

Mp3 vs cd college essay



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The digital era versus the institutions of analog; the format war in relation to the music industry The intent of this essay is to look at the ongoing battle known as the format war, I will begin by looking at the history of vinyl. I will begin to discuss the new and "improved" digital era of music production with its ongoing demands and browsing and how this ongoing battle between certain formats seems to be here to stay. Given that the subject in question is such a broad subject I am going to be concentrating on a specific case study of peer-to-peer file transferring with precise reference to Napster and the way it paved a new path for the downloadable MP3's and how industries jumped on the bandwagon and used the once frowned upon technology today as a selling point. I will look specifically at MP3 and Vinyl in the ever changing tastes and demands in this evolving internet culture and club culture. History of Vinyl.

The gramophone or more commonly known as vinyl record, vinyl, phonograph record, or simply record is an analog sound storage medium. It consists of a flat disc with an inscribed set of grooves, which denote certain pitches and tones when amplified and read by a record player, giving us the listener, the music we crave and purchase on a daily basis. This process was generally used for commercial music reproduction for the best part of the 20th century, although this old fashioned technology had been replaced and advanced drastically since, many music fanatics and DJ's still prefer vinyl as their weapon of choice and believe that it provides a rich and balanced sound found in no other format. I have never heard a CD or an MP3 with anything even remotely like the richness, vibrancy and atmosphere that can come from a vinyl record. " Most of the vinyl's released into the music

industry were known as either an LP or an EP, both acronyms for Long Play, referring to almost all recordings and Extended Play, which referred to 45 rpm recordings with twice the usual number of songs on each side.

Sizes of records in America and the UK are generally measured in inches. The rpm refers to their rotational speeds in revolutions per minute. LPs are most often in the 12" format, although the early vinyl recordings were 10". They are commonly made of PVC, hence may be referred to as vinyl records or simply just vinyl. The Digital Era.

With the internet playing a bigger and bigger part in day to day life, a format was needed for everyday use, instead of searching through your CD collection or vinyl collection to choose your favourite track, people wanted something digital and with technology advancements becoming more and more impressive and capable. Behold the WAV file. Short for Waveform audio format, it is a process of storing data digitally via an audio bitstream on PCs. WAV files are generally large in file size when uncompressed. So as file sharing over the Internet has become more and more popular with broadband limits being only a fraction of what is capable today a solution was needed, thus a format was created for that very purpose. Behold the dreaded mp3.

Also known as an MPEG-1 Audio Layer 3, but more commonly referred to as MP3. It is a digital audio encoding format and is a common audio format for consumer audio storage. With the WAV format declining in popularity, it is still a commonly used, relatively "pure" in sound, a lossless file type with a high quality of sound and used within the industry on systems where a high

end sound is required and disk space is not a restriction. With compressed audio solutions more commonly available the internet went crazy, the entire world was a sharing nation. The small file sizes allowed faster Internet transfers, as well as lower consumption of space on storage devices such as a hard drives. Although with this compression of smaller file size the loss of audio quality was imminent.

Case Study - Napster. I have chosen to look at the first and most famous file sharing service of all time, I have decided to use Napster as my case study. With this sudden growth in MP3 files and various other music formats, Napster was the first online music file sharing service. It was the beginning of the peer-to-peer sharing service which is so widely used in today's internet culture, and has made a major impact on how people use and browse the Internet for music. It was created in 1999 by Shawn Fanning, a student from North-eastern University in Boston and named Napster after Fanning's nickname. Fanning was fed up of the current solutions to searching for music on the internet, using programs such as IRC so he soon created his own solution.

Fig 1. Napster particularly focussed in music in the form of MP3 files and presented a friendly user-interface which was simple and easy to use. The result was a system that worked perfectly and whose popularity generated an enormous audience worldwide with a superior selection of music to download as its selling point. Napster's simple technology allowed even the most recreational of internet users to gain access to their ongoing database of illegal files and folders, giving everyday people the chance to easily share these illegal MP3 format song files with each other worldwide adding to its

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popularity and expansion. This simple and almost effortless way of obtaining illegal mp3 downloads and tracks soon lead to the music industry's allegations of mass copyright violations worldwide.

With growing popularity and word of mouth Infamous rock band Metallica soon discovered that a demo of their song ' I Disappear' had been circulating the internet across the Napster p2p network before it was even released. This allowed radio stations to get the chance to jump on an exclusive play and get a hold of such track via the internet, thus leaking the song onto the radio waves and being played on several radio stations across America. On further investigation Metallica found their entire back catalogue of material also available via this file sharing networking. This angered both band and record company, promptly responding in 2000 by filing a lawsuit against the service offered by Napster. The court found Napster guilty on all claims and finally declared itself bankrupt in 2002 and sold its assets after being shut down for almost a year prior to bankruptcy. Although the recording industry itself criticised music sharing as the equivalent to theft, many Napster users felt justified in this breach in copyright and condoned this illegal service for many reasons.

People worshipped Napster because it enabled them to obtain chart hit songs without having to buy entire albums, which were claimed to have been full of " filler" tracks and the odd decent song. Although this original service was shut down by court order in 2001, this ideology behind file sharing paved the way for underground peer-to-peer file-sharing programs to immerse, which are currently still running under several different names and locations so they are almost impossible to trace and prosecute. This

worldwide system of audio piracy has also paved the way for a new way of thinking with regards to record sales. Napster use peaked with whopping 26.4 million users worldwide in February 2001, so after receiving a enormous response to illegal services, several major companies have jumped on the bandwagon and used this pirate technology and concept to a new level of hypocrisy offering fully legal downloads of tracks such as iTunes, which is now one of the world's leading legal downloading clients for mp3 and track formats.

“ Music is a commodity that requires legal protection, but the meanings given to that commodity are not merely the ones set out by those who produce it. ” Fig 2. Bands have already started resorting to mp3 rather than your conventional CD or limited edition vinyl. For example London based electro hip hop band Hadouken have jumped into this technological war on the digital band wagon by releasing an album strictly on a USB stick containing a comprehensive track listing of mp3's. Also the world famous British band Radiohead, renowned for their controversy have also become aware of this continuation of illegal downloading so they have had their own turn on things by releasing their upcoming album ' In Rainbows' on their personal website only.

The album is set as a negotiable price, where the listener is able to pay whatever they want for the album and it can only be purchased via their website. Fig 3. Although this is a bold and brave step in the right direction to end illegal piracy, I feel that if everyone were to do the same then there would be no business in the music industry and it would so easily decline and fail as a corporation altogether. Although successful as Radiohead are they,
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have still yet to release the exact sales figures achieved by this controversial move. The argument. After looking at the institutions of vinyl and other hard copies of music production and the new digital era of the future I think both formats of music hold their own values and leave the listener overwhelmed and content as he/she purchase their desired format.

For example most popular music artists these days release singles digitally and release fewer hard copies in stores. For a major record company this offers great potential in turning over profit at far less effort. Paying someone to mass produce thousands of CD's, paying for someone to design the artwork and then the distribution costs of shipping worldwide when they can have a database with as many songs as they desire and at whatever price they desire which can be digitally transferred via the internet. MP3's are very portable and play a big part with portability and with new and improved mp3 players, music on the go has never been so simpler, so this idea of no restrictions regarding file size is somewhat appealing to people on the go.

Digital tracks are also very inexpensive compared to the price of vinyl; generally an mp3 will cost around 79p a track where you can be expected to pay at least 5 times as much for a record vinyl. In comparison, vinyl and other analogue mediums are somewhat limited in size and capability where as thousands among thousands of digital tracks can be stored over several cross platforms of storage, whether it be an external hard drive, a mass storage DVD or CD compared to a 12" Vinyl holding as little as just 2 tracks per side and taking up valuable space. MP3's are hugely convenient and easily available, where as record stores are constantly being closed down and harder and harder to find. For a DJ's and record collectors on the other

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hand the idea of vinyl seems much more appealing, not only do people believe that the whole analog experience, from the recordings to the reproduction side of things to be somewhat atmospheric and warm compared to the cold over produced recording of digital sound. The idea of holding the music in their hand and being able to see their extensive collection of music is also rewarding.

Also within certain genres buying from independent labels makes you feel elated because your purchase actually does help fight the cause and help toward the bigger picture. They also still like the idea of going to a record store and finding certain records that are simply not available anywhere else. Shopping for vinyl you can find crazy stuff to sample, rare records... stuff no one else has heard before. " MP3's are hugely convenient and are available all over the internet, illegally and legally, people who generally download mp3's care about their record collections and simply do it for the convenience , whether it be for your iPod when you're on the go or whether it's just background music whilst your working out or passing time. Vinyl's on the other hand are harder to get hold off and have that special element about them, the way they sit in your hand, the way they look, the huge canvas that is the artwork and how it relates to the ideology behind the music. " Music that is released on vinyl is then niche, more unique and more original, for example, aphex twin's ground breaking " analord" album, can only be bought on vinyl. " Not only do people collect for the musical value but for the rarity of the artwork and release of such music. The covers of such LP's became collectables themselves.

Anything from limited edition realises to a rare debut album, the jacket, the sleeve and the vinyl itself is considered to be high collectable and are like holy grail to some collectors and artists. " He believed that more attractive packaging would increase sales. He was right, and since then, some of the most influential figures in contemporary art have designed music packaging. " If all music was in fact digitally released via the internet and there were now record store then there would be no purpose in packaging and no character to a release.

An albums artwork often speaks a thousand words and adds mood and atmosphere to give the desired effect of the release, anticipating the sound and general quality of the recordings, for example if the album is quite uplifting and is full of summary anthems then the packaging would be equally uplifting in visual aesthetics such as colour and tone, matching the sound to follow with graphical elements aiding in the experience that is owning a hard copy of music. As for mixing capabilities the advantages of digital recordings compared to the primitive nature of analog recordings win hands down. The possibilities are almost endless, from general editing purposes like cutting and levels to adding effects and distortion, the world is a producer's oyster in comparison to the limitations of analog. Conclusion. After looking at both sources from both points of view I feel that there is a need for both the old traditions of vinyl as much as there are needs for the convenience and availability or the new mediums such as MP3 downloads. They both fit a different purpose in society and cater for different and changing audiences.

For example for the convenience of downloading a song you've just heard somewhere else then MP3 is the way to go but if you are looking for a piece of rare art to complete your record collection or to spice up your DJ set then the institution of browsing a record store and finding a rare and forgotten timeless track is priceless. Whatever sound or personal choice for music is I believe that there is something out there that applies for every audience. Whether it is to have the biggest collection of music on an external hard drive or whether you want the rarest collection of vinyl, each medium holds its purpose and it's down to the beholder and the purpose. It is merely preference. The compressed audio formats lack quality and 'warmth' in comparison to the uncompressed sound of vinyl as described by many users of the musical underground forums dominating bandwidth. The hisses, the pops and the imperfect sounds they achieve are all apart of living good traditional music.

" In short, it's like comparing religions. " Bibliography. Online Articles. The effects of piracy upon the music industry: a case study of bootlegging by Lee Marshall University of East Anglia, Norwich, UK Web References.

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