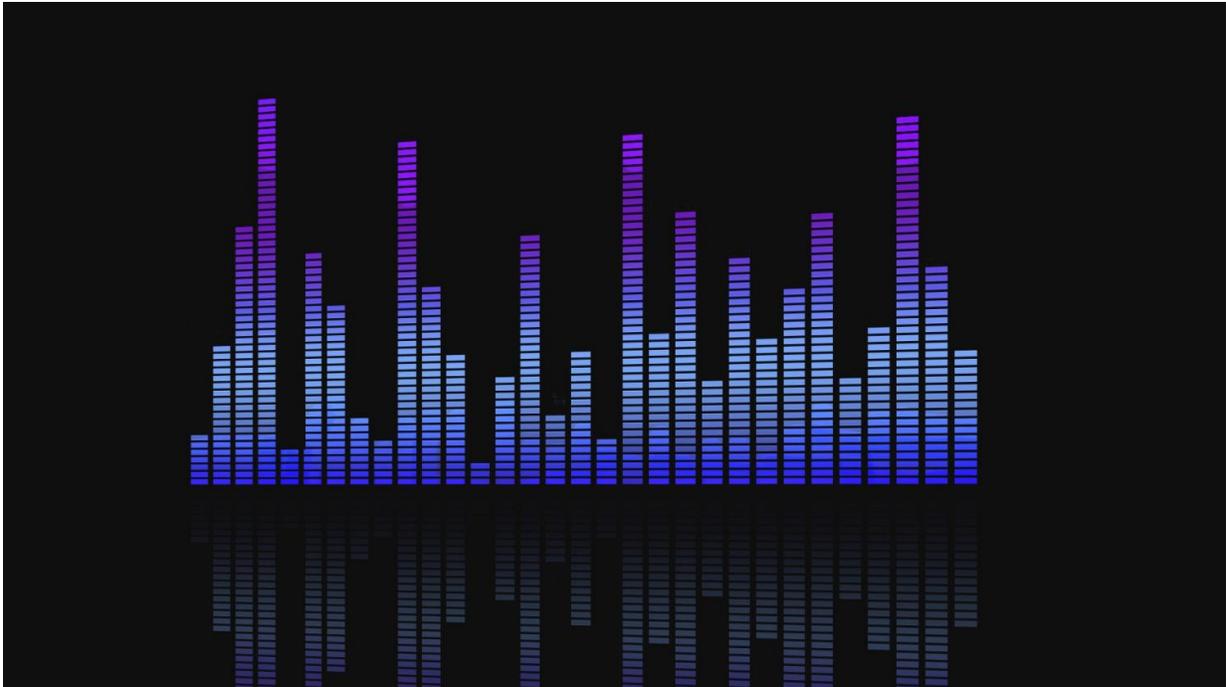


How music listening affects the climate

April 26 2019, by Phillip-André Baarøy



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CD listening has been replaced by music streaming. Has the change in music consumption been good for the climate? The answer might surprise you.

Associate professor at The University of Oslo, Kyle Devine, has collaborated with Dr. Matt Brennan at the University of Glasgow on a research project called "The Cost of Music."

They have conducted archival research on recorded music consumption and production in the US, comparing the economic and environmental [costs](#) of different formats at different times.

Regarding the economic cost, the researchers found that the price consumers have been willing to pay for owning recorded music has changed dramatically.

In 1977 consumers were willing to pay roughly 4.83 % of their average weekly salary for a vinyl album. In 2013, this number is down to roughly 1.22% of the equivalent salary for a digital album in 2013.

"Consumers now have unlimited access to almost all recorded music ever released via platforms such as Spotify, Apple Music, Youtube, Pandora and Amazon," Devine says.

While his colleague in Glasgow has concentrated on studying the [economic costs](#), Devine has looked into the environmental cost of music consumption from the 1970s to today.

As downloading and streaming took over the music industry, the amount of plastics used by the US recording industry dropped dramatically.

"Intuitively you might think that less physical product means far lower carbon emissions. Unfortunately, this is not the case," Devine says.

Storing and processing music in the cloud depends on vast data centers that use a tremendous amount of resources and energy.

Devine translated plastic productions and the electricity use to store and transmit digital audio files into greenhouse gas equivalents (GHGs). He then compared the GHGs from recorded music in the US in 1977, 1988, 2000 and 2016.

The findings are clear. The GHGs caused by recorded music are much higher today than in the past. In 1977 the GHGs from, recorded music were 140 million kg. By 2016, they were estimated to somewhere between 200 million kg and over 350 million kg.

"I am a bit surprised. The hidden environmental cost of music consumption is enormous," Devine says.

He emphasizes that the point of the research project is not to ruin one of life's greatest pleasures, but to encourage consumers to become more curious about the choices they make as they consume culture.

Are we remunerating the artists who make our favourite music in a way that accurately reflects our appreciation? Are streaming platforms the right business model to facilitate that exchange? Is [streaming](#) music remotely from the cloud the most appropriate way to listen to music from the perspective of environmental sustainability?

These are the questions the researchers want to see in a broader public conversation.

"There are no easy solutions, but taking a moment to reflect on the costs of music and how they have changed over time, is a step in the right direction," Devine says.

In the book ["Decomposed"](#) by Kyle Devine, you can learn more about how recorded [music](#) always has been a significant exploiter of both natural and human resources.

Provided by University of Oslo

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