed constructionist approach to family emphasizes interaction as mediating family meaning and domestic reality.” (p.7) They study family dynamics and meaning making processes via conducting and analysing active interview and discuss if family is de-privatised. They conduct their research attempting to search and document “artful family-constructing practices”, while making sure not to underestimate the significance of circumstantial factors that affect the interpretation process. (p.12) This study showcases the theoretical discussions their method suggests and is a useful source to see the active interview method in practice and understand the procedures previously mentioned.

Active interview has been used by various interpretivist researchers apart from Holstein and Gubrium. An example is Pirjo Nikander’s work regarding cultural age categorizations and age descriptions. Nikander studied the discursive practices about being “old” and “a little girl” to investigate the meaning making process of people in interaction to shed light on how age categorization in “talk” is positioned in identity work. Her main claim is that “identity can be viewed as a *discursively achieved process and talk as an action-oriented social activity.*” (Nikander, 2000,

p.351, emphasis on original). In order to operate within this understanding of talk and conversation, Nikander utilizes the active interview method with the participation of Finnish people who are approaching their 50s. She analyses the outcome of the interviews starting with “participants’ orientations and formulations” to recognize the “kinds of *social interactive work* performed” by the participants and concentrates on how people “*do age*”. (Nikander, 2000, p.353-354, emphasis on original)

On a second example, Nelson, Sabatier and Nelson investigate entrepreneurial knowledge management in France and United States and seek to establish an understanding of the motivation of small firm employees to share formalized knowledge. (2006) Their study continues to form a discussion on identification and understanding of the said knowledge sharing practices. The study chooses to utilize the active interview method to focus “on how the knowledge-sharing behaviour affected the sharer cognitively and affectively as well as socially and environmentally.” (2006, p.80) The results of the interview are formulated in figures, which seek to form a relationship between the motivations of the participants and cognitive, affective, social and tangible effects of their action. The active interview and the understanding of subjective, socially constructed knowledge creation is significant in their study in order to form an understanding they aim to. (Nelson, Sabatier & Nelson, 2006, p.83).

As a further step, Hathaway and Atkinson introduces a technique to the active interview approach that concerns the persona the interviewer may take. (2003, p.162) They choose to call the technique “good cop, bad cop” and explore the narrative results and different stocks of knowledge the participants (tattoo artists in one case, drug dealers in another) may use depending on the interviewers’ choice of topic suggestion and questions as well as their general attitude. Hathaway and Atkinson’s motivation to develop this technique comes from their need “to anticipate and respond to multiple roles and projected identities of claims-making informant.” They take and approach to reach different parts of participants’ stocks

of knowledge, which requires a position shift on the interviewer's side as well. Their study reiterates the necessity to be flexible and warns the interpretive social researcher against the "rigid scripting of interviews". (p.180)

The main concern these studies have in common is to achieve contextually meaningful knowledge, subjectively created, while paying close attention to the interpretive circumstances of the interview and the analysis processes. If we take the social constructionist approach and view social behaviour as created by individuals and their interactions with the society and the environment, then personal streaming playlist practices too should be treated as such. The social properties of playlist practices and the personal motivations behind these individual and social activities are inevitably affected and at least partially designed by the social circumstances and interactions. Thus in order to position personal streaming playlist activities in terms of digital curation, this study assumed a constructionist approach and utilized the active interview method to shed light on the meaning making mechanisms behind these activities.

### **3.5 The Study Design**

With the theoretical framework drawn via an intersection of PIM and collection studies and using the concepts proclaimed by the active interview method through an interpretive point of view, I have decided to conduct multiple interviews with four selected personal playlist curator participants to investigate the subjective narratives digital curators may construct. The interviews were supported by observationally gathered talking points acquired via their public Spotify playlists and consensually shared private playlists, in a six-week period between the first and the second interview. A third and final interview, roughly eight months after the second interview was conducted to further develop a temporal understanding of how participant narratives took shape and how their positions regarding their own personal curatorial activities develop.

A further set of semi-structured active interviews were conducted with five music industry representatives in order to provide insight from different points of view in the music industry. These representatives, who will be introduced in detail later on, were selected and pursued to achieve a wide range of positions actively working in the music industry in Turkey, such as: music producer, active musician, record label executive, venue director and music writer/professional curator. These participants were interviewed in a manner that both opens space for them to talk about their professional take on the issue as well as their personal streaming music practices. This allowed a narrative that often shifts positions and a presentation of subjective knowledge from different points of view, fuelled by different parts of participants' stocks of knowledge.

### **3.6 Active Interviews with Digital Curator Participants**

The series of interviews that constitute the core of the study were formulated in order to achieve subjective narratives from active Spotify users who create, maintain and consume playlists and spend time practicing these activities multiple times a week. The interviews were designed to allow participants to tell their stories about their current digital curation activities on Spotify, as well as their past collection and curation habits.

The interviews were conducted in public places the participants chose, if they wished to. In the cases that they did not express a preference, I offered to meet up at public coffee houses in areas of their choice. The setting of the interviews were aimed to be casual and friendly, while letting the participant clearly know that the meeting, the conversation and the interaction is for the purposes of a research. Before getting into the interview and starting the audio recording, 10-15 minutes of colloquial talk and everyday conversation was made and any questions the participant may have had about the details or workings of the study were explained without holding any detail back, apart from the information regarding other participants.

Even though the interviews took different turns through improvisational interactions and follow-up questions, a main structure for the interview focus was still pursued. The first interviews start off with a conversation regarding their pre-streaming and pre-digital music collection, consumption and curation activities and stories they would like to share centring these activities they practiced in the past. This allowed the participants to, at times, make comparative comments between their current and past music curation activities. In addition to narratives they create, this design opened up space for reflexivity and self-analysis. This comparison between collecting digital and physical objects constitutes a significant place in the study, as the aim of this thesis is to position a digital activity, which has strong roots in the physical era, to a digital context, which also has strong roots in the physical era. Due to the significance of this topic, a conversation pointing to any possible changes and differences participants may have experienced during shifting their everyday music activities from physical to digital was initiated specifically, even if the participant mentioned such changes beforehand in another context.

The following topic and set of questions were focusing on how the participants were utilizing Spotify in general in their everyday life. An overall understanding of how the participants describe their own everyday consumption practices and a starting point to talk about consumption of their own curations were aimed. This provided a basis for them to further think and talk about their more precise activities such as maintaining a playlist. The transition between the topics were fluid and often unstructured as the interview process was constructed in a way that participant narratives and improvisational interactions were made priority.

After a general setting was established, the interview continued with questions regarding their music sharing practices, both in physical and digital, to understand the connection between the exposition aspects of a curatorial effort and consumption of one's own curation. As will be discussed further in detail in data analysis, this set of questions were, in cases, inevitably called for conversations

regarding motivation and identity. A conversation about whether they share their playlists with anyone and if they do, how and why, was followed with a conversation on why they make playlists at all. I took these turns in the interview, when they occurred and when I was able to perceive and act upon them, to open up space for participants to create subjective narratives about whether or not their collection and curations have any connections to who they express (or not) they are. These parts of the interviews hold richer narratives and often more personal details. These narratives were made available by the flexibility potential of the active interview method.

The next topic was designed in the hopes for narratives that entwine participants' personal statements about themselves with their general view on discussions such as the ownership of the listener and the meaning of curation and collection. As this topic was positioned after the conversations about their pre-digital music habits, their current Spotify practices and their motivations, participants were able to reference their past statements, express different views or rethink their position on the subject out loud. In this way, the overall narratives that participants created throughout the interviews include statements that stem from multiple opportunities to make a statement or express feelings around the same subject on different narrative points of the conversation. I find the results of this technique significantly valuable in order to convey a subjective and alive representation of the participants' active and evolving use of their stock of knowledge.

The final part of the first interviews consist of participant narratives about their own playlists. Their public Spotify profile and private playlists they chose to share with me for the study were open on my laptop in front of us throughout this phase. All playlists were viewed one by one and the participants commented on the specifics of how and why they created the playlist and if they still do, how they would consume the specific playlist. After they express their opinions and feelings or if I perceived something about the playlist that may incite a new conversation, I shared my observation with them without expressing any sort of judgement. These

encouragements, at times resulted in previously unshared stories and new motivations that the participants make connections to via the playlist in question at that moment. Furthermore, if the participants took a step back and make a general statement that they felt the need to after discussing the playlist of interest; they were given the opportunity to do so without resistance to keep the interview structure rigid.

After the end of the first interview, as previously communicated with the participants, I have restated that I will be observing their playlist activities in the time period of approximately six weeks. I have revealed to them that during these six weeks, for two weeks the observation will be extensive where all their playlists will be monitored daily to see if they add or remove any songs, or make any naming, image of listing changes. Any playlists that the participants may choose to delete or make private and any playlist they may create during this period will also be documented. They were also informed that the remaining four weeks would be used to conduct a less extensive observation where the same changes will be documented less frequently. Which two weeks will be made the extensive observation period was not disclosed to the participants. This was done due to the prediction that participants will behave differently under the conditions of the observation. However, it should also be noted that, as long as the participant knew that their playlists were going to be observed, even if they were not informed when the extensive observation will be conducted, a degree of change in their behaviour is inevitable. Furthermore, it was also expected that some participants made changes in their Spotify profiles and playlists, before they shared them with me. This sort of observation method unavoidably creates an atmosphere of what can be called a consensual voyeur, a social performance, where the performers are aware of the fact they are being watched. Through a social constructionist point of view, it can be said that the performative nature of these activities, which was manifested on digital profiles that were public to begin with, is inherent. Thus not viewing this awareness as a source of contamination and acknowledging the social dynamics of the activity while conducting and analysing the interviews is crucial. The reason

why the information regarding which two week period their Spotify playlist activities will be observed extensively was undisclosed is to try and prevent any induced imbalance throughout the six week period. On the other hand, this six-week period altogether may show signs of imbalance compared to the participants' previous or later activities due to personal reasons as well as increased or decreased performative effort. This acknowledgement should be internalised before making any hasty generalizations that use the data collected during this six weeks to construct a statement that claim to define the participant's previous and past activities. The main aim of this observation was to establish talking points for the second interviews and they were only used as such.

Second interviews were conducted roughly around six weeks later than the first interviews apart from one participant who will be later introduced as Participant D, with whom I was able to conduct the second interview five months after the first interview due to her being unavailable due to her health before then. The structure of the second interviews share only an overall design. The largest part of the second interviews include topics stemming from the observation period. These are followed by thoughts about their previous statements, on which I had conducted a preliminary analysis between the two interview dates and participant narratives regarding how the past six week period was, in terms of their personal digital curation activities on Spotify. Due the nature of the second interview process, the topics and conversation show a wide range of variance between participants. This is the result of a design, which practically got personalized for each participant after the first interview and the observation period. This personalization allowed for continuation of some narratives and rethinking and reassessment of some others. Improvisational topics and question were used in the second interviews as well, in order to attempt further richness in these narratives.

The third and final interviews were conducted approximately ten months after the first and eight months after the second interviews (except for D). Third interviews were conducted with the aim of achieving a further level of richness in the

continuing narratives and offer temporal perspective on the sustainability and dynamics of personal digital music curation activities. The interviews were tailored for each participant using the narratives, talking points and data acquired from the first two interview. Additionally, an attempt to include participants in the study as “allies” (Holster & Gubrium, 1995) was made. This was done by sharing the five key concepts, which will be introduced later on, with the participants, disclosing the fact that those key concepts were formed with the help of their previous narratives and asking them to comment on them in a general manner. This was done at the end of the third interviews in order to avoid any intervention to their other personal narratives. These contributions are critical as this study is interested in subjectively created knowledge, in a socially constructive manner. Sharing the key talking points of the study with the participants and contributing their comments allow for discursive participation and self-representation.

### **3.7 Semi-Structured Active Interviews with Industry Representatives**

A further set of interviews were conducted in order offer new perspectives as well as what one may perceive expert opinions. While all five representatives are indeed experts in their respective fields in music industry, their statements and narratives will not be treated as deterministic definitions. Instead, their insights and opinions will be approached with regards to their experience and consequently defined and enriched stocks of knowledge, yet still as participant narratives.

Four interviews were conducted with five representatives who are professionally positioned at different points in music industry in Turkey and in İstanbul music scene. Two of the representatives, Mehmet Cem Ünal and Safa Hendem were interviewed together due to a collaborative choice. They have worked together for most of their professional careers and are practically seen as a duo in their field. This particular instance allowed for an application of multiple participant practices of the active interview. Holstein and Gubrium state that “the long-standing linkages and togetherness” may make otherwise inaccessible parts of either of the participants’ stocks of knowledge, available. (1995, p.69) They assess these forms

of interaction under multivocality and was able to observe significantly positive results in their study regarding quality of life in nursing homes, when they introduced the spouse and long-time partner of a participant into their interview. (1995, p.67) Even though Mehmet Cem Ünal and Safa Hendem did not express a romantic or life partnership between each other for them to be classified as “spouses” in that manner, they are old friends who saw each other and work with each other almost every day for the last 15 years. Their interactions provided an active environment for narrative construction as they agreed or disagreed with each other or told stories from their shared past or remind the other to talk about this and that memory to address the topic at hand.

It should be stated that in two of the industry representative interviews, a sense of previously formed mutual trust was present. This was due to my previous employments in both Mehmet Cem Ünal and Safa Hendem’s music and audio production company Ses Sanayii between the years 2013 and 2015 and with another selected representative, Metin Uzelli and the digital music distributor The Orchard’s Istanbul office he leads, between 2015 and 2017. Furthermore, Mehmet Cem Ünal and Safa Hendem are individuals whom I regard as friends. This previous relationship opened up a space where they create their narrative points freely and genuinely. On the other hand, at some specific points the interview had the potential to lose track and in order to avoid that I had to offer redirection in particular instances. This was due to the informal relationship I had with the participants (unlike the formal yet friendly relationship I had and have with Metin Uzelli) prior to the study and unlike the other interviews, the design and interviewer attitude was constructed with this fact in mind.

All five representatives expressed varying degrees of Spotify use and playlist curation activities. Thus, apart from their professional view, personal digital curation habits were also a topic of the interview. Participants were encouraged to shift positions at suitable moments in order to allow an access to different parts of their stock of knowledge. This further establishes the approach of the study to the

state of the expert in this specific field as all industry professionals were interviewed in a way that they would construct personal narratives entwined with their professional views to better present the subjective nature of personal digital curation activities.

Participants' personal views and accounts are of utmost significance to this study. However, in order to reach participants who can be helpful to position personal streaming playlist activities in a digital curation context, there had to be one key aspect that was to be looked for in both four participants and five industry representatives. The participants were needed to be active Spotify users, who incorporate personal playlist curation activities in their everyday lives. Participants were reached out to and chosen with this prerequisite mind.

### **3.8 Specialized Corpus**

Prior to an explanation of details of the process, I would like to express that this study chooses to approach the term “sampling” cautiously. This is due to the term's possible implication of collapsing differences. Since a sample is a subset of a larger group that is aimed to be representative, the sampling process poses a threat of overgeneralization if the researcher is not aware of this issue and acts accordingly. Thus, the study utilizes the concept of corpus to address the issue of what and who is to be collaborated with.

Nilsson Björkenstam defines corpora as “collection[s] of natural language (text, and/or transcriptions of speech or signs) constructed with a specific purpose”. (2013) When a corpus includes audio or video in the given context, the term “multimodal corpus” is used. Nilsson Björkenstam defines two ways to focus on the formation of a corpus. “One way is to focus on language as a "product" and sample different types of language material, e.g., dialogue or monologue, or scripted or spontaneous speech. Another way is to focus on the “producer” of language, and to choose informants based on speaker characteristics such as age,

gender, social class, first/second language, level of education, profession, and regional background.” (2013) In this manner, to constitute a corpus, this study uses an approach to incorporate interview transcripts of active interview participants and industry representatives and the observational data acquired from participant Spotify playlist activities. Participants and representatives are chosen in a *purposeful* manner and *intensity* was sought. (Patton, 2002, p.243)

Both in order to assess if the case was extreme or intense, suitable or unsuitable for the purposes of the study, a process of evaluation and criteria for evaluation was necessary. The first and most important criterion was volunteering and willingness to go through the process. This was sought in order to work with participants who are actively willing to discuss their Spotify playlists and music habits with a stranger. The narrative creation process and the interactive nature of the interview method used is positively affected by this state of willingness and the act of stepping forward to volunteer. In order to achieve this state of willingness, I published a call to the study with minimal information on social media platforms and asked my contacts/friends on Facebook to share the call on their profiles.

This call constituted a filter of volunteering and gave basic information regarding what the study is going to be about. A very brief explanation of the criteria that will be discussed in detail was communicated as well. The returns were on comment sections of the shared posts on my contacts’ profiles. People who are interested in commented and expressed their interests. The four participants, who were ultimately selected, publicly expressed their interest as Facebook comments as well.

I responded to every comment until it was practically unfeasible to do so, due to the number of comments expressing interest. At that point, I continued the process of acknowledging their interest by liking their comments, as in the case of Participant D. Including the four final participants, I contacted over 50 people who showed interest via private messaging on Facebook and explained the general outlines and the design of the study briefly and asked if they would be interested in participating.

Among the commenters, 39 people stated that they would be interested in participating and accepted to share their public Spotify profile link with me. Some stated, such as Participant A, they normally keep some or most of their playlists private and offered to share the private link to some of the individual playlists alongside their public profiles.

I gathered the profile links, established a preliminary pool of participants and began an evaluation process in order to identify the volunteers who may show intensity signifiers on their profile. These signifiers, the criteria apart from the first one, are not hierarchically structured or assessed. What I looked for was active, everyday use of playlisting tools used to make meaning; be it quantitative signifiers such as the amount of created playlists and the frequency of added songs (as the dates when songs added to a playlist can be seen on platform) or qualitative signifiers such as playlist names that address specific contexts or situations and any sign that shows the volunteers put additional curatorial effort into their playlists such as uploaded playlist images, embedded playlist descriptions, visible naming and organizational efforts, i.e. m-level activities. All these signifiers suggest, in different forms and for different purposes, effort to make something out of the commodified experience Spotify offers; visible efforts of volunteers to make it their own.

After careful assessment of each profile within the selection criteria, I categorised them into three groups: not compatible, possible for a further study, compatible. Four participants were chosen to be compatible as intense manifestation of digital curation activities on Spotify who has the potential to create rich subjective knowledge, given the chance to construct narratives regarding their previous and current meaning-making processes. The selected participants were sent private messages on Facebook and were informed regarding my intention to work with them. The selected participants were one more time asked if they would like to participate in the study and all expressed willingness to do so. After their confirmation, dates were set for the first interviews.

### **3.9 Participants and Representatives**

The four participants who were selected to participate in the study and accepted to do so by signing disclaimers that allowed me to use the audio recordings and the observatory data collected between the first and the second interview along with their occupation, without disclosing their names, profile links, playlist links and playlist names. Thus the participants and the playlists will be given pseudonyms such as Participant A, B, C and D. These names, letters, were given in a chronological order of the first interview dates. First interviews were conducted on August 16th, 2018, with A and 18th, 19th and 23rd with B, C, D respectively. All interviews were conducted in İstanbul, Turkey in Turkish. In this section, both the participants and the industry representatives will be briefly introduced.

Participant A is a 28-year-old software expert. As will be discussed in the analysis chapter about his practices, he is a musician in a band and an active DJ as well. His primary use of Spotify revolves around his discovery and selection process for his DJ work. For all three interviews, we have met with him in a music studio owned by members of his band, by his choice. He is an active music creator and consumer at the same time. His music creation practices can be categorised into two: his band work and his DJ work. A categorisation of his consumption practices can be made as well: his everyday consumption on Apple Music and his DJ exploration and curation on Spotify. His case demonstrates a rather purposeful use of Spotify as he utilizes the recommendation engine and the curatorial tools the platform offers to establish a “filter” for a part of his musical life, his DJ work.

Participant B is a 46-year-old author/artist. He produces works in a wide spectrum of plastic arts, alongside his written and musical works. His narratives regarding the physical era of recorded music and how he would go about curating his own consumption are richer and often have more details than the other three participants, being the oldest of the four. Unlike other participants, Participant B have sent me update notes, as I have suggested to all participants as a way of keeping up and

reflecting on their own activities. I did not rely on the outcome of these update notes and the design of the study did not rely on them either. However, Participant B's two update notes he sent on September 1st and 19th, 2018, offered interesting opportunities and talking points for the second interview.

Participant C is a 30-year-old who works in arts and culture organisations. She is in the music scene and her everyday consumption is mixed in terms of professional and personal listening. However, her playlist practices and the long-term curatorial effort she is putting in into her project, has strong personal roots. Participant C has a practice of creating a new playlist at the start of every month, curating and consuming it at the same time, effectively creating a diary of playlists since January 2016. Her narratives were interesting examples of reflexivity, since, as we looked through her older playlists together; she remembered specific periods of time in her life, through the songs she added to the playlists of that month. The first interview has several occasions of her remembering previous thoughts, feelings and stories, using a very specific past tense in Turkish language, which loosely resembles the English past perfect tense. In Turkish, the tense is called *Duyulan Geçmiş Zaman*, which means "Heard Past Tense". This type of language, in everyday talk, implies that she does not actually rely on the knowledge of her own memory, rather she relies on the information she now re-obtains through the playlist she made in the past and expresses "It seems I was so and so..." instead of "I was so and so..." This choice of language is not exclusive to C yet her use is considerably noteworthy in volume. Details and possible implications of this will be discussed in the analysis chapter.

Participant D is a 29-year-old copywriter who mainly writes popular music pieces for online magazines. She curates what can be called concept and event based playlists, incited from events or notions, in a personal context. She has expressed that a couple months before she has agreed to participate in the study, she decided to regulate her consumption. She stated that due to her excessive usage of the platform, she experienced some amount of degradation regarding her relationship

to music. The first interview corresponds to a time in her life where she was implementing a form of regulation to her curation and consumption in order to elevate her relationship to her music.

Apart from the four active participants, five industry representatives were selected to be worked with alongside them, as stated previously. These representatives are active individuals in Turkish music industry and Istanbul music scene. All five industry representatives agreed the study to disclose their names and professions. All statements from the industry representatives are of their own and is not in any way associated with or reflect the view of their company or institution.

The first industry representative is Metin Uzelli, a recorded music industry executive who have been active in both record production and digital music distribution fields. The second representative is Deniz Kuzuoğlu, who is the co-director of Salon IKSŞ in charge of the venue and bookings. Third representative is author, music writer, collector and playlist curator for Apple Music Murat Beşer and finally the fourth and fifth representatives are music producers, composers, studio owners and musicians Mehmet Cem Ünal and Safa Hendem. This range of representatives, I believe, allowed the study to reflect different points of view from the music industry and offers an auxiliary source to make sense of active participant narratives.

Even though the interviews with the representatives made use of the interactivity and flexibility, which active interviewing provides, less liberally than then the interviews with the active participants, the structure and the focus was in line. The question and topics were designed in a way that address the issue and focus but at the same time allow the representatives to construct narratives with sufficient freedom.

### 3.10 Interview Questions and Topics

Two sets of question and topics have been formulated. The first set is designed for the active participants and contains questions and topics under two themes.

- Consumption of one's own digital curation
- Utilization of personal streaming playlists in everyday life

These two themes address the main research question in ways that talking points can be formulated for participants to construct personal narratives. The questions and topics were written in Turkish. The questions were directed in a way that is suitable for the general environment the interview had. In some cases, the questions were asked in a different way than the way they were written, to continue an existing context or narrative. Translated questions for the first interviews are as follows:

#### Consumption of One's Own Digital Curation

- When and on which format have you started collecting music?
- Have you made any collections of vinyls, cassettes, CDs, MDs or any other physical format? If you had, what sort of a practice you had/still have?
- Apart from this, have you made any sort of other collection in any period of your life? If you had, what sort of a practice you had/still have?
- As the contemporary music consumption environment started to become digital, have you experienced any change in your collection and consumption practices? If you had, what sort of changes have you experienced?
- What sort of a Spotify practice do you have?
- How often do you make new playlists and edit them?
- Do you listen to your own playlists? If you do, what sort of a practice do you have?

## Utilization of Personal Streaming Playlists in Everyday Life

- Do you share your playlists?
- In any period of time in your life, have you had a music sharing practice? If you had, how did you share?
- Do you think the music you share with individuals or with the public or a closed group via social media platforms has any relationship to your identity? If you do, what sort of a relationship do you think it has?
- Why do you make playlists?
- Do you think your playlists are a part of your identity?
- Music or not, if you have made any physical collections in the past, or if you are still making them, do you think they are a part of your identity?
- Do you see any difference between making a collection of physical and digital objects? If you do, what sort of a difference do you see?
- Do you see a difference between downloading digital music and listening to music on a streaming platform such as Spotify? If you do, what sort of a difference do you see?
- Do you think the songs you have downloaded are yours? Do you think the songs on your Spotify playlists are yours? Do you think your playlists on your Spotify profile are yours?
- Do you classify your activities on your Spotify playlists as curation?

These questions and the conversations they incited are followed by a review of the participant's Spotify playlists, one by one. Improvisational questions were asked on the spot, as well as the following main questions formulated previously:

- What is the story behind this playlist?
- How often do you think about or spent time on this playlist?
- Do you listen to this playlist? If you do how often and how?

The second and third interviews, as stated before, were tailored for each participant using the talking points acquired from the first interview, the observation process and the update notes Participant B have sent. The focus of each conversation is designed to incite richer and deeper narratives regarding the research themes. Apart from this focus, a restricting structure or set of questions were not used.

Industry representative interviews were designed as a version of the active participant first interview questions. They include key questions addressing the two themes of the study as well as questions and topics that would encourage the representatives to shift their positions to a more professional state and narrate what can be considered expert opinions. However, as stated before these opinions will be considered as subjective narrative construction of a participant instead of deterministic views of an expert.

#### Consumption of One's Own Digital Curation

- When and on which format have you start collecting music?
- Have you made any collections of vinyls, cassettes, CDs, MDs or any other physical format? If you had, what sort of a practice you had/still have?
- Apart from this, have you made any sort of other collection in any period of your life? If you had, what sort of a practice you had/still have?
- As the contemporary music consumption environment started to become digital, have you experience any change in your collection and consumption practices? If you had, what sort of changes have you experienced?
- Do you use Spotify? If you do, what sort of a Spotify practice do you have?

#### Utilization of Personal Streaming Playlists in Everyday Life

- Music or not, if you have made any physical collections in the past, or if you are still making them, do you think they are a part of your identity?

- Do you see any difference between making a collection of physical and digital objects? If you do, what sort of a difference do you see?
- Do you see a difference between downloading digital music and consuming music on a streaming platform such as Spotify? If you do, what sort of a difference do you see?

#### Industry Representative Insights

- What do you think about collection making and curation on streaming platforms?
- What do you think about consumer's ownership of music?
- In this context, do you see a difference between ownership in physical world and digital world? If you do, what sort of a difference do you see?
- What do you think of the consumer's position in the current state of the music industry?
- Why do you think, people are making collections and curations?

As will be discussed in the following section, the interviews tend to revolve around some key concepts. These concepts are driven from existing literature discussed in previous chapters as well as participant narratives I believe the following together has the potential to encapsulate the findings:

- Information needs
- Adding value
- Memory
- Identity
- Sharing

Participant narratives with additional insights from industry representatives are going to be conveyed and analysed in the next chapter within these five key concepts and a general position of personal streaming playlist activities in the context of

digital curation is going to be sought through the expressed narratives of the participants and industry representatives.



## **CHAPTER 4**

### **ANALYSIS & DISCUSSION**

This chapter will be presented in five sections, one for each key concept, to analyse and discuss narratives of participants and representatives. Each participant and representative interview is analysed using the five key concepts as codes and each statement along with each line of narrative is coded accordingly. The narratives are grouped together, and repeating patterns and distinctive differences were organized in a structure that would allow a thorough discussion of the concepts within the framework of the narrative data gathered and used research methodology.

First section will discuss information needs considering the significance of the information-collectable dual nature of music on a streaming platform, focusing on participants' discovery and information structure practices. Second section will discuss adding value as a concept in order to discuss and emphasise the importance of subjectivity, context and experience in music consumption, collection and curation practices. Third section will discuss memory, by discussing streaming music playlists as an auxiliary memory mechanism of personal record keeping. Fourth section will discuss identity and the significance of individuation through distinction and similarity while putting the accent on the availability of everyday music consumption and personal curation as a space for identity work. And finally, fifth section will discuss sharing in an effort to discuss the social implications of music consumption, collection and curation practices while non-exclusively binding together the four previous key concepts in itself.

The chapter will be finalized with an analysis overview of the discussion of five key concepts in order to effectively position personal streaming playlist practices under the umbrella term of digital curation. By doing, this using the five key concepts derived from PIM, collection studies literature and playlist curator narratives, it is aimed to set up a foundation for further discussions of linkages and horizons in the intersection of music, streaming and curation.

## 4.1 Information Needs

As previously discussed, the term “information” is a key concept in curatorial activities. Be it in the context of personal activities (PIM) or professional and/or collaborative endeavours such as public archives and libraries, information is also one of the most visible motivations behind collection and curation.

This thesis assumes a certain take on what information is, from the field of Information Science, which PIM leans against for its ontological basis. According to Ian Cornelius, information and meaning are intertwined. He defines information through a communication of meaning by stating that the “information is the meaning of the message together with any relevant contextual information available to the recipient.” (2002, p.412) Jones states that PIM deals with this contextualization of information in a personal domain. He claims, “We manage information because information is the most visible, ‘tangible’ way to manage other resources that are precious.” (2007, p.3) The concept of “information needs” is thus preferred by this thesis to define the motivation to access and manage information and information items.

However, as will be seen in participant and industry representative statements and narratives, the concept of “information needs” is not one-dimensional. The relationship between the digital curator and information is motivated by different personal goals, agendas and drives.

One difference is worth elaborating as it may cause confusion further on. If we follow PIM’s understanding of information, the collectable objects themselves are information items. They are physical and digital containers encapsulating information, musical information in this case. That is one main definition of what information is in a curatorial context. The other definition of information here is regarding the relations and ties of the collectable objects and is contextual. The concept of a playlist is information, the metadata of an mp3 file laying out the artist

and label information is information, the story of a song, whereabouts of an archive, interrelations of genres and cultural subsets are all information. Thus, when combined under a motivation towards information, i.e. information needs, what is being discussed is a curator's drive to access and make sense of what is available via collected musical items as well as connecting non-musical information. This meaning making process starts with *capta*, as discussed before. However, discovery before addition is still a part of the information process. It can be seen in participant narratives that discovery practices is interrelated with information needs.

#### **4.1.1 Discovery & Information**

When asked about the change of practices and affordances of a music collector or curator from physical to streaming era, what music writer and professional music curator Murat Beşer stated about what a physical music collector must possess to do what he does, can be used as a starting point for this section. Beşer stated that he believes that the practices regarding music collections are unknown to people who collect digital music exclusively. He stated that to do what he does, i.e. a physical music collection, one has to have these four things: a concept, information, time and money.

He asked me, as more of a rhetorical question on his side, "If we look at [streaming] now, which one of these do we need?" When I think about it afterwards, contrary to his belief, I can say that all four of these things are needed to varying degrees if one aims make personal digital curations of their own on a streaming platform like Spotify. However, what changed drastically is that building blocks are now given to curators, rather than them having to acquire every piece on their own. As Salon IKS V music venue director Deniz Kuzuoğlu put it while she compared this streaming practice to the curation she did on her physical collection, she stated that she "had to spend more effort. [She] had to leave the house, for starters." Money is less of a problem but still needed or required for a more convenient environment; and time still is a prerequisite, even though the nature of the time spent has changed.

Apart from these, it can be said that “a concept” and “information” is still a necessity to engage in sense making activities via curation. The discovery of information, here on streaming, is the first and arguably most information-driven step of this process.

An example for this can be found in participant B’s narrative of his teenage years in İzmir, Turkey during the 1980s regarding his practices. He expresses signs of connectedness between his discovery and information collection practices. It can be seen that prior to forming concepts, he first built up a vocabulary of music via gathering information: “I started to follow some radio programmes, after that, to follow the *trail*<sup>8</sup> I started to record things that I like from the radio. Then things I like began to get larger in number, and since I didn’t have much of an allowance at those ages, I started to list them and have them recorded on 90 [minutes] cassettes [at designated stores]. You would write around 30% more [song names on a list] of 90 minutes as substitutes since the guy wouldn’t have everything.”

In this narrative, it can be seen that B’s newly started discovery practices drove him to start a collection, since in order to consume the music he liked, he needed a more continuous and convenient access. This need along with B’s financial and technological conditions caused him to seek an outsourced acquisition method. In order to work this acquisition mechanism, he needed to put together, curate a list of songs. Therefore, in this case B has acted to satisfy his information needs, both by discovering new music on the radio and buying unlicensed cassette tapes, for which he had to make a selection. However, these were during the times the physical and most of the intellectual and functional components of a curation were not simply given, in a sense that through internet and streaming they now arguably are.

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<sup>8</sup> He used the Turkish phrase *ipin ucunu bulmak*, which is a slightly uncommon way of using the word *ipucu*, which corresponds to the word “clue” in English, but literally means “rope’s end”. Thus, the phrase he used loosely translated to “to find the end of the rope” meaning, collecting clues and seeing where it goes. However, in English, “being at the end of the rope” usually means that one is in distress and fed up. In order to avoid that conclusion, I chose to use the phrase “follow the trail”.

Musician and producer Mehmet Cem Ünal who grew up in the 80's now remembers cultural inputs from his past. He stated, “[It seems] my brain was filled with garbage when I was a kid. Watching the same things over and over. There was no [other] content!” He further commented on the lack of content or rather lack of access to content back in his youth by stating that the reason he used to read the CD booklets was because he had no internet and/but had a lot of time in his hands. When he thought about the affordances of the current practices, he stated “Now the musicians must be the only ones who look [at the booklets] to see who played on this and that, not the kids.”

As can be seen Ünal shares Beşer's views on with the current technological and social realities of music consumption, implying that the current state of some information, being easily given caused a sense of degradation in people's motivation to put effort into acquiring further information. Similarly, Kuzuoğlu states that when constructing her venue's yearly line up, she takes into consideration that now people are consuming music driven by algorithm recommendations. She stated, “I do the research on people using the ‘they’ll listen to this too, if they listened to that’ thing. On YouTube too, similar names come one after another. Because this is the way listeners in Turkey usually discover music. From Discover Weekly etc. Most of the new generation doesn't have the habit of digging. They don't have the patience to listen to an album from top to bottom.” However, when reminded there are, indeed, people who put effort, do research and “dig” in the new era of streaming as well, she concurred and stated that she saw most of those people who are like so as “people who broke through the laziness”.

This thesis' corpus is constructed with texts and narratives of people who were specifically chosen due to their intense use of curatorial tools on Spotify. That is to say that I will not be diving deep into a discussion regarding how technology and current state of society possibly made the consumer “lazier” or not. This thesis is interested merely in showing that streaming playlist activities can be positioned and

studied under the roof of curation, more specifically digital curation, considering the domain of streaming. Thus, the existence of the “ones who broke through the laziness” as intense cases of this specific phenomenon is sufficient to form a basis.

#### **4.1.2 Abundance of Information**

Participants all have different and personalized discovery practices. Although they incorporate algorithmic recommendations into the mix in varying levels, they still have areas that they put significant effort into personalizing their processes, even at the expense of regulating themselves or temporarily rejecting algorithmic recommendations as a whole. For example, prior to our first interview, Participant D decided to put herself into what she called a “streaming diet” as the sheer amount of information presented to her wore her down, caused her to “lose” songs. Furthermore, she also experienced a sense of diminished value with the ones she managed to “not lose”. Similarly, while having a conversation regarding memory, Participant C expressed her concern about the abundance of information, not only on Spotify and not only of musical nature, but as a whole daily experience in our day and age by stating that: “Somehow minds are too messy. It feels like it gets messier through all these. I’m not entirely sure why but of course it’s certain that there is too much data.” Additionally, Kuzuoğlu stated during the “iTunes, mp3” period, while she was dealing with massive amounts of downloaded artist discographies she collected, she had the feeling that she should “listen to it all because [she is] already too far behind”.

It can be seen that it is possible in cases that this readily available, given abundance of information or information acquired in massive amounts at once has its own challenges. Challenges which, when overcome, has satisfying results. For individuals who are trying to engage in sense making activities via applying PIM practices on information, a noteworthy amount of effort may need to be put in. This effort to overcome the challenge is not necessarily to access what was otherwise

inaccessible as in the times of the physical containers, but to sift through an unwanted amount of information to end up with desired *capta*.

In this manner, Participant A's practices or rather his infrastructure of filtering and archiving systems is one answer to deal with this problem. A's current occupation as a DJ and his motivation to structuralise his discovery, archival and curation process drove him to design his Spotify practices accordingly. His Spotify practices at the time of the first and second interview was entirely directed to the purpose of regulating his discovery and initial keeping processes. He stated that he "wanted to transform Spotify into a no-confusion place, because [he] very much values its recommendations. It's making very good recommendations. [He has] been using Spotify in a way to have it make good recommendations for about 4 years now probably. [He] was able to get it to the state [he] wanted in the last 6 months, and that only happened when [he] reduced [his consumption] to very specific genres. As soon as [he] narrowed it to a specific area, Spotify began to nurture [him] like crazy." The fact that he "educated" his Spotify by consuming only a specific range of music on it, thus having it learn what A is up to, presumably increased the percentage of this efficiency. Other consumption methods, or rather a seemingly methodless consumption may or may not achieve similar results, however, in A's case, it is evident that the algorithmic recommendation tool is working in his favour.

On the other hand, Metin Uzelli, who did not necessarily "educate" the algorithm to his liking, expressed that, via his personal experience on Spotify's Discover Weekly, one can eventually find a couple of songs that they like from it since it recommends so many. He remembers finding a song he really liked on Spotify and after that saying "I'm going to find something amazing on here", spent around three hours on Spotify and only ended up with one more song that he would not have otherwise found. However, he notes that he thinks this technology is ever developing and his experience should not give people the wrong opinion based on a state of the recommendation algorithm.

Furthermore, it appears it has the potential to cause certain frustrations even what may be called anxieties can be observed on the curator's part. In D's case, this can be seen in her remarks about her "from discover weekly"<sup>9</sup> playlist. On this specific playlist, she stated that it is of the ones she "spend[s] time on daily." She expressed that previously she worked on this playlist more but recently she is not putting much work into it since it is "too crowded, it needs to be cleaned, weeded out. It needs to be sorted out to places." She elaborated that this condition of her playlists "frustrates" her. She further stated, "Well, Onur, this [playlist] is like this for a long time now and I have to tackle it. Spending a whole day, or even more, a couple of weeks... Look! I added a whole album here. I've listened to these numerous times, songs from this album are now in [other] playlists but these are still here." In order to understand the root of her frustration and her need to sort out her "from discover weekly" playlist, I kept following the topic up. I asked her why she thinks she has to tackle it, she said it is because "it is too messy and it bothers [her]". I kept following up and asked why this mess bothers her, she replied, "Too many genres are mixing up. I don't like when this many genres get mixed up." This "mixing up" in D's words, or "mess" in C's, can be read through Walter Benjamin's previously used quote on Anja Nylund Hagen's work: "For what else is this collection but a disorder to which habit has accommodated itself to such an extent that it can appear as order?" (Benjamin, 2007, p.60 as cited in Hagen, 2015) That is to say that the disorder C and D are expressing is as personal and interpretive as the order they hope to achieve via curatorial practices. Someone who is unaware of the context participants are trying to sustain may look at the disorderly and orderly versions of the same curation and may not be able to tell which is which; because order, here in these terms, is interpretive and the only points of reference are the curators themselves.

This interpretive nature of the criteria of order and satisfaction may drive the curator to work more on some curations or abandon them temporarily at times, as D did.

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<sup>9</sup> Participant playlist names including this one and all following ones are changed.

Nevertheless, this is something we can call “work” as it is visible that participants are putting conscious effort into achieving satisfaction in their playlists in varying degrees. For instance, B views his playlisting activities on Spotify as a research practice. He collects songs and creates playlists within self-created concepts. This creation and maintaining process takes time and effort, thus he spends dedicated time on his playlists to make sure the songs, as well as the listings are compatible with the concept. On occasions, he expressed how he feels the need to make changes in listings when he stops and thinks about it. He questions and drives himself, “how healthy is the flow of these, how right? It needs work.” For a further example, when I asked how he goes about starting a playlist, he responded that he first adds the ones he has in mind, then looks at it, and sometimes says to himself, “mate what is this, are you forming an all-star team? What nonsense is this?” This indicates that he reassesses and critiques his more instinctual, less cognitive initial work for the sake of some self-set (and socially influenced) criteria. The taking over of his cognitive efforts is also visible in times when he takes on a playlist again, sometime after he created it. For example, on a certain playlist “a band of that genre is too much on the front, [he] has added 20 [songs] of them. To see that 20 there begins to bother [him]. Then the next thing you know, 3 hours have passed and a 5-hour playlist has emerged. That is, on a session [he] sat down just to separate that 20 songs, [he has] created a whole new list.” He expressed that if he does not do this on occasions, his casual, “just listen” practices are affected: “... most of the time you create [the playlist] having in mind what comes after what. If you don’t, then it’s a *shift*<sup>10</sup> for you later on. Because [when] you listen to it and say ‘this does not [should not/will not] come after this my friend’ and you start to work on it.”

I have observed a similar understanding of work on curation in D’s narratives as well. When we were having a conversation regarding when she consumes and when she curates, she stated that her curatorial practices are aligned with his working hours, as she is a music writer. She stated, “I don’t do anything on the weekends.

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<sup>10</sup> He used the Turkish word *mesai*, which means “work shift”, “a day’s labour”.

There is no *shift* on the weekends, no adding or removing. On the weekends I just listen but when I go to work and turn the computer on, I start to listen and I start to think about music.”

As mentioned before, at the time of our first interview, she was trying to implement a “streaming diet” in order to possibly increase satisfaction. However, this was not a long-term implementation. On our second interview, she stated that at one point between interviews, “curiosity outweighed”. For D, curiosity is one of the key activators of digging<sup>11</sup>. On the matter of digging, Uzelli remarked that collecting music on digital realm is not a matter of collecting but a matter of being a “good discoverer, curator, digger, matcher”. Furthermore, he thinks that collecting on digital realm is “not that interesting but being a discoverer on digital realm is something precious.” However, the authenticity this preciousness provides, according to him, is short-lived since it is lost when someone else discovers your discovery. Thus, to Metin Uzelli, one should “keep doing it” to stand out as the “discoverer, popular, distinguished”. So, for Uzelli, the term “digger” has strong social implications. Collector and curator Murat Beşer also takes pride in being a good digger, but he associates the social status that music collections provide with the position of “owning something unique” and states that he does not primarily relate to this side of the practice. This aspect of the issue will be discussed under the section titled “Sharing” with participant narrative examples; however information needs does not necessarily operate within a sharing and social status framework. B’s processes of acquiring information is one example. The fact he identifies as an “indexer” is a suitable start.

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<sup>11</sup> Surprisingly, the term “digging” has not once been used by participants during our encounters but 3 of 5 industry representatives (Metin Uzelli, Murat Beşer and Deniz Kuzuoglu) mentioned this term, in English as it is, while speaking Turkish, each at least one point. Naturally, it is not plausible to make any generalisations about this, however I believe it is a detail that is worth mentioning.

### 4.1.3 Information on Information

Participant B expressed that he used to fill up notebooks of musical information, outputs of his research when he was younger. His relationship with the information and stories around the music culture he was interested in, drove him to seek more than what was easily available to him. His need of information is both fuelled by and fuels his consumption. Furthermore, this information need led B to incorporate musical information indexes as collectable items to his music collection. However, this collection did not live a long life with B, as he currently does not have them in his possession.

He stated that, during the 1980's, much like the lack of access regarding certain music containers, acquiring information regarding music was difficult as well. He expressed that "the notebooks were actually like a research. There's a sea [of other music, information etc.] out there, but there's no internet back then. There was no such good education either. No [foreign] language... How are you going to find [information and new music]? There was the American Culture Library<sup>12</sup> in Alsancak, there were a lot of music encyclopaedia. I would study them for hours just for fun. Well you've listened to a record; you can't find anything about it. The cassette stores don't have it, other places don't have it. When you're looking for who this person is, what this is and it's Emerson, Lake & Palmer, [it seems]<sup>13</sup> the guy did the vocals on three King Crimson albums, then formed that X band, formed a band called Asia in the 80's. After that the notebooks began to get filled with 'I was able to reach these', 'I wasn't able to reach these'."

B mentioned this path of research as "triggers", jumping from one piece of information to another, as a discovered piece triggers a new one. This mechanism of cultural outputs throughout his "research" work on his playlists is noteworthy in

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<sup>12</sup> The library of İzmir Turkish - American Culture Association, founded in parallel with Turkey's initiation to NATO and establishment of NATO and US military bases in İzmir, Turkey.

<sup>13</sup> Use of "Heard Past Tense" introduced in the Research Methodology chapter.

the manner that it actually is digging but does not necessarily serve a social purpose at face value. The workings of his discovery, collection and curation practices seems to be defined by this curiosity and discipline. His discoveries are mostly the result of this “triggers” and the research that follows. In the centre of his curiosity is an “island”<sup>14</sup> he accumulated when he was younger. The songs and bands he discovered back then in a context, which he defines as a “refuge”, are perennial. These cornerstones trigger new routes, and he follows. When asked about how he finds the songs he works with, he responded by stating that most of the “genres there are the ones [he already] like[s]”. Some of his playlists root from “information that [he] already know[s], follow[s] and want[s] to set the game around and some are [through] *following the trail...*”

On digital interfaces like Spotify or even YouTube, this trigger mechanism manifests itself as “navigation” and becomes a provided experience. Interfaces’ present users’ algorithmic recommendations alongside their current consumption. These recommendations have the potential to start a trail that consists of a series of content, in our case songs that trigger each other. There are also instances where provided triggers and effortful research can be combined. For example, D’s “Dark Synths” playlist is the result of a cross-platform discovery. She stated that it started with a curiosity that drove her to seek out more and a need to share a find with a friend. The story begins with D discovering a song on Spotify’s Release Radar. Her first reaction was to think, “I should get in on this style already”. Sometime later she wanted her friend to have a listen, typed the name of the song on YouTube since it was conveniently open on a TV nearby. As a search result, a YouTube playlist came up. The playlist “blew [their] mind” and with each song, D went “crazier”. She expressed that this moved her to carry the playlist, to copy it song by song, a playlist curated by someone else, to Spotify and use it as a hub for her further “Dark Synths” research. This initial YouTube playlist was the result of a personal curatorial practice underwent by someone else and it triggered a line of research for

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<sup>14</sup> B’s concept of “island” will be discussed in detail in the Identity section of this chapter.

D. It is evident here that it is possible to incorporate algorithmic recommendations to an effortful research to acquire more information; it is also possible to incorporate others' work.

Instances where participants specifically used curations and archives composed by others to satisfy their own information needs that feed their curatorial activities directly, needs to be mentioned here. A, C and D all stated that at least one point in their research they used others' discoveries and curations. C expressed that she sometimes "make use of" others' playlists and follows playlists of some music bloggers she likes. D stated that there are people who she "trust[s] their taste in music" and "if something catches [her] attention [she] start[s] to listen. If [she is] impressed, [she] add[s]." Both C and D's practices within this context revolves more around Spotify and streaming, while A has a different practice.

By the time of our second interview, A started using a P2P file-sharing platform called Souseek again after some time for this process. He stated that apart from the primary objective of downloading his initial finds on Spotify to be archived and further sorted out on archival and DJing software such as rekordbox<sup>15</sup> or Traktor<sup>16</sup>, he started to make use of information regarding "how [one] other user put the song [he] found in folders, how they archived it and what else are there in those folders?"

Firstly, A's statement shows that the three practices Jones defines as finding/ re-finding, keeping and M-level activities (2007, p12), does not have to be mutually exclusive, as in his case, different stages of the workflow may incorporate all three at the same time. Furthermore and more specifically, this narrative indicates that A is showing interest in other peoples' archival orders. As he is trying to optimize his

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<sup>15</sup> As described on their website, "rekordbox is a free DJ software and app from Pioneer DJ that enables you to prepare and manage your music files for a DJ set." (Rekordbox, 2018)

<sup>16</sup> Traktor is DJ software developed by audio tech company Native Instruments. The software is designed mainly for DJ live performances, but since live DJing as a practice involves a use of active archive sweepings while on the stage, Traktor has a collection and archive functionality as well.

own, he is researching and getting ideas from other archivers' practices. He stated that the people he took interest in generally appear before him at the beginning of his practice on Spotify: "... I generally find those folders from the thing I caught on Spotify. I find something on Spotify, see that it keeps going to the same user [on Soulseek]... Then go to that user and try to understand their curation as well." This practice has an implication that A sees his practices as improvable and is open to outside inspirations if they show up in a natural way in his system. So it can be said that A's information need practices include a study of how other people deal with their information needs. In addition to the previously described two main definitions of information needs (a need *of* music and *about* music), this constitutes a slightly different aspect; an information need to understand information management activities.

Looking into others' archival practices on Soulseek was a point of topic for C as well. When I followed up on her previous answer about whether or not she is interested in others' Spotify playlists, to which she replied yes, she took the conversation to her previous practices on Soulseek. She stated, "On Spotify, there were times a couple of people caught my attention. But I can't say it was a thing as passionate as it was on Soulseek." I asked, why? She responded: "Maybe we lose our attention more quickly [now]. I mean, there are too many things to follow on Spotify. I mean it was a time that I was struck when I found something, like there's this guy in Russia and you feel like 'there is a treasure here' and you get struck over and over, something like that. On Spotify, there's too much data input like 'let me have a look at this one too, let's see what's flowing on the right [side of Spotify interface, 'Friend Activity'], who listened what, what's that let me have a look'..."

So in C's experience, her previous statements regarding the excess amount of "data" on the streaming environment, was also a defining factor for the "passion" she felt against others' curations. This excess amount of information is also often a burden to deal with if one is trying to make sense out of the acquired information. A's archival system is designed specifically to deal with this problem as A is managing

tens of thousands of songs cumulatively in his playlists and on his archival and DJing software. He is in search for efficiency in his discovery, collection and curation practices. He expresses his discontent regarding the lack of management tools Spotify has to offer to achieve his preferred level of efficiency, as he is taking care of every single one of his playlists on Spotify separately and this causes operational problems.

He stated, “I encounter something like this in my daily life or when I’m playing or trying to decide what to play. I need to find a song, need to find the song on certain criteria and I don’t keep songs in my mind like whose song it was. I need to access it over tags and tagging correctly is really important to me (...) For this, Spotify and iTunes’ own archiving systems fall short, they definitely fall short.” To compensate for this deficiency, he uses rekordbox, which he says has a step system. A collection section and another section for playlists. He can tag songs as he likes on rekordbox and find them using these tags to drag and drop to a playlist. He states, “Rekordbox is not a bad archiver” and “it has been better since [he] started using rekordbox but [he] thinks there may be a better organized system, a better way still.” It can be said that A’s views on this issue is a manifestation of his pursuit of efficiency in his practices. Since “[He feels he] need to be able to develop a method so that [he] can reach one track among 20,000 others in a minute.” He has an idea of what he wants and pushes interfaces and platforms to their limits in order to get what he wants and when he sees he cannot, he migrates to another, which he thinks is a more efficient one.

A’s statement makes available a mention of some key concepts of PIM once more. If we turn back to the model that was proposed on the Playlists and Digital Curation chapter, we could understand A’s system through the concepts, PSI (Personal Space of Information), PIE, (Personal Information Environment) and PIC (Personal Information Collection) (see Figure 3.2). He operates on multiple interfaces that serve different purposes. Spotify, iTunes, Traktor, Soulseek and rekordbox are PIEs, in this manner. Within each PIE, folders, playlists, archives are all individual

PICs. The sum of all these PICs in the PIEs, added together with additional non-interface-specific information constitutes A's PSI.

The reason he uses a multi-layered system with multiple PIEs is a result of his pursuit for archival efficiency. As he encounters limits of platforms and interfaces, he seeks other solutions outside. For instance, A's decision to yet again change archival platforms was made apparent on our second interview when we were having a conversation regarding Spotify's search filter affordances and about Spotify he said: "Also you can't make folder folders. Usually when I'm archiving tracks on Traktor, I'm using breakdowns. Let me show you an example (his computer was in front of us). Oh, by the way, I turned to Traktor rather than rekordbox. Because I realised I am getting the result here."

Technological restrictions like these and affordances of the platforms and interfaces A use, is a definitive part of his narratives. He pushes the limits of platforms and software to achieve a satisfactory level of efficiency in his system. For instance, on his first system the transfer of *bookmarked songs* from Spotify to downloading platforms was manual. He would have to search each and every track, album or artist discography manually, find them and download them. By the time of the third interview, since he could not export a Spotify playlist as a directory file that can be imported to other platforms and used by the platform to reconstruct the playlist via metadata information, he "had to start using iTunes. As the number of the songs and the pool began to get bigger, Spotify became unmanageable." This, inevitably affected A's system's efficiency and thus he sought solutions, which he found in using Spotify only as a discovery platform and migrating his archival practices elsewhere.

However, moving platforms is a process, which takes considerable time and effort. It also, has the potential to evoke a fear of loss. When C remembered now the results of her migration from Deezer to Spotify around 5 years ago, she stated, "That change was difficult for me. I left a lot of playlists there. I wanted to carry them,

then I was too lazy, couldn't find the time, so on. That's why I don't want to make changes very much." Since using multiple platforms for personal information management practices have the potential to complicate the process, and in that complication, one might lose some of the acquired information, it can be said that simpler systems where not much migration is evident have the potential to offer a safer environment to the curator.

Regarding tidying up her streaming, digital and physical assets, C expressed that "[she] like[s] knowing where everything is. It's not ok for [her] to live this thing, to not know where everything is at home." Through this statement, it can be argued that C's practices are, among other things, efforts to preserve information. Playlisting and bookmarking songs, for example, serves this purpose to get things in order. By ordering things, one creates and keeps information as to "where everything is". Both preservation and ordering are terms, which are prominently used and discussed in PIM as well as in curation literature. (ACLS, 2006; Jones, 2007; Yakel, 2007; Williams, John and Rowland 2009; Millar, 2010; Dobrev & Duff, 2015)

"Knowing where everything is" requires a certain archival system as well as careful maintenance. Metin Uzelli described this as "document discipline." He states that his family's business provided him with it: "Maybe because I'm a forgetful man and my father wasn't a highly educated man ... my father had respect for documents, records, recorded data. Contracts are very precious, valuable things. So are records. Consequently, preserving them, keeping them is a mission for us, 'a reason to be' rather than 'something nice to do'"

A's system for efficiency, B's notebooks, C's fear of loss and Metin Uzelli's "document discipline" are all different manifestations of practices regarding information of information. That is, information regarding the collected container or music as well as information regarding the information management systems. This shows that certain practices around both physical and digital, even

bookmarked collections converge in this context of information. That is, certain playlist practices are in line with curatorial and digital curatorial efforts in the sense of a need for information regarding the information items.

B and D expressed an awareness regarding the endless nature of this research. This need for information in the era of information abundance does not necessarily mean a given satisfaction for the curator. While talking about one of his playlists, B remarked on how he thought to himself, “I’m not sure if I’m giving electronic music the attention needs”. He stated that he still does not know if he is competent in that area and expressed that “not being competent is nice too; it means there are things still yet to discover.” On another example, at some point D concentrated her research on music of young people from North London that yielded a playlist she actively spent time on at the time of our third interview. Regarding her research and discoveries on this topic and others, she stated, “[It seems] I had a lot that I didn’t know. And I will always have.”

This endless search has the potential to manifest itself as a “worry” as well. C stated that at some point, she fiddled with the idea of creating and maintaining genre based playlists as well as her ongoing monthly playlist routine. However, she did not go through with it. She expressed, “Because I thought of it. Should I go into genre related things apart from the monthly ones? I realized I forgot; miss out on songs from [other people’s playlists]. To look at these things, to make a playlist for them... And then I found myself thinking what I should name it and even getting sad because I couldn’t find a name. I realized I had such a worry and I found it funny.” Through C’s narrative, it evident that “worry” is also a possible result of this urge as well as examples of heightened curiosity shown previously.

#### **4.1.4 Participant-as-Ally Contributions**

As previously stated in the Research Methodology chapter, this thesis considers participants as allies. Consequently, at the end of the third and final interviews, as

a final input to the study, the five key concepts presented (Information needs, Adding value, Memory, Identity and Sharing) were shared and how they will be used in the study was explained. The participants were asked to comment on these concepts within the boundaries of digital curation.

When asked about what “Information Needs” mean, A’s first reaction was not strictly about personal streaming playlists. His response was “When ‘need’ comes into play, it has an association like... but that’s not information, that’s data... It strikes me more like something like social media addiction, to need any information rather than a need of information about something.” So, his first response focuses around the weight of the word “need”. For him, it seems it has a negative connotation that made him think of a “social media addiction.” However, his last sentence actually is directly related with the multidimensional definition of information, presented at the beginning of this section. What he refers is not the information items encapsulated in containers themselves, but the information about them.

He differentiates “Information about something” and “any information”. Here, the differentiating factor is context. If we remember Bawden’s definition of *capta* (2001, p. 95), we can understand what A is saying in our terms: “the transformation from data to information as involving the addition of context, and hence meaning”. Considering the abundance of information comes together with a loss of focus and context, his reaction is in line with his efforts in efficiency and purpose. Thus, when asked to put the term into the context of personal streaming playlist practices, he responded in a different way. He stated, “When that factors in, the topic completely changes. An information need that a song creates made me think of the artist information of something I’ve listened to, the label they belong to, other people in that label and the information pool these will bring me to.” So, when context is given, he can identify with this key concept as a motivation for his practices. He expressed this motivation in words such as “this is good, I need to get some information about this.”

B approached the concept from a broader yet more personal perspective. He stated, “Well now, this is an important topic. When I look at it through myself, ever since the second year of junior high, I have this cause to get information, to develop my own information, for myself. To not be satisfied with the information I’m offered by my surroundings, to not make do with what I get from school when I was going to school, to not make do with what I’ve learnt from the military when I was there. And as a result, a constant work on getting information and with this, how should I put it, you feel safer or joyous or see the world as more definable.”

For him, the concept of information needs defines a state of simply not being satisfied with what is given and asking for more, “developing” more. He uses the word “cause”<sup>17</sup> to define his efforts to overcome this dissatisfaction. Furthermore, his insight regarding how the “constant work” that is needed to overcome this dissatisfaction results in him seeing the “world as more definable” is noteworthy. His research driven by his information needs is a tool for him to make sense of the world around him as well as a technology of self. (DeNora, 1999) This is an example of how the proposed five key concepts for understanding the position of personal streaming playlists within digital curation, are interconnected, since, as will be seen in its dedicated section, Identity, B’s information needs motivation is clearly related with his identity work.

Similarly, for C, information needs serve a more personal purpose. However, her responses point to a different connection with two other key concepts, memory and sharing. For her, her personal streaming playlist practices are a way of reminding herself about her previous self. She stated, “This reminds me of... Can you see how selfish my playlists are? It’s totally about informing myself, nothing to do with

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<sup>17</sup> The Turkish word he used was *dert*, as in *derdim var*, which literally means “problem”, “I have a problem”. This comes from a more common expression that goes *bir şeyi dert edinmek*, meaning “to occupy/concern oneself with”. I used the word “cause” instead of “occupation” or “concern” because *dert* implies a problem that is the root of an action and “cause” corresponds to this better.

others ... It's something that came completely out of the need to look back and see, by myself, my own need to inform myself about what things I've done."

She experienced some sort of a discomfort when she felt that when information needs is in question; her playlists are "selfish", not contributing to others. In this manner, it is visible to me that for C, the concept of information needs were loaded in terms of social interactions. The fact that she used a negative word such as "selfish" to describe the personal nature of her information needs shows that, for her, information, needing and/or sharing information has social implications. This will be discussed on the section titles, Sharing, however, the fact that C connects these two notions in her own personal example show further interconnectedness between key concepts.

When asked about what she is informing herself about, she responded: "What was I doing? (...) Yeah. Where I was, in what mood I was in also. With whom I was, on which locations mostly. Because, through that sound a lot of things come back. Of course, sometimes just a moment comes back but sometimes a period of time does." As will be discussed in further detail in the section titled, Memory, C's thought and practices regarding information needs are heavily connected to her keeping track of herself, then informing herself later on with previously created information.

D's response revolved around "teaching". She stated, "Music teaches me a lot of things (...) I wish it could teach everyone that much (...) It's either the stories or it's the artists or something. My admiration for the human being has changed a lot, I admire talent. And If I learn something from that talent, if something comes out of that story, I wish everyone would hear it too but I don't necessarily have a thing to tell stories." Her relationship with the information item and information within the item as well as information about the item (a song, music, info about music respectively) extends beyond the margins of music, since things, she learns from music affects other areas of her life. The fact that she used the word "teach" signifies the research aspect of her practices, her discoveries, her playlists, her blog posts and

articles, holds a noteworthy place in her life. In this manner, her motivations regarding acquisition and transfer of information is in line with Dobrev & Duff's digital curation definition that includes "dissemination" of information as a goal. (2015, p.97) The fact that D writes about music and now recently she is creating radio content about music will be further discussed in the Sharing section, however, her "wish" to share the information she acquired with others is consistent with a digital curator's approach to sharing curated information.

#### **4.1.5 Information Needs & Digital Curation**

Information needs is a concept that was coined to encapsulate personal streaming playlist curators' aforementioned practices and motivations. As stated in the beginning of the section, each participant has different yet contextually similar narratives regarding this concept. All narratives revolve around efforts to make sense of the musical environment the participants are in and the personalized environments they constructed out of what is presented as well as the outcomes of their conscious work. These information needs and the actions stemming from these needs are in line with both PIM and collection studies literature in ways that streaming playlist activities are definable within the concept of digital curation.

As explained in the Playlists and Digital Curation chapter, e-science's definition of digital curation makes use of some concepts that are directly related with information such as "discovery", "point of creation", "managing", "re-use" and "purpose". All these concepts are existent in participant narratives in various forms. Research and discovery is a significant aspect of all participant practices and each playlist discussed has a narrative regarding acquisition of needed information telling, "How it came to be". All participants manage and preserve their playlists in their own way to either keep it accessible for further use or the achieve a sense of completion through a learning process. When looked through an information perspective, A does it for efficiency, B does it for research, C does it to preserve

and D does it to share and make available. Thus, purpose is observed to be an effectively existent agent in these practices for these four participants.

Jones' remark on how information collections are "proxies that project desires" (2015, p.10) and Dervin's remark on how structure and order help people in sensemaking (Dervin, 1992), finds reciprocation in participant narratives in this manner. This projection of self via sensemaking activities is done by contextualizing readily and publicly available information in personal ways. This is in line with Dobрева & Duff's argument about "the ever changing face of digital curation". They claim that, digital curation is now increasingly about "preservation of the context of digital objects" (Dobрева & Duff, 2015, p.98) Participants all create these contexts or sometimes take up on others' concepts (as in the case of B's genre studies and D's "Dark Synths" playlists), personalize them, and preserve them. In terms of information needs, these activities are thus explainable via a study of digital curation.

Furthermore, implications of Kaye et al.'s "reasons for maintaining an archive and storing its contents" and McCourt's "desires" are also observed in terms of information needs, through Kaye et al.'s "finding it later" and McCourt's "desire for compacting". (Kaye et al., 2006; McCourt, 2006, p.250). Even though the practices in question revolve around *bookmarks* and not tangible or traditionally owned intangible objects, personal streaming playlist practices of the participants can still be understood and discussed via archive and collection literature. This supports this thesis' claim that personal streaming playlist practices can be positioned at the intersection of previous PIM and collection studies literature. Digital curation resides at this intersection and when thought in terms of information needs of a curator, personal streaming playlist practices can be positioned within the current understanding of the concept.

As music consumption experienced a paradigm change in the digital direction, the nature of the collectable object has transformed into an information item. This

transformation allowed discussion of personal streaming playlist curator participants' activities through information and PIM. At the intersection of collectable object and information item, a curator's motivation to access more and make sense of what is accessed is discussed under the concept of information needs, which has varying manifestations in participant narratives. Thus, information needs is observed to be a key concept in positioning of personal streaming playlist practices under the roof of digital curation.

## **4.2 Adding Value**

Value is a concept that has the potential to generate various discussions in many different aspects of the word. In terms of curation, value has two main connotations that this study is interested in. The first is conveyed by Millar, as described previously in the Playlists and Digital Curation chapter, and is directly related to the selection process. Millar states that the choice to keep something and to not keep some other thing creates value on a subjective basis. (2010) What is chosen is valuable, or as Jones puts it, "sacralised". (1994, p.320) The second connotation is regarding the altering of a whole via addition and omission of parts. This aspect drives upon the notion of the whole being greater than the sum of its parts. Bringing together these two aspects, value in our case should be understood as something the curator creates or adds via selection and via creating a whole. Thus, the concept "adding value" is defined with emphasis on selection and context creation. The assumption here is, selection and context are value, thus creating a whole with selected parts is adding value.

### **4.2.1 Cutting and Sewing**

After the discovery process as previously discussed in the Information Needs section, selection and context creation process take place. The remarks of Participant B, an artist, on the relationship between his collages and his playlists make a good starting point to discuss these notions.

B uses materials from any printed media to form collages with different narratives. What he does is effectively using parts to form a whole of a different nature. He creates a context with the possibly unrelated parts and via this creation, the whole constitutes something more and often something else than the parts. About the relation between his collage and playlist practices, he expresses a certain motivation as a common factor, a “creative energy”. B’s “creative energy” is often a prerequisite for his curatorial activities. He explains how he operates when he achieves this state as “putting things in order or scattering them”. He follows this first step by “chasing the images that form in his head” to reach music that suits that mood. About his collage works and playlist practices and the apparent resonance between them in terms of motivation, B states: “I mean indexing on Spotify, using it more in a curatorial fashion, cutting and sewing the image, to form it... The relationship between is direct.”

When I asked him about the “cutting and sewing” of the image and where he begins to do this, he replied, “That can change. Sometimes there’s an idea, to actualize the idea... I mean, I’m an archivist.” Here B creates a narrative for the whole of his curation process as a realization of an idea via a creative process. For B, that is natural since he is an “archivist”. B associates being an archivist as something that by default involves creating context for parts. His playlist curation processes are a result of a motivation to add value through context to disparate parts. His practices can be defined by what he chooses to use as a part and how he uses those parts to actualize the idea, which he defines as “cutting and sewing”. This is in its core a value-oriented practice in the form of a creative act.

Choice, here is a key concept of value. In his book titled *The Paradox of Choice: Why More Is Less*, Schwartz investigates the relationship between the abundance of available choices and satisfaction. Two key aspects of his views can be summed as “with all the options available, picking what you want takes more effort” and “freedom to choose has what might be called expressive value.” (2004, p.19 &

p.100) Deciding on what to pick is in itself, creating and adding value to the picked thing as well the picking process itself. This process is visible in A's filtering mechanism as well as D's two-playlist system for her most precious items. D explains how those two playlists operate as: "The songs in 'The ones I rise for'<sup>18</sup>, are old songs that I used to listen even before [Spotify], the songs that I know. From 'The ones I'm taken by lately', a lot of songs can go and the ones that deserve to pass to [The ones I rise for] will never leave again." Her use of the word "deserve" is a signifier that this process indeed is a value driven act, in which she assesses and deems particular songs valuable enough for her to "rise for".

However, the nature of these activities as creative or even artistic is a debatable argument. For instance, music writer and professional playlist curator Murat Beşer does not necessarily associate personal mix-tapes, which are effectively predecessors of streaming playlists, with curation. However, he thinks it is "something more". He states, "It contains a vital value, I think it is really precious. Because it really has true life experience in it and it has effort in it, an idea." Again, an emphasis on idea is apparent. This idea that encapsulates the parts and creates a whole effectively results in something more, an added value. Beşer emphasizes another aspect of this input as well, "true life experience" and "effort".

Curating in streaming platforms requires work, effort. Finding, keeping and m-level activities are cognitive work on the curator. If a curator is to achieve their goal, they have to work to get the parts, to create the context and to maintain the curation. However, compared to the physical era of recorded music, streaming era is heavily oriented to provide ease of use. This, by default, may result in a sense of devaluation of the content. Participant A, who sifts through thousands of songs and uses a filtering mechanism that uses value and context as separation criteria, contemplates on the ease of access on streaming platforms. He states, "Accessing everything doesn't bring a great freedom actually, you pass by most things before you can

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<sup>18</sup> As in, "please rise for our national anthem".

understand their value.” So, even before the curation is constituted by adding value to parts via creating context, even at the beginning of the selection process an understanding of initial value is in effect.

Participant A can access “everything” but this causes him to think he is unavailable to appreciate the value of a portion of that “everything”. Because an appreciation of music takes effort requires an investment of time, as well as mental and emotional work to varying degrees, in some aspect, A can be defined as what Schwartz calls a “maximizer”. (2004, p.4) By his definition, maximizers “spend a great deal of time and effort on the search.” (p.78) For a maximizer, with the abundance of the parts, an ability to access “everything” comes with the burden of increased effort. As this effort is spent, this investment is made; the part by itself becomes more valuable to the curator as now there is added value on it. Furthermore, as a whole is formed out of parts with added effort value on them, the context of the whole is heightened with the previous investment the curator made.

This investment can sometimes eat away from the consumption time of the curator but with efficiency, it is possible to concentrate more on the more valued, deserving songs. On our second interview, when I reminded A of his statement from the previous interview regarding how he could only spend 2-3 hours a week to “listen to music for pleasure” and the rest was for discovery, and asked him how things were on that front, he responded that he “increased it a bit”. He said this was because “[he] doesn’t have to discover new things anymore”. When I asked why, he replied, “Because my standards are set. The number of songs I try to discover now is, 10, 15. More than that happens to be too much. The issue of what I am going to play on what occasion is clearer now ... Since I try to understand my archive better instead of enlarging it; I can now focus on listening, listening for pleasure. Also I increased my discovery efficiency greatly. I can do the same thing in a much shorter time now.” As I follow up on the subject, he began to tell me this happened because he can tell apart what he does not like at first sight more clearly now. He stated that he now “spend[s] less time on things that are going to be rubbish later.” So in A’s

case, the amount of effort he put in his filtering process decreased as he managed to optimise his system, resulting in a better yield in terms of what is deemed by A as valuable enough to move forward within his system. Schwartz's "maximization", in this manner, even though an initial ordeal, ends up as a value elevation process.

As another instance of filtering to elevate value, industry executive Metin Uzelli is in possession of a large catalogue, accumulated by his family's record label and cassette production company, Uzelli Kaset. He stated that he cannot say that he values every single piece as much as the other and also on various occasions, he had to go through the catalogue for different reasons, which led him to discover patterns and contexts. He decided to bring forth one of the patterns he had discovered, and with the help of Kornelia Biniewicz, a compilation album titled *Uzelli Psychedelic Anadolu*, which consists of a selection of psychedelic Turkish pop and rock songs from 1970s and 1980s, was released. (Uzelli Psychedelic Anadolu, 2017). What Uzelli did was to filter, select and curate his catalogue to produce this record. By doing this, he added value to his catalogue as well as to the initial songs in the record, via the context now they reside in.

Following Beşer's statement, another contextual aspect of the digital curation is "true life experience". The idea, the context overarching the songs that compose a playlist can be of private and personal nature stemming from certain elements of the curator's life. These elements or rather these factors upon which a curator creates a context and assesses the value of the collectable can vary. A's and B's playlists have often almost academic or technical context. A is using an elaborate filtering system based on sub-genres for his DJing work and B is following and recreating certain cultural cores that somehow touched and touches his life. Even though these processes certainly are personal, C's and D's playlists have a more personal core when it comes to context: life experiences.

As participant C's monthly playlists act as a diary for her past three years, they constitute a suitable example to discuss personal context. C stated that she keeps

some songs on the basis of their “connection to a moment” even if sometimes she is not entirely fond of the particular song. She states that she does this since she “want[s] to remember that feeling and the song allows [her] to recall that.” From this statement, it can be seen that for C, there can be more powerful criteria in effect than her liking. These criteria are related with the keeping, preserving of a moment, a memory. As her practices heavily revolve around the term memory, this will be discussed further in detail in the appropriate section, however, regarding value, this statement offers a new perspective. C constructs a context for her monthly playlists, which adopts her current experiences as the core idea. Throughout the interview and observation process, I have observed that this idea has the potential to outweigh her taste as well as what may constitute as “good music” to her. For C, the particular song acts as a sort of technology that allows her to remember. Every song is tied to a memory, be it strong or weak. As the songs accumulate in each month’s playlist, they organically form a broader narrative of her experiences in that month. She uses these monthly playlists effectively as memory containers and for her, the context created has more value than the sum of the songs together, since the songs and thus the playlist comes attached with memories. Since a value driven term, preservation, is one of the key aspects of curation in its traditional sense, a motivation towards preserving one’s memories via digital curation of streaming songs can be viewed as a collection of otherwise irrelevant parts, finding meaning and personal value through context. This can also be seen in venue director Deniz Kuzuoğlu’s narratives. She states that by making a collection, she is creating a “museum” of herself. When I asked her if she thinks what she is doing is a form of curation, she confirmed and stated “Actually what I’m doing is... I am making a curation out of things that have touched my life.”

#### **4.2.2 Listing**

Since context has such a key role in playlist curation, the fundamental structure of the playlist can be read in terms of context. Playlists have a linear flow. That is, they are essentially one dimensional in terms of temporality: One song comes after

another, no two songs can be played at the same time. There is a listing. Although this listing is not a necessity for a curated playlist, as can be seen in A's "pools of songs" that serve his filtering system or even in the very existence of the shuffle, for some curators such as C, listing is crucial.

In the Playlists and Digital Curation chapter's User Scenario section, I imagined Rob from Nick Hornby's *High Fidelity*, who lists his records not alphabetically, not chronologically, but "autobiographically" (1995). Much like Deniz Kuzuoğlu, Rob is "making a curation out of things that touched [his] life." This is significantly visible in C's playlists as well. She adds songs to her monthly playlists as they come and never changes the listing, thus effectively creating a linear temporal line of autobiographical input. She states, "The listing is important. I'm trying to track the scenes of my life, what went where, where it got connected to, that's why... I mean it meshes with the way life goes and that's why I want to keep it that way."

Since C meticulously tries to track her life through her playlists, for the sake of the fidelity of the record she is keeping, the track listing should be kept untouched. This creates what can be called a cipher that can only be deciphered with C as the password. Without the introduction of C's personal context, the listing does not necessarily add up to any specific meaning, but with the inclusion of C's agency as the password, a whole new meaning is available. This inclusion is essentially adding value to the songs and the playlist. For C, listing is a form of context.

#### **4.2.3 The Whole**

Listing as context can be observed in a broader sense than the autobiographical approach: the perceived and created harmony of the songs between each other. Compatibility of parts to the whole and the compatibility between consecutive parts is often a form of regulation of consumption. By putting the songs in a desired order, a curator allows themselves a seamless consumption session in which the narrative

of the playlist, via either technical aspects such as tempo or tone, or a more personal constructed meaning, flows without the need of an intervention.

Furthermore, listing is basically the basis of a playlist, as manifested in the name of the phenomenon. The order of songs lies close to the centre of the context construction and it is a concept far from exclusive to the streaming era. Since, as explained before, music consumption has a linear temporality and the question of “what comes next” has been around even before recorded music. Thus, it is plausible that streaming curators acquired practices to answer that question on a different music consumption technology than streaming. D, for instance, states that she started the whole “these songs should follow this one thing back then, sitting in front of the radio all day.” She expressed that this practice is regarding a sought-after general sense of compatibility between songs. D seeks “harmony” in her playlists. She stated that, for example, after a discovery and adding session, she turns back and checks if everything is to her liking and is harmonious. It can be seen here that this motivation to achieve harmony has the potential to override the quick decisions made while on a discovery session. For D, it can be said that the harmony of the whole can be more valuable than the satisfaction of discovery and keeping.

Regarding the value of a particular song in playlist, C has a similar understanding. When asked if she sees any difference between singular elements of her curations, she replies, “That’s meaningful in a whole. If I take [that song] and put it in another month’s playlist, it loses most of the thing for me, I mean it’s about integrity and the chronology of it.” What D defines as harmony and C as integrity is defined as chemistry by B. B expresses that once he is satisfied with the composition of the whole, he is reluctant to make more additions. He states, “Sometimes you like what you’ve done, this list is one of those, and I don’t add any other songs because I like this thing now, the chemistry.”

For B this chemistry is definitively personal. Even though he is trying to make sense of certain moods and genres via curating playlists with an “archivist’s” diligence, his criteria for what belongs to the whole and what does not stem from personal judgement. For example, for his progressive rock playlist, he felt the need to make explanations about some songs. He stated, “No one would put this band in a progressive playlist but I think this song is like that.” So, for B, even though the practice is pursued with set and explained rules not unlike he is following what one may call a scientific curiosity, the roots of what constitutes the chemistry is indeed very personal. He has an understanding of what music is suitable for him and what music is not, and this understanding at times overrides his initial discovery and keeping practices, much like D. B states that, for some songs he previously added to one of his playlists, he thinks “It should not have a place in my music scale” and proceeds to remove them from his playlists. B’s evolving understanding of his musical scale is where the chemistry he seeks gets constructed. The chemistry, integrity or the harmony is the added value on the playlist and it stems from personal taste and judgement.

#### **4.2.4 Content, Context and Experience**

For a curator to act on personal taste has the potential to take upon an intellectual role. Murat Beşer constructs his collection solely on the basis of his evaluation of “good music”. He states that, “I have never bought a record that has been deemed valuable by some other collector’s criteria, just to make it a part of a collection or just because it has a ‘collection value’, I won’t do it. For me, the sole criterion is that the record contains good music and for me the value of that record can only be measured by the music it contains.” Beşer evaluates the content and makes decision based on that evaluation. However, even though the content seems to be in the spotlight here, context still is the definitive factor. Beşer’s idea of what good music is and also his conceptualization of what his collection should include is contextual.

Even though Beşer is collecting physical records, the general idea behind creating a context for physical collections and streaming curations are in line. A value driven selection and context creation process is common in both cases. Though there are some certain definitive differences, such as the financial value of a song or a record. As previously discussed, the nature of what is being bought and sold and the commodity status of the object, platform or the experience are separating factors between physical, digital and streaming. However, if we take a step back and try and see the bigger picture, we can see that the discussion can be expressed in terms of content and context.

Musician and producer Safa Hendem, who does not necessarily define himself as a collector or curator, associates being a collector with a motivation to “sell it later”. Obviously, for tangible objects, financial value can and does extend beyond personal value for certain line of collectables including physical records. Although, in terms of uniqueness and ownership, streaming era postulates a completely different playing field, the basis of value is still very much related with the context. What makes, say a 30-year-old, limited edition, mint condition record valuable is not necessarily the content but the context. It is not directly about what *it* is but in what context *it* is *it*. The value of the object or information item is constructed socially and personally, and it has the potential to exceed a supposed objective value of the nature of the actual thing. At this point, an explanation regarding what has changed from physical to streaming in terms of context and content from Metin Uzelli can be useful.

Uzelli looks at what is bought by the consumer in both cases: “You are the owner of the thing you buy on physical (...) But actually, what you own is a right to use the content under certain conditions. What you own is a legal licence. But with that licence you are given audio and you preserve it (...) That audio... How you consume it creates an experience for you. Consequently, there exists an experience that was not sold to you but you own it anyway via the purchase. That experience is not guaranteed by the seller, but it actually is what you have purchased ... On

digital, again you buy a licence, a legal, limited right. And to it a media is attached. How you access that media is again a matter of experience. But this time, you buy the experience. If it was just media, it wouldn't have mattered whether you listened to it on Apple or Spotify. Listening to the same thing on Apple and Spotify offers different experiences. During the physical era, it was just a matter of retail experience, where you buy the record from. Now it's different.”

The experience Uzelli defines is an outcome of the context in which the content is consumed. You can listen to the same song on vinyl or on a streaming service, the content is the same. The context, in terms of mechanics and politics, is different. However, in both cases the relationship is defined by the rule of the context over the content. So when a collection of a number of these content containers are in question, the context stands out as an overarching, added value. If we bring together the effort factor and relationship between the context and experience, the term ritual comes up as a suitable topic of discussion.

#### **4.2.5 Ritual**

About the cassette culture Participant B states: “We liked the ritual of it.”<sup>19</sup> This statement shows how he defines music practices that revolve around the act of listening on a specific container format as a whole “culture”. In B's case, apart from the cultural existence of the audio cassette, the technological and social aspects of the whole practice is a part of the experience. These arguably complementary parts of the experience drove B to call the activities around music apart from the direct listening practices as the “ritual of it”. B expresses that for him, this was absent in CD. He states that he did not like the CD very much and even “got disconnected with music” during the CD era: “Apart from buying the things I think were very important, I did not have a serious CD archive.” Something noteworthy happened

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<sup>19</sup> Here B's use of plural subject “we” is noticeable. This use can be understood as B talking on behalf of a group of people. His friends from his generation, or his generation as a whole. The fact that B is 18 years older than me and the conversation being about his youth, he might have felt the need to represent his whole generation to a representative of a later one.

when I asked him if this disconnection was due to digitalisation or just his life taking a different turn. He replied it might be because his life progressed “in a weird way” but digitalisation must have an effect on it as well. He stated, “You know what Benjamin calls ‘the cult value of the object’. The cassette had a cult value but CD didn’t ... After the cassette I couldn’t digest the CD as an object.”

It would be a good idea to have a look at the term B is referring to via Walter Benjamin’s seminal work, *The Work of Art in the Times of Mechanical Reproduction*. (2007) The terms ritual value and cult value are quite important parts of Benjamin’s work and although in my opinion B may have confused cult value with ritual value, he may have a solid point. Benjamin states that the ritual function of the work of art is “never entirely separated” from the existence of it “with reference to its aura.” (2007) He further states that, in his time the ritualistic basis of the work of art is in serious decline and claims this is due to the fact that “mechanical reproduction emancipates the work of art from its parasitical dependence on ritual.” (2007)

Music recording itself is a form of mechanical or digital reproduction, be it any form. So what Benjamin is referring to is not the change of value when the music is transferred from one record container to another, but rather the recording process itself, separating the “aura” from the work of art. However, if we look at B’s narrative of his experiences, he conveys a story of ritual around the audio cassette that allows him to access music. Though the work of art lost its original authenticity by the act of initial recording. Benjamin calls these practices “politics” instead of “rituals”. However, in the form B experiences these practices, he sees a ritual and a cult value. This may be due to the certain physical nature of the cassette and B’s identification as a collector. It can be seen that while writing about art collectors, Benjamin states that the “collector who always retains some traces of the fetishist and who, by owning the work of art, shares in its ritual power.” Even though what B collects, audio cassette was not the authentic work of art, it still has a fetishistic presence and in B’s views and Benjamin’s remark, it can be said that via the

ownership relationship B has with his cassettes, he shares a ritual power. This existence of this ritual power, however, is independent of the form and is directly related with the experience. Experiences may vary depending on the nature of the container, but every container, be it physical or digital, has accompanying rituals at least in the form of interface experience.

On a parallel note, Mehmet Cem Ünal thinks that the value of physical containers of music is not defined by convenience but by ritual. About the CD, he stated that, “I think what’s pleasurable about it is the ritual ... You buy a good, quality CD and it sits there. It’s like studio gear. Like how we have the tape recorder in the studio (which they do not use for recordings anymore due to the advent and rise of digital recording technologies).” Similarly, when I asked Deniz Kuzuoğlu what she buys when she purchases a vinyl record, she stated that what she buys is something “very valuable” due to the effort put in on the object as well as the content. For her, vinyls are “valuable in a meta sense” as well, meaning she values the objects on their tangible existence. In this sense, this value postulates a necessity of care. For instance, she stated that when putting back a vinyl record back in its case, she would do it holding the case upside down so that the inside will not get dusty and accumulated dust would not damage the record (something she learned from a more experienced record collector, Murat Beşer). She differentiates her relationship with mp3s and streaming from her vinyl collection in this sense, on the basis of physicality. This “meta sense” Kuzuoğlu speaks of refers to a fetishistic aspect of a collectable object as well as the accompanying ritualistic value apparent in the form of consumption. Since the curator associates a certain value with the content, she creates or sustains a context where this value is preserved and heightened through ritual.

A similar difference is expressed by Metin Uzelli as well. Uzelli family use to have a chain of active record shops in various places in Istanbul. In 2001, Metin Uzelli started a “kiosk” project where instead of CD sample listening stations, which had to use one of the actual products in every store, listeners would be able to sample

listen ripped digital audio files. Via this project, Metin Uzelli accumulated a large digital archive for his company and himself. Looking back, he still thinks this was a very good business decision but personally, he does not enjoy consuming this archive as much as the previous physical one. He stated, “Because it was so easy to skip. You wouldn’t have to tolerate any songs and wouldn’t love what you didn’t tolerate. Music requires a bit of compassion, attention. It requires an effort to understand, to digest. Today, the listening habits this digital environment provides us with drives us away from this. On one hand, it is something very comfortable, but on the other, there is a serious pile of art that we overlook.” Metin Uzelli adds that it is much worthwhile to try and understand this new experience, instead of deciding which is better in what way.

On the topic of ritual, I have shared with Mehmet Cem Ünal and Safa Hendem an experience I had with the composition produced by Peter Broderick for the project Heterodyne by Fiona Hallinan. (Sesigür, 2016, April 10) Hallinan composed a musical piece for the ferry ride across the Bosphorus from Eminönü pier to Kadıköy pier. The app only works if the user is in the vicinity of the Eminönü pier, and the user is instructed to press play right as the ferry leaves the pier. The piece is approximately as long as the ride and it accompanies the scenery and creates a new experience for the user/passenger.

As musicians themselves, Ünal and Hendem commented on this idea of having to “pay for the experience” as a ritual value. Ünal calls this “an investment” and one invests on an experience because it’s not “readily and easily available”. I asked them, “so then it’s about ease being taken away?” to which they both confirmed. Ünal stated, “Because when it’s easy, it becomes cheap. When it’s difficult...” Hendem takes over, with a view on the issue from a musician’s perspective: “Effort! You gave them something, to listen to that, you give something from yourself. Because that person gave it their months, days, whatever... Now you take the trouble to give it half an hour of your time.” Similarly, when I asked venue director Kuzuoğlu if she sees any connection between collectors and concert-goers, she

stated: “A collector is someone who values this thing. Consequently, someone who cares is more prone to going to gigs.”

Here we encounter the notion of effort again. However, this time value addition through effort is present not in the selection process but in consumption. The ritual value surrounding the consumption of a work of art unavoidably creates an investment opportunity, through which heightened experience, thus added value is possible.

#### **4.2.6 Participant-as-Ally Contributions**

As a final step to the interviews, participants were asked to comment on the concept of “adding value” within the context of digital curation.

When asked to comment on “adding value”, A felt the need to distinguish and separately talk about “adding value” and “attributing value”. He defined “adding value” as “seeing the potential in something and making it more valuable”, his “attributing value” definition, on the other hand, is as an activity that “may contain illusion”.

He feels “adding value” is more in line with his playlist practices. His idea of adding value, however, is not an addition to the singular object but to the contextual whole. That is to say that when he selects and adds a song to one of his playlists, the song adds the value to the playlist, not necessarily the other way around.

Here, A speaks of the playlists, which are at the end of his filtering system, the most refined, ready-to-play ones. In his case, every time a song deserves to pass through multiple levels of filtering it results in an increased value in the final playlist it ends up. It is notable that he felt the need to distinguish “adding value” from “attributing value”, Since he is using a complicated and effortful process for selection, it is understandable that he is wary of attributing false value to certain songs, thus creating an “illusion”. After all, his whole system is indeed a distillation process

and what is left of the process is the most valuable and with every addition to a final playlist, the overall value of the whole increases.

For B, curation does not necessarily associate with adding value but with becoming aware of an inherent value: “When I look at the way I establish relationships with things; a thing already has value, you become aware of it (...) If you are not making art, making music, you cannot attribute a value to something out of nowhere. That’s a creative activity. Or it can be this: If you are taking this archiving of music and feeding it back to people while putting something extra on top of it as a DJ or a producer, that’s fine. Apart from that, what we do can only be becoming aware.”

B is an active artist. As previously stated, for both his collages and his playlist, he feeds from the same core, a creative energy. However, when it comes to value, B thinks that personal playlist curation is not necessarily an artistic endeavour. This is in line with Murat Beşer’s view, which deems playlists as not necessarily artistic but “something more”. In B’s case and his view, the processes of playlist curation does not add value to a thing. The whole endeavour is rather an effort to be aware of the existing value. For B, an added value occurs only when the curation is shared, which will be discussed further in the section titled Sharing.

C was at first not able to identify with “adding value” and upon clarification she took some time to think, started to briefly talk about her playlists and then decided that she did not want to talk about this topic for personal reasons.

D associates added value with the relationship of her music with her daily life. She expressed that music compliments her daily life and this interaction creates something bigger than the sum of the parts. She defined this as her life’s soundtrack and stated, “I don’t want to get into that cliché but that can be considered as adding value.” This relationship of music with everyday life points to a significance of the context yet again. Tia DeNora has deeply explored the relationship of music

consumption with everyday life and regarding the “soundtrack” phenomenon states: “To be in control ... of the soundtrack of social action is to provide a framework for the organization of social agency, a framework for how people perceive (consciously or subconsciously) potential avenues of conduct”. (2013, p. 17) By curating a playlist for everyday activities, one takes (at least partial) control of the context of their social agency. This interaction by itself creates certain senses of added value for the curator’s experience. In this manner, curating a soundtrack for everyday activities is a form self-regulation as well as an opportunity to achieve a heightened experience.

#### **4.2.7 Adding Value & Digital Curation**

Adding value is defined in the context of digital curation by British Library’s Digital Lives Research Projects and by the call for papers for *Archival Science: Information Journal on Recorded Information*’s volume 15, issue 2, “Special Issue on Digital Curation on June 2015” (Williams, John and Rowland 2009, p. 342; Dobрева & Duff, 2015, p. 97) as an activity performed on a collection, archive or a singular element of these. Both definitions, as previously explained in the Playlists and Digital Curation chapter, puts the nature of the cyberspace in the centre of their understanding; that is, the adding value to a digital collectable object or information item can only be understood through a new view on the subject that champions the context.

As Dobрева and Duff claim, digital curation is mainly interested in the “preservation of the context of digital objects”. (2015, p. 98) This is in line with the seminal term this thesis chooses, *capta*. If we remember Bawden’s definition of the term as “the transformation from data to information as involving the addition of context, and hence meaning”, the relationship becomes clearer (2001, p. 95). This meaning is intrinsically personal and for each participant and industry representative who took part in this study, different yet similar narratives regarding the creation and preservation of context via digital curation is apparent.

A's filter practices (as a "maximizer") are a manifestation of creation of an efficient and distilled *capta*, B personalizes known musicals contexts such as genres and waves and preserves these as an "archivist", C preserves a projection of her life experience by contextualizing disparate parts of otherwise less value and meaning rich nature and D picks "deserving" songs and an heightens their value by putting them in value-oriented categories. All of these practices are understandable and definable by key digital curation concepts and thus allows for a positioning of personal streaming playlist practices as a function of digital curation.

The value added, however, is observed to be less about the object but rather about a derivative of experience and context. To repeat the discussion stemmed from McCourt's statement regarding how with the digital revolution loss of physical form separated value from the physical form and how the cyberspace, the platform of experience now becomes the commodity (2006, p. 250 & p. 252), the value adding process is now manifested in the curatorial activities themselves. The state of the meaningful whole created by the curator and the ritualistic nature of curating and consuming is where the added value resides. This observation is in line with Jones' previously discussed statements about the shifting status of the collector as individuals who "remove an item from the secular, profane, undifferentiated realm of the commodity, and ritually transform it into a personally and socially significant object" (1994, p. 320).

This personalisation of content via contextualisation and ritualistic practices is observed in participant narratives as an effort to communicate with their surroundings as well as with themselves by making use of information items on a commodified platform. This transforms the whole process and adds personal value and personal meaning to commonly available data by creating *capta* and context. Consequently, adding value is useful if we are to understand how personal streaming playlists are positioned within the area of digital curation.

### **4.3 Memory**

The existence of a relationship between music and memory, especially autobiographical memory is a well-known phenomenon and to this day a currently studied subject. (Jäncke, 2018 & Janata, Tomic & Rakowski, 2007) Collecting and curating music containers has strong ties to this relationship. All collections are accumulated over time, through which one lives various life experiences. These experiences leave traces on the containers' as well music's projection in one's mind. Janata, Tomic & Rakowski's work show that "brief musical fragments" are useful if one is to investigate autobiographical knowledge. (2007, p.847) If this is the case and collectors are indeed collecting information in the form of brief musical fragments, then through Neil Beagrie's previously discussed remarks regarding personal digital collections, claiming these are indeed "expanding digital memory collections" (2005), we can construct a basis to study the effect of memory as a motivation for personal streaming playlist practices.

To take the first step, if we follow Millar's previously discussed remarks on "keeping" (2010), then memory and the concept of preservation gets closer to each other. . Thus, it is plausible to discuss narratives of preservation provided by participants and industry representatives to investigate the position of personal streaming playlist within digital curation.

#### **4.3.1 Preservation**

If something is deemed valuable, be it for the purpose of "finding it later" as one of Kaye et al.'s "reasons for maintaining an archive and storing its contents", or to maintain a personal connection to relive a past input, one has to preserve it. (2006) This preservation is primarily done within people's own mind, in their memory. Tools and technologies help us create gateways to access parts of our minds, which are otherwise harder to access after the initial creation of the certain memory information. For a digital curator on personal streaming playlists, this is done by

keeping songs and contexts, preserving and maintaining them. In Participant A's case, this process of preservation results in multiple playlists that has capped the 10.000 songs limit of Spotify.

As I was recapping the extent of the observation period that would take place between the first and the second interview, while we were wrapping up the first one, A confidently stated that he would not be removing any tracks from any of his playlists. He expressed that this was a newly set rule he started to implicate on his practices. When asked why he does not remove tracks, he replied, "I used to. Then I realized I wrongly evaluate songs a lot, depending on my mood. You can undo a positive wrong evaluation. When a negative wrong evaluation results in deletion, there may not be any way back ... Instead of [deleting], I increased the number of filter layers. It passes through 3-4 filters before it reaches the end. Nothing too bad ends up in the final layer anymore. But I don't delete anymore." Indeed, throughout the six weeks between 16 August and 3 October 2017, he did not remove any songs from his playlists. His remark on why he does not delete can be read as an example of "fear of loss" (Kaye et al., 2006), which Jones prescribes metaphorical "walls" (Jones, 2012, p.17) to deal with. A is using the filter mechanism as a replacement for removing songs which is safer and presumably leaves less space for this fear of loss. Battling this phenomenon is done by a process of preservation, in A's case, by using inputs in Spotify playlists to accommodate information that is useful to him. Thus, these playlists effectively act as supplementary memory for A.

Similarly, D feels that throughout the periods in which her consumption on Spotify was excessive, she "lost songs". She expressed that she uses her playlists to "not forget" the songs that she liked and picked. However, excessive consumption damaged this whole process for her. Even though she liked songs as in, she added them to her library, or even if she added them to her playlists, they got "lost" in a sense and she either does not have memories regarding those or simply does not remember what the song was. In this case, the mere action to "preserve" on Spotify, did not effectively work for D as a memory supplement mechanism due to lessened

initial connection resulting from the large amount of input. The limit where this amount becomes a problem is extremely personal. For A, it can still not be a problem after thousands of songs and for D; it is a problem with much less.

Viewing her two specific playlists, which she uses to store songs she discovers from Spotify's Discover Weekly, is useful. These two playlists, even though they differentiate by name and in terms of how valuable they are for D, are a continuation of one another since she created the second one because the first one "had no space left". Spotify's song cap for a playlist is 10,000, which Participant A often reaches with the playlists on his filter's first level, but this is not the "space" limit D is talking about. She is speaking of a personal limit, which she thought she reached. As discussed before, the results of excessive consumption - diminished value and damaged or non-existent memory - bothers D. To not allow a "loss" she uses a second playlist, creating a different gateway, and adds songs that she does not want to "miss".

In order not to "lose" or not to "miss", D utilizes her writing as a secondary mechanism. Since D is an active music writer, her pieces have a parallel role in her life with her playlists when it comes to the topic of memory. On our third interview, I asked her if she still has a sense of anxiety regarding losing songs due to excessive consumption as she expressed, she had on the first interview. She stated that now she does not, thanks to her writing: "I don't anymore because I'm writing more and since I am a person who turns back and reads the things they write, I don't have anxieties like 'oh the songs are getting lost'."

In D's case, writing and curating act in parallel to serve a similar purpose. She is utilizing both to achieve a sense of connection to her past valued findings. This mechanism, however, does not necessarily have to work these two parts in parallel. Participant C, for instance, expressed that one may have taken another's place: "I use things to recall, it's very functional. For instance, I used to write and draw more; [playlisting] may have replaced those."

If we bring together D's narrative regarding her writing and C's statement about how playlists may have taken the place of her writing and drawing, a pattern occurs. In terms of memory and preservation of experience and emotions, writing and curating playlists may have a similar role which, in our case appears to be interchangeable as in playlisting can take writing's place and vice versa to satisfy a purpose regarding memory. Again, C describing her practices as "keeping a diary" support this observation. In this case, at the end of the day, it is about memory and preservation; and curating, writing, drawing etc., while having their distinctive and largely different properties, are mere technologies to serve memory in their own way.

All four participants have expressed they had collected and/or still do, and even curated objects or information items too other than their streaming playlists. The effort to preserve can manifest itself beyond different types of collectable objects and information items. In Metin Uzelli's case, preserving objects that has ties to the past of his record label manifests in a different form. Even though he does not define himself as a collector, apart from his label's master recordings, Metin Uzelli owns and showcases in his office a collection of old Facit mechanical calculators. When I asked him about any connection between his Facits and his music he expressed that it all comes down to memories tied to them. He stated, "I cannot say that I'm a collector. But if I am one, I can say that I collect memories since the reason I kept these Facit calculators is not about the calculators themselves (...) These calculators were all actually used in my father's offices. I haven't bought any of them from outside. You know, a collector is someone who seeks and hunts down things. These ones fell on my lap. Consequently, I am not a collector but the reason I keep these and preserve them is the things they remind me of."

In Uzelli's case, music and other artefacts belonging to the context created by and around the label, such as calculators, act as a technology to preserve the connection to the past of a record label and to his family's past. Regarding the connection

between, he further stated, “All these are a timeline<sup>20</sup>. They all have marked dots on them during a period of time and when I face these products<sup>21</sup>, I return to that dot and to be honest this experience is priceless.”

### 4.3.2 Connections

Uzelli’s use of the word timeline indicates a linear temporality, on which one can track and recall their past. Participant C used this exact word to express the purpose of her playlists: “It has a function in my personal timeline.” This timeline can consist of “dots”, as Uzelli stated, or connections to certain other elements.

For pieces of his record collection, Murat Beşer stated, “For me records have connections to people, events, dates and even to some political incidents and some cultural fabrics. I can say that every record’s memory includes these things and I have written about them in my articles.” (Beşer, 2016) Again, the relationship between writing and music in the context of memory is visible. But more importantly, Beşer remembers records with the connections they have and then re-presents and recontextualizes them in his articles.

Similarly, Participant B stated he kept notebooks of music information back in the 1980s. He calls these chronological notebooks, “indexes”. He stated, “I used to group [the notebooks] in my own way and look at what I had.” When I asked about the nature of his grouping, hoping to incite a conversation regarding the roots of his current practices, he stated that the grouping was done with various criteria: “The current system I use is implicated with many varying things in mind, in essence. Usually I would group them with momentary concepts of taste or of temporary periods. For example, the thing I want to listen to the most, things I can never give

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<sup>20</sup> He used the English word “timeline”. This not surprising since the word has been embedded in the lives of many social media users today.

<sup>21</sup> Uzelli, not unlike other music industry professionals, often uses the term “product” for music releases.

up, maybe the rest is alphabetical...” Though this collection did not live a long life with B, as he currently does not have them in his possession. However, during the times he had, the notebooks acted as a technology for B to review his “progress” on his musical “research”. By writing down indexes and making them available for his future by storing them, he created a memory repository that acts as a recalling mechanism for his past music taste, “what [he] wants to listen, things [he] can never give up.” As long as this functions, it allows for a connection to the past.

Playlisting provides a projection of the memory and allows for preservation of connections as well as recontextualizing of certain memories by relocating certain parts of these connections, bringing some together, i.e. curating. Participant A’s filtering system, as of our third and final interview, filters down to two final playlist types. “Selections” and “memories”. I find these two particularly interesting since unlike A’s other current and previous archival system parts, these two have relatively more intuitive and personal sounding names. He defines “memories” tracks as “the ‘oh, there was this track’ ones. The things I know very well but still have not classified.” When I followed up on this specific folder name, asking whether it has anything to do with preservation, he replied, “I mean at times I had trouble finding things, things I know very well. And especially, that memories sections mean that I have played these ones before, I have listened to them, I trust them, I know when to use them. When I see them, I don’t need any extra information.” This reply has an implication that A uses these “memories” folders not necessarily to remind himself something via music, but rather as sub-archives that has tracks in them; he already knows and does not have to be reminded of. He “trusts” these songs due to the connection they have with experiences.

The “selections” folder on the other hand includes tracks, which he is not that much sure of. He states that the tracks in the “selections” folders are the ones that, when he is listening to them, would make him say, “Yeah I know this song but I’m not too sure, it’s a bit new to me. Maybe I listened to it two years ago and liked it but I don’t remember it all that much”. The distinction between “memories” and

“selections” are, thus, derived from the strength of the connection A has with specific tracks. Apart from his personal decisions to select and keep tracks in his filtering system, by using this two-folder structure, he introduces another subjective context to his archival processes; his memories of single tracks. In this case, A is effectively using the nature of the connection he has with songs as a curatorial criterion and ends up with the “memories” playlist, which although does not provide a linear timeline for his past memories, constitutes a pool of connections, organized in a different manner.

Organization in this manner is a key factor that allows the recalling mechanism to work. On the topic of preserving experiences and connections via keeping things, Mehmet Cem Ünal differentiates hoarding from collecting and states the difference is this very organization. As discussed in the Playlists and Digital Curation chapter, Danet & Katriel differentiate collecting from hoarding by stating that collecting refers to a quality over quantity approach, even though the collector may be interested in quantity as well; a “fine discrimination” is in effect. (1994, p.224-225) Therefore, while Danet & Katriel differentiates hoarding from collecting, they look at the differences in the collection process while Ünal finds the difference in the curation process, i.e. “organization”. However, Safa Hendem views the topic from a broader perspective and states that both activities are a signifier of connection to past. He expressed that he does not keep (and thus neither does he collect or hoard) much of anything from his past. He stated, “I believe in this, usually the people I see who cannot throw anything away are establishing a connection with their past through that thing, that song, that cassette, that t-shirt or whatever. I don’t think holding on to the past is such a good thing. People always (...) Look, sometimes you get better, you get to a better future and sometimes you get worse. That thing always keeps you actively connected [to the past] ... ‘Oh how good it was back then’.”

As can be seen in Hendem’s remarks, the connections may not always be a sought out or pleasurable experience in this manner. Hendem’s views regarding the effect

of these connections preventing individuals from going forward, even though not unheard of, is not observed to be shared by the participants and other representatives this study includes. For instance, his business partner Mehmet Cem Ünal, expressed that he “likes to see difference as in ‘look how much it changed, would you believe it?’” He added, “I like remembering. Remembering is actually like saving. You save it to your head, you refresh because the memory<sup>22</sup> gets corrupted.” As another example, Participant C thinks turning back to her playlist as something pleasurable and melancholic. Even while during the interviews when we were looking at her playlists together, she expressed multiple times that this “looking back and seeing what was what” was something she actively enjoyed.

To “turn back” and “refresh”, one first needs to keep and keep in an organized fashion. This organization is partly achieved via inclusion of an autobiographical context, which binds together the “dots” in a “timeline”. This process is a feature of the curator in the form of record keeping.

Elizabeth Yakel, in her study “to provide an overview of development and recent focus on digital curation and [tie] it to larger cyberinfrastructure initiatives”, investigates contemporary digital curation definitions and observes, “The definers of digital curation see curation as an active and potentially interactive process with records creators.” (2007, p.338) If we put this statement to the context of personal streaming playlist curation, it can be seen that curator and record creators are the same individuals. Record, in this sense is not the song, nor the information but the context curators create in order to establish and sustain connections to previous experiences. Thus, the “active and potentially interactive” process here is not between two parties. Instead, it is an internal, personal and often autobiographical process.

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<sup>22</sup> He used the actual English word “memory”, which is commonly used in Turkish when speaking of computer memory, storage.

Forming the timeline, or keeping a personal record that can be referred to in a given time, is achieved via collecting and curating. For instance, Deniz Kuzuoğlu states that when she looks at her vinyl collection, she can see her life from middle school to high school, then university times, then moving to Istanbul after university, side by side. For her, her collection is a projection of a time of her life through an autobiographical organization she constituted. In addition to the collection as a whole serving a purpose, she can interact with singular records and access a previous memory through formed connections.

Participant C calls these “stimuli”. During our second interview, after listening to her narratives about how she associates her playlist with memory, I asked if she has a “good memory”, if she remembers things well and quickly, to which she answered yes, and continued: “I don’t have any difficulties, I remember if there is a stimulus. In this sense my playlists can act as stimuli and remind me of the thing that happened in the last five years.” In both Kuzuoğlu’s and C’s cases, the records they kept previously, act as stimuli, as tools to look back and remember autobiographical information.

Participant B, on the other hand, while using playlists as record keeping platforms and tools for looking back, does not necessarily see previous autobiographical information. B has a playlist titled “Stowage”. It is one of his least distilled playlists, as the name suggests. He uses this playlist as an initial keeping step to add discovered songs as well as a temporary storage for songs he removes from other playlists, but does not want to delete all together. On a Spotify playlist, the songs are listed chronologically from top to bottom, with respect to dates added. This chronology, B states, helps him remember the record of his practices. That is, he can see what changes he made to certain playlists and when he made them via the adding dates and chronological listing of his “Stowage” playlist.

These adding dates are shown next to the songs on a playlist on Spotify. This, by itself, essentially allows for a daily record keeping. Participant C states that sometimes when she looks back at her playlists, some specific songs and their

adding dates tell her specific things about her past. The fact that additions show specific dates, helps specify connected memories. These dates however can be manipulated by a resetting procedure. C is not in favour of resetting the adding dates of a playlist by copying all songs to a new temporary playlist and re-adding them all to the original playlist, resulting in a record that shows the same and updated adding dates for all songs, a technique that commercial playlist makers use to make their playlists look up-to-date. She expressed that in order to keep track of her life; she has to leave the listing “as the way music comes, on that day, in that moment, for [her] it’s more important to have it that way.” For that same reason, she does not turn back to her previous playlists and add songs either. She expressed this is because she does not “want to disrupt the integrity” of the playlist.

This “integrity” is the integrity of the projection of her life. Since these records act as autobiographical information regarding the curator, any definitive change to previous records effectively means damaging or rewriting the past. Thus, as someone who would like to keep an untouched projection of her experiences in the form of playlists, C puts cognitive effort into record fidelity while putting her playlists together and later, while consuming them. C stated that initially this effort was almost reflexive. However, as she continued her practice, as her record began to grow large, and became an effective tool for memory recollection, she began to curate consciously with a sense of responsibility. She stated: “[Playlisting for the purposes of record keeping] is an intentional move. At first it wasn’t intentional, and then I understood the purpose of it and started doing it intentionally.”

### **4.3.3 Looking Back**

Once the record is kept with integrity, on a level deemed appropriate by the curator, then it can be used to travel back in time, so to speak. Through travelling down preserved connections, the personal curator has the opportunity to look back, remember and re-experience. This re-experience does not necessarily have to be a perfect replica of the initial memory, it also can be argued that it is impossible for

it to be that way, however, it still allows for a personal and autobiographical re-consumption process.

On her monthly playlists, C's consumption practices follow a certain pattern. She states that she listens to the playlist of the month she is in, as well as the playlists of the two or three previous months. Throughout the interviews, while we were looking at C's playlists together, I observed that she was more enthusiastic about conveying narratives of older playlists. As the act of remembering occurs then and there, possibly after a long time she had done that herself for that playlist, her reactions to questions about older playlists sparked narratives, which she talked about with a smile on her face. Since the method of active interviewing suggests attention to participant mood and calls for a subjective evaluation of this input by the researcher, I can say that in C's case, the farther back we looked, the more "fun" she had.

This looking back incited in C a motivation to re-consume some of her previous inputs that she gradually forgot. About some songs in one of her older playlists, she stated, "Now that I'm looking at it, some songs really shine for me." Through this looking back process, C remembered the value she associated with some songs as well the contextual connections she preserved by using her playlists as auxiliary memory. Remembering the existence of these connections through Spotify playlists as a gateway, not only reminded of the existence of the connection itself, but of the "shining" quality of the singular song."

As stated before, C stated on multiple occasions that looking back "feels good" and it is "fun. For these positive emotions to sustain, she needs to preserve with a sense of responsibility and as she stated, "intentionally".

However, on some months, C did and sometimes still does add only a couple songs to the playlist of the month. I asked her, as the end of the months approach, if she felt a drive to fill those playlists before the month ends. She replied, "Yes, I do have

that concern. I used to have it more but still I do feel like ‘it’s nearly the end of the month, I should fill this’.” To continue the conversation, I asked when she feels like this, whether she starts spending more time on her practices or does she lower her standards to fill the playlist. She stated that she does not lower her standards but she starts spending more time, “because it’s like a reminder.” She expressed that sometimes she does not listen to music much or she feels disconnected: “Yes, you don’t listen to music with an intention but sometimes you forget to. And I don’t want to forget because you remember how good it feels. [The realization that the current month’s playlist does not have many songs in it] acts as a warning that I should look into this more, I should nurture myself here.”

Similarly, on the other end of the scale, while looking at her May 2017 playlist, which has 30 songs in it, she stated that, “[It seems]<sup>23</sup> I got relaxed. I mean [it seems] I listened to some music that month.” Meanwhile, now that she was looking at July 2017 playlist, the month was “really stressful and [she] listened to things that lightened [her] up on a loop.” A couple of months later, on September 2017, it is yet again a different story. She stated that, “I can see how messy a month it was. Now that I look at it, [it seems] I didn’t take nourishment from too many sources. It’s a bit barren (...) [it seems] I did not concentrate much on music that month.”

It can be seen that through her monthly system, C is able to track her own life, her mood, and her experiences. When she looks back at her past playlists, they remind them of what she has been through. I find it quite interesting that when she looks back and tells me what she sees, remembers, she almost always uses the “Heard Past Tense”. As explained in the Methodology chapter, use of “Heard Past Tense” in Turkish language, indicates that the person is not the original source of information and they “heard” it from somewhere. In this sense, C’s playlists are truly auxiliary memory storage units and since she preserves her playlists with “integrity”, trusting the information, she “hears” from them. This example of

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<sup>23</sup> Use of “Heard Past Tense”.

utilization of personal streaming playlists indicates a connection between digital curation and accommodation of memory.

Since it is possible to use these curations as auxiliary memory mechanisms for their curators, they can outlive their purposes too. If the playlist was intended to be of temporary use, the curator may cease its existence once it serves its purpose. Participant D states that deleting playlists is not something she is unfamiliar with. About her playlist “Sort of Crazy”, she expressed that she “deletes these kind of playlists” at some point.<sup>24</sup> She stated that she created this playlist “probably before going somewhere, it was May, [she] must have created it to listen to these four<sup>25</sup> songs and it stayed.” She deletes this kind of short-term functional playlists since once she listens to them in this form for a sufficient amount or time, “they are already in [her] mind.” However, while we were looking at her playlists during the first interview, after we have passed “Sort of Crazy” and was talking about other playlists, I felt the need to turn back to this playlist and her deletion practices. When I asked her again why she wanted to delete this one, she replied, “Actually now I don’t want to delete it. Because this too tells something. Back then, you couldn’t write texts or add photos [to the playlists]. [It seems] this just stayed like this. Whatever I’ve done back then is standing there like a signature.”

Therefore, in D’s case, even playlists that were not intended to last can be kept due to their transformed nature. D created her “Sort of Crazy” playlist to serve a purpose of consuming a number of songs together, for a period of time she decides sufficient. Then, after some time, it sustained its existence, the playlist turned into something like a “signature”, something that communicates to D and everyone else (since it is a public playlist) about her past. This transformation was made possible by an act of looking back. When she looked back after some time, she saw

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<sup>24</sup> As of January 30th, 2019, this playlist is still online, public and unchanged since September 5th, 2017.

<sup>25</sup> She created the playlist with four songs in October 2015 then added a fifth one the following February.

something different in the playlist, which made it worth keeping. What she was as a record, a memory, a connection, a past statement, a “signature” about herself. The awareness regarding the significance of this “signature” was only available by preservation and then looking back.

#### **4.3.4 Participant-as-Ally Contributions**

At the end of the third interviews, participants were shared the five key terms and asked to comment on them within the context of digital curation.

When asked to comment on the term “memory”, Participant A took his time to think out loud about the Turkish translation of the word. In Turkish, memory can have two different translations, *hafıza* and *anı*. *Hafıza* means memory as whole, as a storage and *anı* means a specific memory of something. A made this differentiation in Turkish and decided to go with *anı*. For him the term memory is more of a “tag” for classification, as previously mentioned. For him memory is a tag that overrides genres and moods, and includes every song that comes attached with an *anı*. His use of *anı* is parallel to how I used the word connection, or how Metin Uzelli used the word “dots” in a timeline. A stated that these *anı*s are what he thinks connect digital curation and personal streaming playlists.

This differentiation A made is an interesting talking point. All the interviews I conducted were in Turkish, however, I am writing this thesis in English and the key concepts I decided to share with participants as well as some terms I or they used within the context are in English also. All four participants do speak English with different levels of competencies, all sufficiently enough to understand the meaning of these five key concepts. Knowing that, I decided not translate these words to Turkish and have them make any connections they see fit. This allowed for a wider range for the participants to comment on. A’s differentiation and choice between *anı* and *hafıza* was made possible via this decision.

Differentiating singular memories from memory as a whole allows for a re-association between them. Singular memories are handled in this thesis as connection that triggers access to a larger part of memory. In this sense, if we go back to the proposed hierarchical model for Domains of personal information in Playlists and Digital Curation chapter, it is possible to form analogy of *hafiza* as PIE (personal information environment) and *ani* as singular information items that comes together within personal contexts and forms a *hafiza* bigger than the sum of *anis*. Participant A, as can be seen in his remarks, is usually more interested in the singular tracks and he chose to go with *ani* instead of *hafiza*.

Participant B, on the other hand, reflexively went with *hafiza*. He stated that in his playlists, memory has a significant place, “because [his playlists are there] to store, save, remember.” This statement can be thought of together with Participant D’s previous statement regarding the “soundtrack of life”, in the sense that music accompanies life experiences. It is plausible, thus, to use personal streaming playlists to preserve and relive these experiences in the context the curator sees fit.

B also associated memory with connections by stating that he thinks, “some periods [of life] ought to have songs.” For him, as life goes by, these connections and preserving them are important. He stated, “As one gets older some things stay precious... To keep them in your mind. To digest the moment you see as important, to remember it (...) I think.” For B, as one gets older, preserving the connections with the “precious” things, becomes more important. This is in line with Participant C’s heightened enthusiasm with older playlists. As extended periods of time gets in between the initial creation of the memory container in the form of digital curation, what is preserved gets more or at least stays “precious”. This is not unlike a well-preserved collectable object, piece of art or a bottle of quality wine.

For C, out of the five key terms this study focuses on, memory is the most significant one. When asked about her thoughts on how she thinks memory relates to personal streaming playlists, she expressed that memory is directly related with

how she uses her playlists indeed. She stated that these playlists are there to support her memory but she does not think that other people necessarily use playlists in this manner: “I have the feeling that people create these playlists for certain moods and occasions. It’s like a tool that I can look back like a roadmap, or a timeline, I mean it’s a tool. So, I think a sense of mission is present there as well.”

This is in line with Tia DeNora’s remarks on music as a technology of self, stating that: “Music can be used as a device for the reflexive process of remembering/constructing who one is, a technology for spinning the apparently 'continuous' tale of who one 'is'.” (1999, p.45) Participant C’s utilization of digital curation via personal streaming playlists is indeed a “tool” or a “device” for the reflexive process DeNora emphasises. In this process, topics memory and identity intersect, because constructing a sense of who one is also possible via consumption and curation of music.

Participant D associates memory with experiences as well, but more importantly, she made an emphasis on the effects of her experiences, rather than the experiences themselves. During the interview process, D went through a serious surgery that required her to rest laying down for an extended period of time after the operation. Her music consumption and curation practices had to be adapted to her condition. One specific playlist now plays a role in her life as a reminder of those times. She stated that, “For example the time I made the ‘D’s jams’ playlist corresponds to a time of my life when I was in a recovery process and because of it, it’s always there and I play it everywhere. How I rose to my feet...”

“D’s jams” acts as a reminder how she got back on her feet and now has a different significance than before when she constituted it. This playlist helped her during her recovery process and now it acts as a reminder of her successful yet difficult recovery. The nature of the playlist transforms, its significance gets relocated but it still serves a purpose in terms of memory.

#### 4.3.5 Memory & Digital Curation

As discussed before in the Playlists and Digital Curation chapter and Adding Value section of this chapter, Dobрева and Duff observe that the field of digital curation has transformed in meaning and become an umbrella term that includes the practice of context preservation of digital objects. (2015, p.98) Contextualizing information consumption in a way that serves personal needs requires this preservation. However, mere functionalities of platforms and interfaces such as saving or “liking” on Spotify, is not enough to contextualize in an autobiographical way.

According to Jones, an extra element is required: “Keeping must include support for remembering and for managing attention. Keeping is more complex than simply saving information somewhere.” (2005, p.30) This extra element, as Jones states, provides support for remembering, allowing an organization of preservation. As can be seen in participant narratives regarding their playlists, a context is present alongside an organization to support the context for further consumption of the music as well as the experiences connected to both context and the music.

Jäncke’s work of music, memory and emotions uses the term “associative memory” to define the process of looking back at the preserved context via connections. He defines associative memory as “a memory system in which a specific piece of memory information is linked to other memory information by associative links. Recalling a previously experienced item by thinking of something that is linked with it evokes the association.” (2018, p. 7.21:2) Playlists, songs and the overall or singular contexts they were preserved in, forms connections. These connections, when put together in a personally meaningful manner, sometimes act as a diary, an index or even a museum of one’s own life. The digital curator uses personal streaming playlists to preserve the context and to look back, consume again. In this sense, personal streaming playlists have the potential to act as an auxiliary repository for autobiographical memory to be contained to be used again.

This practice is observed in participant and industry representative narratives in varying forms and intensities. What this practice essentially does is leaving breadcrumbs to be found again. How the breadcrumbs were left and in what form they were found again is personally variable. The amount of effort and organization one puts into preservation and before that contextualization, allows for a connection that may have more integrity, which results in possibly stronger remembrances. However, effort is not a prerequisite for this to happen since, we leave breadcrumbs as we go, even if we do not intend to. It is possible to activate these breadcrumbs, or these connections unintentionally as well.

Thus, what the digital curator does is to put this mechanism into “intentional”, as C would say organization so that they activate the connections in a more controlled fashion. So, it can be said that digital curation in the form personal streaming playlists is an effort to preserve and re-experience via music in an organized and partially controlled fashion. Therefore, memory is a key concept to bear in mind in the positioning of playlists under digital curation.

#### **4.4 Identity**

In her ethnographic work titled “Music as a Technology of Self”, Tia DeNora sums up her respondents’ description of music as “providing a template or source in which respondents may 'find' or 'view' themselves, a model for the composition and validation of self-identity as projected to self and others.” (1999, p.34) In these terms, music can be utilized as a “device”, a “technology” for negotiation of identity. (Sanmartí, 2007)

Identity is a fluid process that evolves and transforms through interactions and negotiations with social bodies and phenomenon. This process non-exclusively envelopes the creation and manifestation of identity simultaneously. (Dye, Schellenberg & McLean, 2017) In this sense, one’s control over their music consumption is an effort to regulate or influence this process. What we choose to

listen, how we choose to listen and what we choose to show in terms of our music consumption practices can be significant entry points into who we are.

#### **4.4.1 Individuation**

Dye, Schellenberg & McLean's large-scale study on musical identities, music preferences and individual differences suggests that musical preferences vary with respect to "culture, environment, and ethnic background", and also are associated with "personality characteristics". (2017, p.1) Additionally, musicologist Even Ruud emphasises Bourdieu's take on the subjects and how musical preference and taste is "embodied into a sort of 'habitus' which transforms our cultural consumption into a kind of mark of identity." (1997, p.9-10) Thus, studying participant preferences in music consumption and their narratives regarding how their preferences are made in relation with the social and cultural context they are in has the potential to offer insight into the connection between identity and streaming music playlists.

In this sense, to better understand how participant A relates to his music, I asked him, "Do you think the music you listen to defines you?" He responded with a quick, "No". I followed up and asked, "Do you think it's a part of your identity?" He replied, "I think it's a part of my identity but I can't say it defines me directly. If it did, I would have turned into a different person every year. I don't turn into a different person every year. As an evidence, I can present this, I think. Because my taste in music changes so quickly. I guess it's probably a bit about how fast I am consuming. I can only stay bound to a style 1 or 2 years. Surely, it must have an effect on my lifestyle. At least it must be a complementary part of the whole. I don't know, maybe the people on the street looking at me think, 'he definitely listens to this and that' but I can't say it is directly definitive."

A's statement regarding how he would have "turned into a different person every year", is in line with the concept of fluid identities. However, he does not think his

music consumption “defines” him, per se. He rather thinks that music is a “complementary part of the whole” of his identity. Following up on that, as a participation strategy suggested by active interviewing, I decided to tell him my personal story of how when I was younger I identified heavily with some genres and music bands. I told him that with age it got complicated for me, but it is still there. Then I asked him, “The things you listen to or the curations you make, the things you play as a DJ, something that makes you feel, ‘this is who I am’ or at least ‘this is who I am now’, ‘look at me and see me’ kind of thing. Does this happen to you? Even momentarily or for a short while?” By doing this, I tried to incite a sense of empathy and mutual trust so that if he chose to, he could share his narrative regarding the issue. Only after asking the question like this, by giving a personal example, he responded, “Of course, at times it happens. I want to show what I’m listening to. I want to show what I’m doing. It’s certainly a part of my identity in any case. An important part of it.”

Similarly, participant D thinks that what she chooses to listen is not necessarily a part of her identity, but is more about her mood, her style, her perspective on life. However, she also stated that what she listens to affects her identity via her “production”, i.e. her playlists and music articles: “The thought that I should produce something came early to me ... I think what I do for a living took shape through that, the decision to pick where I live took shape through that. The music I listen to ... set me apart from everyone else.” D’s comments on how her preference in music consumption “set her apart”, is in line with Dye, Schellenberg and McLean appropriation of Erikson’s definition of individuation. (Erikson, 1968) They state, “Through the processes of individuation, individuals also develop a sense of continuity across contexts, in terms of personal characteristics, such as beliefs and goals, as well as continuity across time. These aspects of personal continuity—personal and ego identity—allow individuals to find distinction and similarity with others. (Dye, Schellenberg & McLean, 2017, p.1) D’s profession as a music writer stemmed from her interest in consuming music and producing content around her experience. She took her practices to a level where their outcome affects her

everyday life in a significant way. However, more importantly, as seen in her example, finding distinction and similarity with others is an identity work that music consumption and curation practices can be utilized in. In a context, such as curation of readily available information items on an easy to access platform, choice and preference constitutes the area available for individuation.

Similar to D's case, when I asked Deniz Kuzuoğlu if her music, her collection and her curation had an effect on her identity, she replied making an emphasis on the effect they had on her in her teenage years. She stated, "I too had the story of 'feeling special' ... In those periods, what you have discovered, all the songs that touched you are special for you. You wouldn't like to share that with others. Or like, 'only cool kids listen to this', sort of thing." With her preferences, Kuzuoğlu established herself an identity as a "cool kid", utilizing her music consumption as identity work. As previously discussed in the "Information Needs" section, following Metin Uzelli's remarks, collecting music on the digital realm is a matter of being a digger and one of İstanbul music scene's most well-known collectors, Murat Beşer, takes pride in being a digger. Constructing an identity around being a good digger means that what one has found and what one prefers to consume is somewhat, to their view, more exclusive and unique. This effort in distinction from others and similarity within a distinct community is visible in Safa Hendem's narratives as well, as he states: "When Nirvana came out, everyone was listening to Nirvana but we were listening to Stone Temple Pilots or something and were putting ourselves apart to a more special place by doing that." In this sense Hendem separates himself from the mainstream and finds a smaller and more distinct community (notice his use of "we") in consuming alternatives.

However, this distinction is contested by Adorno as *pseudo-individualization*. "By pseudo-individualization we mean an endowing cultural mass production with the halo of free choice or open market on the basis of standardization itself." (Adorno, 2009, p. 289) According to Adorno, cultural hegemony being constantly instated and reinstated via mass media leaves no room for any sort of free choice. As I have

discussed in detail on a previous article titled “Critically Popular: Adorno and ‘The Turkish Second New Music’”, I do not view the current situation as dire. (Sesigür, 2016) Through examples in contemporary production and consumption of certain examples of popular music in Turkey, I was able to identify and point out to instances of critical knowledge and meaning creation through socio-political stances and shared values of sub and countercultures. Individuation and the dialectic understanding of distinction and similarity is key here. Through individuation, people are able to find similarities amongst each other through communicated music consumption preferences that helps them “set themselves apart”. Furthermore, curating personal streaming playlists, although on a commodified platform, still leaves room for critical identity work. Thus, while acknowledging the notion of hegemony and the concept of mainstream as well as the immense power of these on everyday life, I insist that personal regulation of consumption has the potential to offer space for critical thinking and identity work. Through this, the potential of popular music as, as Frith suggests, an “individualizing form” is available making “the experience of pop music ... an experience of identity.” (1996, p.121)

However, this nature of music consumption does not exclude interactions and interventions of social and political factors as preference acquisition sources. What is potent in our everyday lives, inescapably affect our identity processes. In Participant B’s case, radio was a big influence: “It was ‘83, I was 11 years old, apart from the things my parents were listening, I began to build up my own musical taste from TRT 3 FM<sup>26</sup>.” By nature, radio is not an interactive music consumption technology. The listeners do not have control over what to listen and when to listen. What they can control is what station to listen and whether to listen or not. In the early 1980’s, B did not have an abundance of radio stations to pick. TRT 3 was the only music-oriented radio channel available for him. Even though his journey took him to very different places, his awareness of his own musical preferences began

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<sup>26</sup> A radio station, which specialises in music broadcasting, of the state TV and Radio network, TRT.

to form through a state controlled music radio station. In this sense, it would not be plausible to not factor in the hegemonic influence of mass media, political and cultural state propaganda on individuals. However, as can be seen in his example, B only took this as a starting point. Throughout his journey, he made use of libraries, record stores, cassette swap groups, internet, streaming platforms and many other sources to build up his musical taste. Although it can be argued that all available sources are in a way in the sphere of influence of power structures, it still cannot be definitively said that his identity is a planned and executed project of a hegemonic centre. Admitting that it may take some extra effort, social processes can be filtered, regulated and feedbacked by individuals.

As an example, for Metin Uzelli, his job at his family record label, his musical taste and his identity constitutes intricate sets of relationships. He stated that even though he did not personally collect the records his family company released for personal collection and curation purposes, through his extensive effort on documentation, organization and indexing of the albums, the effects of this interaction became visible: “After some time, it becomes a way of life, a preference; it reaches a different level of value.” He further stated that the content of their catalogue, inevitably affected his personal taste in music. However, this effect was not one-directional. During the 1990’s, Metin Uzelli’s personal taste affected Uzelli Kaset’s catalogue, where he spent effort for the release of Turkish rock bands’ of the time and succeeded. He stated that this is “a beautiful feeling” and “a great indulgence” at the same time.

In this specific example, it can be seen identity process through consumption of music can be multi-directional and complicated. Uzelli’s musical identity began to form in a fluid process, with factors interacting such as his job, his social environment and his personal effort. However, lately putting effort into these interactions acquired a whole new meaning. Now we have streaming platforms with algorithms that aim to learn our musical preferences and drive us to consume more via well-calculated suggestions.

Participant A heavily uses recommendation algorithm driven features of Spotify. His whole filtering system only makes sense if there are enough raw materials to begin with. In order to collect to right raw material, he utilizes features of Spotify such as Discover Weekly, Release Radar and Song Radios. However, in order for these recommendation tools to work properly, the algorithm needs to “understand” what Participant A is up to. A calls this a process of “education”: “If you haven’t educated it very well, your Spotify shows the same stuff it shows to everyone. Your [recommended] playlists can be a bit more colourful, but the song radios, which actually list the same songs from recommended songs, are the same if you haven’t educated it.”

As discussed in the Information Needs section, in order to educate his Spotify algorithm, A puts careful effort in what he is consuming on the platform. He has spent months into teaching the algorithm what he likes in order to end up with an algorithmic profile that serves his efficiency needs. This careful effort includes regulations on his curatorial practices as well. He stated that “the reason [he doesn’t] create a lot of playlists is that [he doesn’t] want to alter the character Spotify knows me as.” His word choice, “character”, is a topic of discussion here. Since he is not necessarily using Spotify for his everyday music consumption, which he calls “Human Music”, the profile Spotify constitutes of him is an intentional construct. This construct, this character is a projection of Participant A’s identity as a DJ. In order to serve his discovery needs as a DJ, he introduced himself to the algorithm as a certain character and built up a filtering organization to end up with what he needs efficiently. However, his “Human Music” practices are not as organized and intentionally structured. Thus, in order not to “contaminate” his system, he consumes his “Human Music” on Apple.

Commodity preference algorithms are being used in many areas from consumer goods to matchmaking, news feeds to cultural outputs. Currently, if we look at participant and industry representative narratives, we see that Spotify’s algorithm

is not perfectly able to satisfy them consistently using only the everyday, personal (Human Music) consumptions of the curators. This is not surprising since the fluid nature of preferences and identities, even though predictable to certain levels in certain areas, are not easy to successfully profile identities. Frith claims that if we take music as “a metaphor for identity, then, to echo Marx, the self is always an imagined self but can only be imagined as a particular organization of social, physical and material forces.” (1996, p.109-110) Although it is important to appreciate the significance of these factors, it should be noted that these forces are almost always negotiated. These negotiations and the intricate nature of these interacting forces takes more effort than the current algorithmic endeavours present.

For instance, Mehmet Cem Ünal is highly unsatisfied with his “Discover Weekly” playlists. This is in line with the previous argument as to him; his practices are in a hoarding nature, and have “zero organization”. Furthermore, he defines his taste in music as “very weird” and thus, apart from what Spotify knows him as, when he makes playlists, they can only make *him* happy, not necessarily anyone else. He does not necessarily think they have a “(...) meaning. They have no extra thought in it; [he] just puts the things [he] likes in [his] bag.” This “zero organization” is not easily shareable and difficult for the current algorithms to profile but it still has implications of identity. Thus, the relationship between identity and music consumption, with contemporary technological affordance, cannot be deduced to a mere algorithm of preferences. The negotiations, interactions and uncommunicated personal factors has significant weight in this manner. The space defined by the contextual construction of identity by social and personal factors is an opening for representation and expression. Participant B calls these spaces “islands”.

For B: “[In the cloud] none of the things we claim ours are ours but somehow there is an island that belongs to you. At the end of the day I give [my playlists] the names I want, I sit down and choose the image I think that represents it, you’re giving

explanations in your own way, some make sense, some don't. You say 'yeah mate, there is a space here that belongs to me, that expresses me.'" B's remarks regarding what is owned and what is not on the "cloud" directs to a belonging defined over personalisation. That is, even if the content is created and provided to the cloud, ownership somewhat depends on the "island" an individual construct via subjective interpretation and effortful and choice-driven (pseudo or not) personalization. These "islands" are interactions spaces for similarities and distinction, where individual and group identities form and re-form.

#### **4.4.2 Islands**

As B speaks about "islands", "to belong" is a strong point in his narratives. This particular belonging is bilateral, that is one feels they belong to a something, while they also feel that thing belongs to them. In our interview with Murat Beşer, to spark up conversation about a different subject, manifestation practices, I have shared with him my story about how MSN Messenger and Winamp, which were highly popular messaging and media player software during early 2000s in my community, and how the fact that they can be linked, so that MSN Messenger would showcase what you were currently listening on Winamp. I have expressed that this was important for me since I felt like "I belong" to the bands and styles I was listening to and it was important for me to "manifest" that, share that. My aim was to have a conversation about these manifestation practices; however, Murat Beşer interrupted me and said, "We used to find identity! We used to find identity in liking that band." His reaction initiated the forming of a bond in which he identified with my narrative enough to use "we": Beşer and I. He was able identify with the point of the narrative I have shared, which is, for me listening to certain music and showing people that I listened to that certain music had identity connotations.

This use of "we" signifies a social function of the relationship between music and identity. According to Even Ruud: "Being a part of a social group also positions the individual in a particular way within the culture, as a member of a social class, a

subculture, within a particular ethnic group, or a gender reality. In line with this way of thinking we could say that we are using music to create boundaries between ourselves and others and to communicate where we belong within a larger social landscape.” (1997, p.9) Through this shared narrative, heightened communication was available due to finding a similarity in our separate distinctions. In B’s terms, we were able to connect via our “islands”.

Beşer believes that this process of island creation begins with a “search for identity”. To his view: “The reason this emerged particularly after 1980s [in Turkey], the reason it became more of a need was because it was one of the easiest identities that generations who lost their political identities [due to political history of Turkey between 1960-1980] could find.” One particular narrative of Participant B is in line with Beşer’s claim. In order to maintain the integrity of the narrative, it would be more useful to look at it at length:

“At the beginning of the 80’s, Turkey was a very shitty place. There was curfew, the shitty state of 70’s, they bomb the printing house 30 metres away, the printing press explodes and so on... You are in such an environment, I mean there’s no going out to play or anything. We<sup>27</sup> are the ‘lock yourself at home’ kind of type. We’re reading Jules Verne’s *The Mysterious Island* for example. Then all of a sudden, you get a hold of an Alan Parsons Project album about Edgar Allan Poe. Then you search and find a Poe book. If you look at it, these are things that trigger each other, you’re fed up with the existing reality, you’re looking for an identity for yourself and music is very decisive on this. Watching *The Wall* around early 80s, for example, showed me that the things Pink Floyd evoke in me could also be a worldview. In some way, actually, you feel this: outside the day spaces where people run around and school is boring, there is a culture of night and you feel more in peace and closer to that place. When the folks go to bed at home, you put the Walkman on and enter a different world. It’s the same place you go when you read

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<sup>27</sup> Note the plural subject, “we”.

*Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Sea*, the same with music. Meanwhile, that period is pop's crazy years but new wave is still alive, we don't know the term "post-punk" yet but we know new wave. Actually, there is a stance against the world in there. On one hand, it likes to have fun but on the other, it is pessimistic, darker, an attitude that tries to question existence all the time. Actually, these are things that were influential in forming worldviews for us living in those times. It's the same thing, the feelings you get when you watch *The Wall* or Coppola's *Rumble Fish* (1983) or *Mad Max* (George Miller, 1979) and the imagery feelings you get when you listen to King Crimson, Pink Floyd or a punk band. You don't like some things, you don't want to be there, the present you're living in doesn't satisfy you. You like the things you see in those post punk music videos better. People who jump outside to streets at night, who can design their outfits and hair in some way, people who try to resist social oppressions; maybe for you in the atmosphere you're living in, it's a utopia that you take refuge in."

This narrative of B's has multiple points to discuss, mainly: his use of "we" in some sentences, his statements regarding the "utopia" he used to take "refuge" in at night, how he sees different cultural outputs "trigger" each other and the identity and worldview he constructed with the help of a certain subcultures. As briefly mentioned previously, yet another hint of representation is given here. He switched to the plural subject with the sentence "We are the 'lock yourself at home' kind of type". This expression indicates that B attributes this state of living a more indoors bound childhood due to the socio-political situation of Turkey and thus feels like he shares this situation with the rest of the people from his generation enough to use a representative form of language when speaking about the subject. He is not alone in being "locked at home".

In this manner "island" is an appropriate term for this specific condition. Like several small islands in the ocean, B expresses that his generation resided into small personalized areas due to unpleasant daily realities in social life at the time of their youth. For B, the refuge took place at night. Day is when he left his island, went

out, went to school, which was boring for him. Night is when he put on his Walkman and in a manner, escaped to a different reality. Music was a key element in this escape as the main facilitator. Through music, B had access to other cultural inputs that widened the narrative universe of his island in many directions. With each “trigger”, a curiosity, a research started for B, which resulted in new music, books or films. This state of continuous consumption of cultural outputs of a certain nature helped B construct worldviews and identities. Similarly, Beşer uses the word “worldview” in order to distinguish his collection not just as an “arithmetic sum” that will have clues only about his taste in music but a contextual whole of his own, an “island” in B’s terms, that says more about him.

Another reference to this “island” was made by B, during a conversation regarding his previous archival practices on physical music and video containers when I asked him why he was “doing that”. He replied, “I don’t know. It made me happy. These are all your own private spaces. Maybe it’s an island that you want, to get yourself closed up in there, live your own thing. If you don’t have an island like that, [a place] to live that thing within the boundaries of your living spaces. Actually you too have explained it very well (he’s referencing to an earlier part of our conversation where I told him, in my teenage years the music I listened to helped me define who I am, to find an identity), since it is certain albums, certain films, certain books that give the answers to what you are, you always put them in an important place in your life. Technical approaches, indexes, notebooks, groupings on Word documents have always been [for me], I mean.” For B, this “island”, this personalized space where one can live their “own thing” is achieved via collection and consumption of certain cultural media. Since these collections serve a purpose for creation and maintaining of a personalized subset of everyday life, an island, possibly away from the dominant culture and daily realities, B expresses familiarity to my own situation where the music I chose to listen and to show that I was listening to had an active part in my identity creation. He tends to this interface of identity, organizes it, indexes it. By doing this, he sustains a connection with his identity creation processes. Music sociologist Tia DeNora investigates this certain

utilization of music in everyday life as she studies “respondents' descriptions of music as a device for producing autobiographical memory and moving on to consider music as providing a template or source in which respondents may 'find' or 'view' themselves, a model for the composition and validation of self-identity as projected to self and others.” (1999, p.34) So, in DeNora’s terms, B’s practices for creating an “island” can be considered a device for an autobiographical memory production and also a tool for composing and validating his self-identity. Thus, the social context in which B has begun these practices are of significance in terms of identity construction and social negotiation.

This fluid and transforming island practices may include some cornerstones as seen in B’s narratives regarding post-punk and D’s playlist titles “The ones I rise for”. These specific nodes of content-context relationship are key elements in curators’ self-declared identities. Mehmet Cem Ünal uses these cornerstones to “restore factory settings”, as in he would “return to [his] original self” through them. This indicates a function music collections and curations not only as memory repositories, but also as a sort of safety net for identity production processes. By keeping cornerstones, Ünal creates a safe space for “his original self”, where he can return to. This cornerstone allows Ünal to pursue his current identity production and reflection processes with more confidence. These production and reflection processes, or as Beşer calls it, “this search for identity” is initiated and sustained with respect to these cornerstones. However, this is a bilateral interaction as well, as the steps of identity creation are not locked stages of construction. Rather they are fluid and sometimes temporary meta levels of an intricate self-process.

#### **4.4.3 Production & Manifestation**

As discussed before in “Playlists and Digital Curation” chapter, collections and curations have the potential to act as “proxies” that allow “projection” of ourselves. (Jones, 2015, p.10) Frith, on the other hand, claims that the emphasis should be made not on the reflection and projection potential of music consumption, but on

“how it produces [listeners], how it creates and constructs an experience - a musical experience, an aesthetic experience - that we can only make sense of by taking on both a subjective and a collective identity.” (1996, p.109-110) In this sense, I believe it is more useful to look at production and reflection as two forms of the same feedbacking mechanism, a dialectical interaction. As will be seen in participant and industry representative narratives, production (collecting, curating, writing etc.) and manifestation (projection, reflecting, sharing, performing etc.) tend to go hand in hand in everyday life.

A personal Spotify playlist can be public or private, depending on the curator's choice. In the case that it is public, even though its existence is not specifically advertised, it is essentially showcased for anyone who takes the time and effort to look. And in the case that it is private, the curator may choose to allow others to view via sharing a link or physically show others on their own interface (smart phone, pc etc.). However, the non-visual, musical existence of a playlist can be shared as well, mainly in social environments. For Participant A, it is for sharing with an audience, for B, it can be utilized as a mood setter for a get together with friends, for D it can sometimes be an auxiliary transmedial element for her to convey her story to her readers or in Mehmet Cem Ünal's and Participant C's cases, the outcomes of the productions may be deemed too personal or judged not enjoyable or meaning for others. In any case, playlisting and manifesting via playlists be it digitally or physically, is an example of complicated nature of music consumption and curation practices for the purposes of identity work.

For this work, playlists are a receptacle. According to DeNora, music consumption “may provide a medium that comes to carry conventional or biographical associations. Music may also be understood by its recipients to provide a 'container' for feeling or for the quality or character of an experience.” (1999, p.53) For instance, D uses her own photographs as cover images on some of her playlists. Namely her “the ones I rise for” playlist, which she defines as her “cornerstones”, has a photograph of her “rising”. While Participant C, does not use any imagery or

specific names for her playlists other than the date information. Both participants use playlists to store particular parts of their everyday experiences in order to reflect or manifest something about themselves. The potential of playlists as a platform for identity associations is clearly visible as the methods and practices may vary to a great extent, providing a wide range of production and reflection space. Obviously, the information and subjective meaning within and around the playlists are legible by the curators themselves. However, it is also possible for an outsider to see some “dots” as Uzelli calls them and with the inclusion of contextual thinking acquired via dialogue, playlists can be utilized as communication platforms.

For instance, venue director Kuzuoğlu believes that someone who “gets these stuff” can guess certain specific information about others by looking at their collections, such as where one lives, where did they grow up, socioeconomic status, what sort of an high school they went to, how was their relationship with their parents, how was their love life etc. Her prediction is in line with Dys, Schellenberg and McLean’s study on identity and music preference. (2017, p.3) For her, the prerequisite of this guess to be close to correct is that the person in question should attach weight to their collection. About her own collection, she stated that, “I did not try to define myself with something but that still happened in a way, organically.”

In Beşer’s words, “finding an identity” was important, however, manifesting who I was, showing others this identity was as important for me, if not more. Even though, for instance, Kuzuoğlu expressed that she did not get into the practice of showing off to people what she was listening to, she still cared, in her teenage years, which cassettes were allowed to represent her or at least her taste. At this point, the motivation to share comes into play, which will be discussed thoroughly in the next section.

When Deniz Kuzuoğlu was collecting audio cassettes in her youth, she would showcase them in her room. Her main categories were “bought ones” and mixtapes

she recorded from the radio. Her mentioning of one detail about her showcasing back then is about a sense of what she felt safe to be identified with. She stated that, “As time went by, my taste in music developed and the things I was ashamed back then stayed a bit more to the back [of her showcase]. The newer stuff, things I view as cooler back then began to appear on the front.” This is something that I, personally have done in my teenage years with similar intentions as well. Preference in music was something of a manifestation of identity and sharing this with others and sharing this in the way that I wanted to showcase myself was significant for me. The significance of the motivation to share will be discussed further in detail in the next section.

#### **4.4.4 Participant-as-Ally Contributions**

To finalize the interviews, participants were asked to comment on the concept of “identity” within the context of digital curation.

Participant A expressed that he has multiple identities both for consuming and performing music. For him, different identities are necessary for playing different venues with different moods. He uses mood as an indicator of different identities for the case of consumption as well. To A, different moods postulate different behaviours and thus, one’s searching, picking and consuming music patterns. He calls this a “creation of identity” that one actively does, depending on moods. This is in line with A’s previous statements regarding how music does not define him but still is a part of his many identities. That is, through his consumption, which is mostly driven from his motivation to produce is, in DeNora’s words, a technology of self. A platform for intricate identity work. (1999) Furthermore A stated that being a DJ like him requires seeing tracks as having identities as well as the tracks themselves having identity inducing moods. His practices, to him, revolve around these “identities” of tracks and their harmony.

One last note regarding A's participant-as-ally contributions is that he associates identity with personalization. To him one of his playlists titled "live", which includes songs he thinks are appropriate for a live performance would have been different if someone else curated the playlist since "my 'live' is different than others' and theirs are different than mine."

Participant A's remarks about how one has more than one identities is similar with Participant B's narrative about band t-shirts: "I could have a Motörhead t-shirt, a Nirvana one and a The Beatles one as well, why wouldn't I? I don't think there is just one identity, you pick and wear that represents you best at that time of your life. It's a bit because of the times we're living in. I mean it's as if people are actually very much allowed to be subjects, internet, digital, global culture etc. but there's no such thing. And in the absence of this, simple things through which you can express your subjectivity become more significant."

For B, manifestation of distinction and similarities in identity is in fact a form of subjective expression. In this sense, most available media has the potential to act as a platform for this expression. Musical preference or choice of outfit "say" something about you. And, according to B, in a world where subjective representation is somewhat of an illusion, these "simple things" have the potential to manifest identity work as well as induce social negotiation.

Participant C takes the word identity and use it in a way that it is more about a sense of self, a more individual and discrete notion. She thinks, "Archiving is completely about identity." For C archiving and collecting are a way to better herself, as well to better represent herself. She expressed that: "There is a *you* and there is another *you* that you would like to rise to, to meet. It's actually really spiritual. There is a journey with external factor and internal moods. So [archiving and playlisting] is about representing the best of yourself, to yourself."

C's narrative regarding the two *yous* signifies the inner processes of manifestation, a self-reflection through archiving and collecting. For her, collecting music is a form of achieving an idealized self. By archiving, she is keeping track of her progress. In a sense, it is a technology for her to communicate with her past selves, in order to arrive at a "better" one.

Much like Mehmet Cem Ünal, D defines her playlists as "definitely without identity" since she "couldn't live an identified life. Couldn't feel like [she] belonged". Her definition of what identity is and what it means to be "without an identity" is key to understanding her narratives. She expressed that she feels like "she couldn't succeed in life": "I could have done some things earlier and some things later. I couldn't manage to be in some places I should have. Everyone has that. I have a state of mind, a psychology that tends to drift apart. Giving up on everything, quickly getting my hand off things, drifting apart... It's really dominant. And this of course, affects the music I listen to, the places I go, friends, everything... Like it affects the playlists."

For D, to have an identity is to achieve a sense of success and identity is a well-defined state. In this sense, the personal eclectic nature of her playlists is "definitely without identity". For her statement, it is clearly visible that this process of definition and identity is manifested in her playlists, as well as other aspects of her life. D's playlists project D's emotions, her self-definition and her search of belonging, her search of an island, using curatorial practices. Thus, it can be said that the personal streaming playlist is a potential medium for an understanding of one's self as well as projecting this self to others.

#### **4.4.5 Identity & Digital Curation**

Music and identity in general have a rich connection in various aspects that can be addressed using various approaches. In the context of music consumption, collection and curation on streaming music platforms, personal playlists as

outcomes of participant identity processes are suitable to study a part of this rich connection. Furthermore, investigating identity work as a motivation for playlisting makes “linkages and horizons” (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995) visible.

Preference and taste in music consumption on a readily available catalogue of recorded music is a way for listeners/curators to do intricate identity work and manifest these identities to their liking. This identity work includes a constant search and construction process (Kaye et al., 2006 & Frith, 1996), as well as multiple forms of showcasing and/or personal reflection (Jones, 2015). This whole process constitutes individuation through discovery and/or forming of distinctions and similarities in music consumption and curation practices. (Dye, Schellenberg & McLean, 2017)

Curators may decide to start a playlist in order to construct a certain aspect of their selves or to regulate their everyday life; or the process may turn into a practice of identity without intentional effort, but with repetition and practice. Observations and analysis of participant and industry representative interviews, as well as playlist observations are in line with DeNora’s statement regarding how music consumption can provide an interface for “composition and validation of self-identity as projected to self and others”. (DeNora, 1999, p.34) Playlisting, mixtaping, collecting, curating in this sense, applies yet another layer of interface, a space for further individuation and sense of control.

These constructed identity-work-spaces, these islands as Participant B calls them, has the potential to become effective in long term identity processes as well as in short term or temporary intervals as meta-levels for self-creation and manifestation processes. Participant C stated that she can see collecting and curating as a “repeating pattern” in her life. The objects of these endeavours changed and transformed, but the act of “archiving and listing” sustained as a record keeping and self-regulating activity. That is to say, that identity and digital curation has the potential to yield meaningful information when approached from two different

aspects: music as a technology of self and identity processes through curation of objects. The core of this study has been the intersection of these two aspects, curation and music consumption from the beginning. Following from the historical, methodological, ethnographic and analytical work previously presented, I can conclude that the term identity is a key concept if we are to discuss personal streaming playlists within the arch of digital curation.

## **4.5 Sharing**

Music consumption, collection and curation are connected deeply to social behaviours. All previous key concepts discussed, information needs, adding value, memory and identity have at least partial social connotations. If we consider the fact that historically music is indeed a very social human output (Prior, 2015; Waligorska, 2011; DeNora, 2013; Jones, Cunningham & Jones, 2004) alongside its evolutionary cognitive roots (Masataka & Perlovski, 2012; Ruud, 1997; Levitin, 2006), it is plausible to consider sharing as a final topic of discussion in order to understand personal playlisting practices in the age of social media and streaming.

Sharing behaviours are closely related with the affordances of the available communication technologies of the time. Accordingly, digital music and internet brought out significant new platforms and interfaces for sharing. As mentioned in the History chapter, Napster, as a P2P file-sharing platform had groundbreaking effects on music acquisition and consumption practices. Streaming services such as Spotify, which offered licensed music, with the addition of social media platforms, was yet another advent that changed the game. Participant narratives revolving around post-digital revolution interfaces are a good point to start the discussion.

### **4.5.1 Online Platforms**

Jones, Cunningham and Jones, studied “personal ethnographies, interviews and

on-site observations of personal music collections, observations of music store layout and shopping behaviours, and focus groups” with university students as participants and observed, among other things, “browsing a friend’s music collection may provide an opportunity to learn more about a new type of music, or to re-think aspects of one’s own tastes. (2004)

This notion was briefly explored in Information Needs section regarding how this practice could be utilized as a discovery and acquisition method. However, interactions and sense of community on P2P sharing platforms such as Soulseek is noticeable as well. As mentioned in the Information Needs section, C used to use Soulseek extensively to discover and download unlicensed music. On platforms such as Soulseek, users share their digital archives with others. Soulseek’s system allows navigating through the folder structure of other users to pick and choose what to download. C stated that finding users and discovering from their archives was important for her and she would share her discoveries with her friends, telling them, “there’s this guy on Soulseek, follow him.” Following specific users and sharing these users’ names as sources provide two aspects of the practice on which sharing can be discussed.

The first is the sharing of a source, a human source. Specific Soulseek users Participant C discovered is shared with friends with whom she has a common distinction regarding music consumption preferences. Just like one would go about recommending a piece of music to friend, C recommends a human medium, a curator. Curatorial decisions of others are the object of sharing; the context is shared.

The other aspect is the sharing of the content. Spotify’s recommendation or industry marketing operations are essentially impersonal. Hearing a band or a song from a friend be it in real life or online, has deeper personal connotations than ads and algorithmic playlists; it has a better chance of possessing personal connections. This distinction is visible in Participant A’s narratives. A uses Spotify’s recommendation

algorithms heavily for raw material acquisition to his filtering system. However, he still uses Soulseek to download the songs he discovered on Spotify. Soulseek, in this manner is meant only to be a final step for his system. However, it ends up being more than that. While searching and downloading the results of his curation, he comes across specific Soulseek users, who repeatedly appear as sharers, providers for what he seeks. He states that since curations of these users on Soulseek are “not the product of a company or an algorithm but of people. The results are more unsuccessful but it balances a bit” and “that’s why [he] like[s] it”.

The balance A speaks of is a balance between machine and human. The fact that he is calling the music he discovers, consumes and shares out of his original filtering system, “Human Music”, support this observation. Encounters with other Soulseek users’ archives, learning and discovering from them allows for a more personal connection that, for Participant A, has a balancing and pleasurable effect.

Neither Participant A nor Participant C has another form of communication with their source curators on Soulseek. Their sole communication is one-way and is over music and curatorial structures. If we consider, even though they are still used by many people to varying degrees, P2P platforms to be interfaces of the recent past, it can be seen that in our current communication technologies environment where Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, WhatsApp, Spotify and YouTube exist, this specific notion of sharing is still there. Participant D is in message groups where members of the group only share songs and musical information. Furthermore, she stated that, apart from these groups, she even has some friends she only has a “communication over songs” with. That is, they do not chat online or socialize in real life; they just share songs back and forth.

Similarly, up until recently Participant C was sharing songs with a closed group of friends via cloud file sharing platform Dropbox. This group of people took up on Dropbox in order to make their already existing music sharing practices easier. Prior to fast broadband internet and streaming, digital music meant that in order to share

music, one would have to continue using a physical container. C was using an iPod to carry around her music in those times and she stated iPod's "awkward" synchronizing procedure made it difficult. This problem C and her friends to think about better solutions for music exchange. As broadband internet got faster, they started to use Dropbox. She stated that their existing real-life community migrated to Dropbox and a wider community formed around their initial shared Dropbox folders. On these folders, members would occasionally update their contribution and check what others have for them. She expressed a common concern of the group regarding audio quality. Their folders would mainly include lossless digital containers such as .flac or .wav files. However, this concern did not sustain as streaming come into play; the convenience and speed of not permanently downloaded low to medium quality mp3 won the battle. At the time of our interviews, she and her group of friends were sporadically sharing Spotify links on WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger chat groups.

Participant B, on the other hand, did not express any effort in for being in such sharing platform. However, in his discover narratives learning from what others share take its place. He stated "I don't follow the contemporary but I have some younger friends who I think are good music listeners, I look at their posts." Furthermore, he stated that sometimes some songs on Spotify's "Friend Activity" sidebar catches his eye. He expressed that between our first and second interviews, he saw a song I was listening to on Spotify and now the song is in one of his playlists. Even though the mechanism of acquisition from what others share is similar with the other participants, B expressed that in order for him to take someone's post or activity seriously; he first needs to have a positive judgement regarding their integrity as music listeners. This judgement, in B's case, is only available after getting to know the person in question in real life. At this point, it is plausible to consider that Participant B often expressed a certain disinterest in sharing on social media and unlike other participants who are in their late 20s and early 30s, B is in his mid-40s.

Similar to Participant B, Participant C expresses a disinterest in active sharing on social media as well. She stated “I used to [share music on social media], but I don’t share anything anymore. But I guess until 2 or 4 years ago, I used to share the stuff I like on Facebook. Sometimes with a comment sometimes just the link. I haven’t been doing that for a long time, but my playlists are public.”

Participant B and C’s curations are affected, even though in a rather passive way, by their presence on online platforms; they do not actively try and establish a sharing mechanism on online platforms. However, sharing on online platforms also has the potential to incite a two-way conversation. Participant D, for instance, she stated that by the time of our second interview, started to “talk more about music” on social media. As soon as she started doing so, the connection between her discovery and sharing practices, the two-way mechanism became more visible: “After I started to talk more about music on social media, songs started to come my way through personal relationships. ‘Maybe you’ll like this or have a listen’. I added a song to one of my lists that was sent like that just today.”

In order to further look at this interactive sharing practice and its connotations regarding digital curation, it is necessary to focus on the social aspects of sharing.

#### **4.5.2 Sharing Publicly**

According to Murat Beşer, for a selection, aggregation or archive to be considered a curation, it must be utilized in a social manner. He stated, “For these to be curations, they need to be made use of. It needs to be presented that way, acknowledged that way.”

One way this social manner takes form is an attempt to share publicly and gain recognition and acknowledgement. On our second interview, Participant D mentioned that she was thinking about getting involved in radio: “I have a bit of an itch to be a radio programmer. I think one should transfer all this research, all this

energy somewhere, 1 or 2 hours a week.” By the time of our third interview, she was already working with a hip-hop radio as a communication strategist. Participant D states that when her “production is listened to” it makes her “happy”. By her production, she means the collection of her playlists, music articles, her input in the radio and her social media posts. For D, this is an appreciation of her hard work. Through the recognition, she gets via people listening to or reading her production, she feels “approved”.

The need of approval is a well-known human phenomenon. (Spielberger, Berger & Howard, 1963) Personal music streaming practices are not exempt as a topic, from this phenomenon. According to Mehmet Cem Ünal, indulging in collecting and curation is directly “for sharing it with someone. It has a ‘show off’<sup>28</sup> factor as well.” This, indeed, brings the word performance in mind.

Since Participant A is a DJ, he shares and performs his curations actively at venues and clubs. Furthermore, he provides mixes to radios and shares his set online on SoundCloud and YouTube. When we were having a conversation about what curation is and how he would define it within his practices, he stated that he would feel more comfortable calling the end result of his archival process a curation, rather than the process itself. He considers the rest of his system as “seeing and exhibition” and the end result, the playlists and DJ sets as “exhibitions” themselves. His definition of curation takes only the presented, shared end result in to account out of the whole range of activities discussed in the literature review chapters. Via this understanding, it can be said that for A, curation is more about sharing than managing. This understanding of curation and the fact that he produces his work to satisfy a DJing motivation considered together puts an elevated emphasis on the presentation of the work. While his practices up until the point of sharing is in line

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<sup>28</sup> Although the phrase “showing off” has negative connotations, here, it should not be taken as so. The very act of sharing and manifestation of identity can be considered under what Ünal calls “showing off.”

with the concepts of PIM and a portion of collection studies, in his case and for him curation is sharing, in essence.

Since sharing seems to be the end result of his practices, in order to understand if he takes his audiences' choices into account by collecting and using in curations the songs<sup>29</sup> that are not necessarily to his liking but he thinks fits the general concept of the curation, I started a conversation. He stated that he does not do it while listening to them but while playing he does. But there is a nuance to it. He stated, "Actually I don't play any songs that I don't like, I can tell you that. There are times I prefer a song I'd rate 4/10 instead of a song I's rate 7/10. It's about reading the vibe. And it's the same at home as well. While sitting around at home with 4-5 people and there's something you want to listen but you look at the vibe and put something different on ... It's like that in the club as well. Because you perform for 4 to 5 hours and you can't always be on the same energy level with the vibe of the club. The energy of the vibe is more important."

This statement has an indication that A indeed takes the choice or liking of the audience of his curation as far as he could read the "vibe"; however, his previous practices that involve rigorous filtering eliminates anything that is not to his liking at an early stage. In A's case, there is balance between his motivation to manifest his curation, his decisions and his motivation to satisfy his audience. In his case, curation has to do both with him and with others.

A similar motivation was made visible when I asked Participant D, why she shares the music she listens to, or her thoughts and feelings about what she listens to online, she replied, "We all have it; everyone has the motivation to share in general." I asked why she thought we had this and she replied, "It's not exactly like

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<sup>29</sup> I used the word "song" while asking the question, instead of using the word "track", since the question is about his personal taste to see if he would go along with it or refute. He went along and used "song" also. This does not indicate any definitive view or thought regarding A, only that either he did not see the need to correct the term, or he did not realize and just responded the question as it was asked.

sharing joy or anything... I don't know. I think some things are really out of track. A lot of new music is really garbage. I share to say forget about those, there are things like these and sometimes I share French rap, or today I shared Florence + The Machine." Metin Uzelli has a similar idea regarding listeners' motivation to share. He stated, "I think it's an instinctual behaviour. I don't know if there is a scientific study about this but I think each and every person without exception have this. Everyone who listens to music, want to share the music they listen to. That thing we call DJing, everyone has an instinctual... I mean their instincts drive them to be DJs. Let's have a look at what it means to be a DJ. It requires a curation, a selection. Then this curation, this selection is shared with others within a meaningful framework." In line with Uzelli's statements, all four participants expressed narratives regarding playing playlists for others, be it friends or an audience.

Uzelli continues: "Naturally, due to being social, due to living in a society, people have concerns such as competition, recognition, distinction, differentiation. Among these concerns, there is the pleasure of being the first to discover, first to listen, first to share, first one to do all of these." Similarly, Murat Beşer observes that in the physical collector community, "social status" is a significant factor, a factor that he strenuously tries to stay away from. However, he admits that he too is not completely exempt from this feature that creates a competitive environment. He stated, "A collector has an impulse to [feel like] an elite."

This motivation Uzelli and Beşer point to regarding being distinct and the impulse to manifest this distinction to others is without a doubt a social phenomenon. For D, this motivation is intertwined with her means to make her living. This situation creates circumstances where the curators may choose to steer into a route where they would be appreciated more by the system they are articulated in. She stated, "I mean career, being a music writer, being better known, more visible. I always get feedback, then I say 'well ok then let's walk this way'. Because it's hard to get commissioned otherwise. I'm doing this for my job, for my career but I know that

people see it, listen and like it. They send me stuff, they share too.” Similarly, Murat Beşer who is also a professional music writer stated he buys records not in order to “prove his expertise in this but to highlight [his] traits as a discoverer by sharing things no one knows, creating a common feeling and through that widen his social circle, share this with people who are like [him].”

Participant D’s and Murat Beşer’s relationships with their collections, curations and their motivation to share draw the outlines of their careers. However, this relationship can yet again be a bilateral one. D stated that if she was not doing this as a profession, she would not have been curating this many playlists and would not have been sharing them. Similarly, Participant A’s case is one where the line between professional and personal gets blurry. In order to understand his motivations better, I asked him if he would have downloaded tracks or songs if he were not DJing. He said, “I wouldn’t. If I wasn’t a DJ, I wouldn’t. I’d keep it on Spotify completely, probably (...) My need [to tag and search songs] would be less.” His motivation regarding the effort he put in his whole process, seems to be coming from his DJing practices. It should be kept in mind that these practices are not exclusively professional in a way that A earns his living with them. He is DJing as a side profession, while working a day job as a software expert. It can be discussed whether this can be considered a “personal streaming practice” since he defines his process in such a goal-driven way. I would argue it indeed is. His motivation to take DJing as an endeavour and to build up a system that can satisfy his finding, keeping and curating needs is not observed to be connected to a directly commercial motivation. This is something he does for personal reasons, by himself, in his own way and thus it is a “personal streaming practice.”

For Participant B, who only occasionally DJs for small venues of his friends but frequently sets the tone with music for get-togethers with friends, playing playlists for others act as a test for the integrity of the playlist. He does not necessarily take extensive verbal feedback from his audience but observes his own behaviour and makes changes accordingly. He stated, “I mean I think this flow should satisfy me

but when playing for friends if I start to skip songs back and forth, then I see that the playlist can be revised.”

Participant D’s motivation to seek her follower’s appreciation, Participant A’s motivation to “follow the vibe”, Participant B’s need to revise playlists upon self-feedback he gets while manifesting his curation for others are all heavily social behaviours. Apart from their obvious social implications, it should be pointed out that these narratives are of people who are regarded at least somewhat “good with music” by their social circles. That is, they have built reputations through their music consumption and curation practices. This reputation manifests a person with knowledge and narrative competency to share their knowledge, a person appreciated for these features by their community. Similarly, Mehmet Cem Ünal appreciates the recommendations of the owner of his go-to record shop and uses an analogy: “It’s actually a very classy thing. You know how the French have *cavistes*, they recommend wine and cheese. I have [the record shop owner]. I always buy the stuff that I know, same circle, I tell him to ‘take me out of there’.”

In addition to sharing publicly and the motivation to do so in various forms, the prerequisite of “acknowledgement” as Beşer call it, can be satisfied in a discrete way.

### **4.5.3 Shared Experience**

According to Murat Beşer, music sharing via physical containers held more merit due the intimacy of the relationships formed around the music: “We used to go to each other’s homes, listen through each other’s cassettes, vinyls and lend them to each other or duplicate them. These use to rely solely on singular personal relationships ... those friendships and bonds caused communities to form ... With the advent of internet, social media, the practice to share your identity and to multiply it heavily lost its genuineness”

However, as discussed previously, digital communities such as P2P platforms and/or messaging groups are very much present in present day curators' narratives. Perhaps, Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (1983) can be taken into consideration while discussing music communities formed in the digital era. Nevertheless, communities formed around music consumption can still act as tools for individuation, as discussed in the previous section. However, finding distinction and finding similarity do not always come hand in hand. Deniz Kuzuoğlu stated, "I was never in communities but that's about who you are. I look sociable but I'm not." Metin Uzelli explains the function of communities in this context as a space to experience simultaneousness: "On the internet, on digital, even though today live broadcasting is widely available, you're actually still offline. You are so free that everyone can dabble with their desired content whenever they want. Whereas what people need is to do things simultaneously. I think this is something instinctual as well."

Regarding this simultaneousness, narratives of Mehmet Cem Ünal and Safa Hendem regarding the bond between the musician and the listener are noteworthy. According to musician and producer Safa Hendem when you buy a record, "you own the right to listen to it whenever you want but owning the actual music, it's out of the question. You're actually purchasing the pleasure you get when you listen to the music. It takes you somewhere and makes you feel something. You're buying those feelings." Both Mehmet Cem Ünal and Safa Hendem considers the experience made available by this purchase as a sharing opportunity between the listener and the artist. Regarding Peter Broderick's composition for Fiona Hallinan's *Heterodyne* project mentioned in the Adding Value section, and the "effort" the listener has to put in in order to live the experience, Ünal and Hendem thinks that it is indeed a heightened form of sharing. Ünal stated: "By being [at the Eminönü pier in order to play the song] you are experiencing the same thing with the guy (...) It's borderline voyeurism. You're in this bloke's head and his soul. That's beautiful. It's actually all social. People want to bond with the other. This is a beautiful and refined bond." We can see the outcome of this bond on the artist'

side in Participant A's narrative regarding the satisfaction he gets from discovering and showcasing his discovery on his live DJing performances: "There are times that I like to set it out. But my artistic interest feels greater than that to me regardless. My artistic curiosity, even a sense of nerdiness is actually a bit more dominant (...) I mean the satisfaction I get when I discover that new thing is the most priceless. Of course, when I put on something underground, something unknown instead of something popular and get good reactions from people while I'm playing, that satisfaction is really great as well. Again, I mean it's an artistic satisfaction"

This bond is formed through a "sacrifice" of "being there" in order to achieve "satisfaction" in a "simultaneous" manner. Through this sense of simultaneous being, heightened experience and added value via shared conditions is available. In order to attempt at this bond, one needs to put themselves out there, manifest.

#### **4.5.4 Manifestation**

As discussed in the previous section, Memory, Mehmet Cem Ünal differentiates collecting from hoarding by organization. In this manner, he expressed that, for him, hoarding is "more personal. [It's] something you wouldn't want to showcase to someone else." In this sense, sharing and the decision regarding what to share is effectively personal and has often to do with identity-work. Be it personal reflection or public or discrete manifestation of identity, sharing music materializes curator's will out there in the open.

As an example of sharing for the purposes of reflection, Participant C's narratives can be discussed. While having a conversation about ownership of the music listener, I asked C if she thinks these songs in her playlists are hers. She replied, "I feel so". I followed up and asked whether she thinks the playlists themselves are hers. She stated, "I think the playlist is mine completely. I realize that the ownership [of the listener] remains in a sense, and playlisting is like... I mean you are trying to keep it going through [playlists]. For example, I realized that I enjoy looking

back to these with you (...) I somehow sustain the feeling of ‘I see this, I like this and it expresses me’, even though no one looks.”

C’s monthly playlisting practices not only acts as a diary for her to keep track of herself allowing reflection by “looking back” to see her own journey, since her playlists are public, they also provide an interface her to express herself to others, to put herself out there for whoever chooses to have a look. However, since she does not express any particular interest in feedback from other in order to transform her curations, like a DJ would, her narratives regarding others commenting on her playlist differs from Participant A or Participant D. Much like other participants, C sometimes meddles with the idea of exposing her playlist to friends. However, she has reservations: “Remember when you asked me if I play one of my playlists when my friends come over? See, if I play my playlists, it would be nonsense. It’s too much about me. That’s why I don’t have many followers. That’s kind of sad.”

Due to the fact that C’s playlists are “too much about her”, she does not think her curations would be deemed meaningful by others. Her narrative can be read together with how Mehmet Cem Ünal describes his playlists, outcomes of hoarding activities. However, there is one significant difference in their narratives. Ünal did not express or claim any overarching context or a binding idea that connects the narrative world of his playlists. Participant C did express that. Both the whole of C’s playlists and every single playlist with seemingly unrelated songs in them are a part of a story, purposefully constructed by C. A story of C, in essence. This makes a “sharing with one’s self” as well as a “passive sharing with others” possible at the same time.

Furthermore, even though C finds it “sad” that not many people are following her playlists, she has conflicting feelings when they do follow, and maybe do a bit more than following. On our second interview, C expressed that she thought about this “follower thing” and realized that she “wouldn’t like [her] playlist to be followed all that much. “Recently a friend of mine took a bunch of songs from my September

or October playlist and added to their list, in the same order. I felt like... No-no. I mean of course that's ok, no problem. But like internally, those songs going away like that in bulk, I didn't like that."

Naturally, all songs are available to every user on Spotify, everything is common, and nothing is owned. However, C's narrative shed light on a different sense of ownership, an ownership of context. Participant C made a curation using readily available songs, using a personal and discrete context as a structure. When this structure is taken by someone else, it creates a conflicting situation for C where her desire to be appreciated is confronted with her desire of distinction, her sense of ownership regarding her personal context.

Attempts of involvement or intervention to this constructed personal context can be as un-welcomed as an overall duplication of it. For instance, Deniz Kuzuoğlu is reluctant to accept contribution from outside to her record collection: "What I'm actually doing is a curation of things that touched my life, touched me. Sometimes my friends tell me 'let us get you a record as a present' and I tell them not to do that and to just get me a gift card or something. Because for my birthday I got a lot of records and I can't place them in this system, 'cause I wouldn't have picked those. I know they do it with good intentions but those records don't belong in my collection."

Involvement of others, especially in terms discovery practices, on the other hand is appreciated by Participant D. D had a difficult period of time where had to stay in bed with limited mobility between our first and second interview. During this time, songs sent to her by friends played in important role in her daily life when she was recovering from her surgery. Since her movements were restricted, she could not actively pursue new music but her friends kept sending her songs that they think she would like. They also added her to message groups such as a specific one called "honest and genuine music sharing", from where she could see a select group of music enthusiasts' posts.

Additionally, taking comments and suggestions of loved ones and significant others into consideration for curations are also observed in the narratives of some participants. Participant B, about his “Calm” playlist, stated, “I made that playlist for [his partner], but we were drinking at home, we were listening to it and she said ‘this playlist has become something like your Fatal playlist’. Then I looked at it and she is right! Your mood reflects on it and you change the songs. Sometimes a song gets in the way of that dark routine and you kick it to some other place in the listing. So that the dark ones stay more together in integrity.” B stated that after his partner’s comment, he sat down on his playlist and re-organized it in order to turn it back to its original mood, original context.

Similarly, Participant C, albeit her narratives regarding her difficult relationship with sharing, started and sustained a collaborative playlist with her partner. They started a playlist for their vacation using Spotify’s collaborative playlist feature. Collaborative playlisting allows more than one person to edit a list. They both added songs, they both changed the other and listened to the playlist on the road as well as while they are spending their leisure time. Although the playlist was meant to only serve a purpose during the vacation, they sustained it after. Their collaborative playlist turned into “a shared playlist where we add stuff, we think the other will like.” The collaborative playlist actively serves a communication purpose between the people who are close to each other. It provides a platform for negotiation of their differences and a celebration of their similarities.

#### **4.5.5 Participant-as-Ally Contributions**

Participants were asked to comment on the concept of sharing within the context of digital curation.

When I asked Participant A to comment on the concept of sharing within the context of digital curation, he quickly responded: “Soulseek! (He laughs) Just kidding of

course... Actually, listening to music isn't necessarily sharing, it's what you get at the last step of sharing, maybe it's right to call it 'receiving'. There is an artist out there who is not experiencing your listening experience but he/she is someone who shared it with you ... You have to have a weird ego to share your taste in music [with others]. It's very difficult, it's still difficult for me. But at the end of the day, what we do is to share music that we listen with people. You toy with it, meddle with this sharing experience but all in all what you do is about sharing what you listen to with people, to share what you want to do."

Participant A points out to a distinction in two different functionalities of sharing. He defines being on the comparatively passive side of the interaction as receiving. Indeed, this section discussed "receiving" as a part of the sharing experience in music consumption practices. This is a conscious choice made in order to emphasize the significance of acquisition from what others have shared and to distinguish it from acquisition of information from recommendation algorithms and marketing operations. In this sense, "receiving" can be discussed as a subset of sharing; the way sharing has been defined by this section.

Another point A made is regarding the social motivation to share. To him, to do this, one has to have a "weird ego". That is, one must possess a conviction regarding what they share is valuable or meaningful to others. That, I believe, is a very human thing and is in the core most social interactions. However, oversharing can be considered a vain behaviour. (Agger, 2012) This, it seems, is in effect regarding this specific narrative of Participant A. Nevertheless, this motivation to manifest identity in the form sharing is essential to consider if the topic in question is personal streaming playlists on a public commodified platform such as Spotify, where everyone is visible as much as they wish to be, but not everyone is looked at by others.

Participant B appears to be aware and in peace with this nature of Spotify. He stated, "Well, we think all of [these playlists] are for all the world to see. In a place where

this much of data is flowing, these are not at all for all the world to see. Do I share all that much? I don't (...) But every now and then I thought 'maybe there are a couple of people out there, they'll pay attention, it'll make them happy, I might as well share' and share some playlists but I'm not currently sharing all the time like 'these are the lists I made'. But maybe your friends come around for New Year's Eve and you play your list. If they like it they'll follow anyhow."

Participant B's comment on sharing and digital curation holds a resemblance with the narrative of Participant C. She stated, "I mean I don't pursue anything like an exchange with others via my playlists. They're just there. They're not closed, they can be shared but they don't ache for to be shared (...) [Sharing before streaming when she was younger with e-mails, messages or Dropbox] used to be more important, I remember it (...) I used to attach more importance to it. But that somehow got disconnected. It transformed into a relationship I hold with only a couple of people, a relationship that I tried to hold but couldn't."

In this manner, sharing, or rather passively sharing in the form making oneself available to be discovered, is somewhat still in effect even for curators like Participant B and C, who are not necessarily interested in publicly sharing their productions and their projected identities. According to their narratives, this is done in the hopes of a connection. A connection over music consumption practices, which allow a sense of similarity within a sphere of distinction; a communication.

Participant D replied with an essentially similar narrative to that of Participant A's; however, her comment was more concentrated on sustaining the social status her practices provide her: "[Sharing] has an interesting motivation. It's a question I ask myself often and I don't know the answer. It's like 'why am I putting this song on [Instagram] stories?' But it's a hope. Because I know my close friends will see it and say 'D is listening to this'. Or I don't, I have little cousins, maybe they'll listen. It's all about music; it's all about spreading music." I asked her why it is important for her that her cousins or friends see what she shared, and she replied, "Because if

there is an authority on this thing in my close circle, if there is someone who is considered to be most knowledgeable, they consider me it and I appreciate that. If I have such an identity, I may as well keep doing this. When I get reactions, comments I get motivated more. A motivation to share. That's mainly because people's reactions.”

D's narrative regarding her effort to understand why she shares and her answer to my question regarding why it is important for others to recognize her expertise is indeed supports this section's initial stance on sharing as an essentially social aspect of music consumption, collection and curation practices. In this sense, what one may choose to share holds significance regarding the function and utilization of personal streaming music playlists in everyday life, as well as widening the narrative space of the umbrella term, digital curation to encapsulate personal endeavours in a more inclusive manner.

#### **4.5.6 Sharing & Digital Curation**

Music in general is a social phenomenon as much as it is a cognitive one. In the realm of recorded music and sharing of music among listeners, curation holds a significant place. In order for one to share an acquired recorded music with another, they have to first choose what to share and how to share. In our case, the how's of the process is outlined by the affordances of the cyberspace. (McCourt, 2006) Within the cyberspace, using readily available material, a one can produce a curation and choose to share it for various reasons.

These reasons are, as pointed out before, mostly social. Still, the fact that they are social does not necessarily mean that there is a bilateral relationship between communicating parties, nor it means the sharing is public or aimed at a particular party. Online platforms have their own social formats and within their boundaries, different forms of sharing can be exercised. For instance, from the perspective of a curator, making available an archive online holds a motivation to make resources

available. (Kaye, 2006) Or in Participant D's case, sharing newfound music as well as contextual Spotify playlists on social media platforms is a form of offering expert opinion. While Participant C uses a collaborative playlist as an auxiliary manner of communication with her significant other; and so on. Regardless of the mechanics and utilizations of activity of sharing personal curations of recorded music, they are indeed, forms of communication.

This communication allows experiences to be shared, identities to be manifested and negotiated, records to be kept, added value to be created and information to be conveyed. That is, sharing in digital curation non-exclusively brings together the four previous concepts in itself. Thus, due to its singular significance as well as its conceptually integrative nature, sharing is a key concept to be considered in the effort to position personal streaming playlists under digital curation.

#### **4.6 Analysis Overview**

Throughout this chapter, the five key concepts derived from the distillation of the literature review and narratives of the participants and representatives were explored in the context of digital curation. Each participant and representative have distinctive utilizations of personal streaming playlists in their everyday life. All conveyed narratives regarding these utilizations are analysed and discussed using PIM and collection studies fields' research and discussion tools, thus effectively positioning personal streaming playlist activities under digital curation, at the intersection of information management and music collection.

The findings and discussions presented do not attempt to form a *de facto* definition of the activities and their implications nor do they are used in a way to construct an overarching, collapsing universal meta-narrative. Subjective statements and narratives of participants and representatives are conveyed in a way to enlarge the current understandings of various fields including PIM, collection studies, popular music and media technologies, while documenting in-depth personal examples of

digital curators using personal streaming playlists. The effort to do so made visible some key aspects of the practices and motivations, which allow for a scholarly study of a relatively new cultural format. Information Needs, Adding Value, Memory, Identity and Sharing, together, paint a wide picture of the practice that touches multiple points in studied fields.

Information Needs section points out to the nature of the environments as well the items/objects of personal streaming playlist practices. Participant and representative narratives construct a whole in line with the definition of information (Cornelius, 2002) assumed for the study, which brings meaning and context together. That is, when information needs are mentioned, all practices and motivations discussed in the Playlists & Digital Curation chapter, as well as the subjective contextual significances of the concept should be understood. This consideration of information in music consumption, collection and curation practices offers discussion of popular music consumption and everything around it as information, not just in the environment of streaming but in physical formats as well.

The second section, Adding Value, puts strong emphasis on the contextuality of digital curation in streaming playlist activities. Value, in this is sense, is created subjectively via choice, bringing together, shaping, ordering and experience. Even though “ways of doing things” (Sterne, 2012) are outlined by the affordances of the platforms, nuances in practices and variety in the construction of context allows for a subjective value creation.

Since collecting and curating heavily imply keeping, the section Memory explores the preservation of value and context. In this way, playlists and songs are utilized as gateways to past experiences as well as connections to each other. Via curating personal playlists and keeping them, a new form of subjective record keeping, possibly in the form of a diary as well as a projection of certain aspects of the curator’s self is available.

Following the strong connection between music consumption and self (De Nora, 1999; Sanmartí, 2007; Ruud, 1997), the notion of Identity within the context of personal streaming playlist practices are explored. Finding and creating distinction and similarities through music consumption as well as the reflection and manifestation mechanisms made available via playlisting activities constitute a space for identity work. Certain activities or outcomes of these activities have the potential to function as entry points for curators to look into themselves and communicate with and through the playlists.

Finally, Sharing as a concept was discussed to concentrate on the social aspects of the practices in question. Various online and offline music sharing practices shed light on its function as a uniting concept for the four previous sections. Exploring sharing practices in this manner provides insight into the intricacy and complexity of personal streaming practices while offering digital curation as a form of communication.

When put together, these five concepts provide a position of personal streaming playlist practices under the term digital curation. Digital curation as an umbrella concept (Yakel, 2007) is suitable to further understand aspects of the contemporary phenomenon of the playlist. The fact that the position constructed made use of in-depth subjective narratives of participants and representatives, employs further research in the area in order to widen the narrative universe of the playlist. That is, without claiming to be the one and only approach and without attempting a universally binding understanding, it can be said that understanding personal streaming playlist practices by looking at subjective participant narratives through the five derived key concepts of digital curation is possible.

## CONCLUSION

This dissertation sought to answer the research question, “How can a concept of personal streaming playlist practices be positioned within the context of digital curation?” In order to do so, first a foundation for the question to be discussed was established.

The physical and/or immaterial nature of music is a discussion that has been fed with remarks for at least a century. Forms of containers and agents of music such as sheet music, recorded music, radio transmission as well as the ownership of music with regards to the composer, producer, performer or listener have been approached by philosophers, musicologist, communication scholars and sociologists as topics of interest. Since streaming platforms are considerably new and since music consumption and collection practices went through dislocating changes due to emergence of digital music and then streaming, previous fields of research regarding music collections and curatorial practices open up a space for new research. This is partly due to the transformed nature of music as collectable as well as the media and practices that change continuously.

In order to explore the current environment of music consumption, collection and curation practices and its affordances, a historical review of recorded music formats and technologies is presented. This presentation was set out with Sterne’s use of the term mediality (2012) as a central element. History of recorded music containers are discussed in four sections, which correspond to four different proclaimed eras of container technologies: Physical, Hybrid, Digital and Streaming. Each era is discussed through key affordances of the technologies and the environment that allow and affect personal curatorial activities. By doing this, a historical review of music technologies through the window of a personal music collector and curator is laid out.

Since the era in question is streaming, this dissertation approached music consumption, collection and curation on the chosen streaming platform, Spotify, by utilizing two fields, which have, are yet to extensively shed light on the specific area: Personal Information Management and Collection Studies. This approach is held to set up an intersection of information item and collectable object. The understandings of what a song on a streaming platform such as Spotify really is, and how the practices around the songs and playlists are structured are discussed in the Playlists & Digital Curation chapter, while studying key literature regarding digital curation and positioning personal streaming playlist activities within the existing structures. In order to do so, key concepts and terms of Personal Information Management is used to propose a hierarchical model (see Figure 3.2). This model allowed for a position of the playlist within the broader universe of collection. Furthermore, the hierarchical model offers a structure that can be used in any information collection study.

One of the most important propositions this dissertation makes is to treat songs and playlists in a way that is in line with their context. On streaming platforms, listeners collect what practically are bookmarks. This makes a playlist an address book to access online information, which is stored in a singular server or a couple central servers elsewhere. This nature of songs in streaming platforms, allows discussing playlists and songs as both information items and collectable objects. Discussing streaming songs along these lines, allowed a study of personal streaming playlist curation that tries to understand the traditional collection aspect of the practice while staying within the bounds of the current context and the technological framework of digital music and streaming. Neither fields of research put extensive effort into this specific area while considering the existence of the other, thus an examination of the streaming playlist with a methodology that includes means of both fields, will hopefully contribute to both how information management field studies music collections and how collection studies see digital, bookmarked collections.

Following the theoretical establishment of the dissertation, research methodology and study design is presented. In order to explore new understandings on a contemporary cultural communication practice, a social constructionist approach and a participatory/collaborative method is chosen. Four participants and five industry representatives were chosen and their narratives constructed via active interviews were incorporated to the specialized corpus of the study. The decision to collaborate with the participants and representatives, and including them in the discussion phase of the study was a deliberate action. This is due to my personal worldview and academic stance regarding an affinity to the phrase and the attitude it provides, *de te fabula narratur*<sup>30</sup>. As a social, cultural, communication researcher, who in this study collaborated with people in order to have a sense of a certain aspect of life, I feel the responsibility to help produce a narrative that the producers are not alienated from the product. Thus, participants and representatives were informed fully about the structure design and their contribution in it, while their own discussions and conclusions were represented as such. The dissertation will be shared with the participants and representatives following its completion and their comments and feedback will be taken in order to further improve this methodology to be used in future research. I believe this stance is critical in our day and age, when we need inclusion and collaboration direly. This is a story co-constructed by all ten of us, in order to make sense of the world around us.

Derived from the literature review and the narratives constructed, five key concepts in order to structure an understanding of personal streaming music playlist practices within digital curation were formed. These five concepts by themselves, constitute a representation of the intersection of information and collectable, bringing together two fields. Although these five concepts all have standalone significance and exclusive talking points, they are indeed intricately connected. The significance of this study, I believe, lies in the effort to conceptualize personal streaming playlist practices as human activities that are deeply rooted in the social and personal

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<sup>30</sup> Latin. What is told is your tale.

phenomena. This can be seen as an attempt to legitimize a mainstream practice on a commodified environment. However, what was aimed and hopefully achieved was to showcase the possibility of non-dominant discourse being created and manifested even in a hegemonic environment.

This is achieved via participant and representative narratives, which come from subjective accounts of social interactions and personal reflections. The five key concepts driven from the existing literature and participant and representative narratives, portray the aforementioned roots, emphasises the complexity of the practices in question and highlights the individual, be it diminished or damaged, existence of the media consumer. Curation, in this sense, has the potential to create non-dominant discourse.

In order to dive into a complex issue such as this, a starting point and a framework that can be improved was necessary. Thus, this dissertation mainly aimed to provide this framework by positioning personal streaming music playlist activities under digital curation. Digital curation provides a solid starting point for contemporary playlisting procedures for further research. However, undoubtedly the environment of these practices as well the practices themselves are rapidly changing and a stationary understanding should be avoided. This study can be seen as a hopefully successful representation of a possible approach to understand a contemporary phenomenon of a historical notion.

As presented in substantial detail, the approach and the five concepts, for the purposes of this dissertation, effectively are the linkages constructed in collaboration with participants and representatives and thus establish a solid structure. However, to reiterate, these linkages and the possible horizons they provide (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995) constitute only a part of the whole story. A universally overarching discussion and conclusion is purposefully avoided, due to my personal stance on the subject regarding the collapsing connotations it may provide and also in the hopes for further social constructionist studies driven from

subjective participant narratives to enlarge the story universe of the argument, effectively creating a richer and more inclusive understanding.

Throughout the study, I have attempted to position personal streaming music playlist practices, an activity that I personally deem significant in my own life as well, in a suitable, agile and inclusive framework of digital curation. The findings and discussion provided will hopefully provide other researchers a starting point to explore the issue in their own way, using and improving the theoretical and methodological approach utilized in this study. This is something I hope since I believe contemplating on and researching everyday activities such as listening to music has the potential to provide insight for far more than what initially comes to mind. Making visible human stories and trying to understand their contextual existence has the potential to construct a significant attempt at making sense of the lives we will; and as discussed in detail through the study, playlisting makes sense.

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