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**“It’s Like the Way it was Supposed to be  
Listened to”: The Vinyl Revival Against a  
Digital Backdrop**

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## **Abstract**

This paper studies the revival of vinyl records, utilising existing research in conjunction with interviews with consumers, industry professionals and record sellers to examine the various reasons behind the revival. After considering the reasons for the format's initial downfall and the extent of the resurgence, the possible causes for the revival are discussed: Record Store Day, nostalgia, social media, special editions, community, sound and technicality, artwork and additional features, listening types and physicality and materiality. The paper focuses on these key factors and the current research inclination to assign multiple causalities to the revival. This is broadened to consider the possibility of one overarching factor that led to the revival – the dislike and distrust felt by consumers towards digitisation and streaming services. From here, these factors are all linked to the distrust in digitisation and the concluding opinion is that dislike in digital music platforms can be seen as an overarching causation of the vinyl revival. While this paper is not conclusive, it highlights the need to explore the possibility of a central determinant rather than the current notion of multiple factors leading to the vinyl revival. The dislike in digital music platforms is a key factor which contributed to the vinyl revival and, while other overarching causations are possible, this digital distrust can explain why the vinyl revival occurred while also accounting for all of the pre-existing causal explanations.

## **Acknowledgements**

Many thanks go to the participants in this research – Emma, Orla, Phil, Simon, Josh, Laura and Mark – for without them this would not have been possible. Their insight proved to be invaluable and their time commitment towards this project was greatly appreciated. Besides this, they highlighted one key factor which inspired this research – vinyl records are important to many people from all walks of life and should be loved and cherished for many years to come.

When I first began collecting records, I was told that it would be a waste of money and a short-lived fad. Having now collected over 150 records over the course of 7 years and investing countless hours into the study of them shows me one thing – my younger self really was on to something... and it definitely wasn't a short-lived fad. So, to those who told me not to bother with records – guess you were wrong! This study allowed me to broaden my knowledge on one of my passions (while buying a fair few more records along the way) and for that I am truly grateful. Despite the inevitable stress, the time spent learning more about people's sheer joy towards this format (while keeping an eye on the snooker scores, naturally) has helped show me that I am not alone in my passion... and I should definitely keep buying more.

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## Introduction

In this modern age new technologies seem to be everywhere we look, and music is no exception; gradually we have shifted from wax cylinder recordings to 78s shellac records and then vinyl records of varying sizes from the 1940s onwards. The desire for portability, durability and increased storage (amongst other reasons) took over, with cassettes and CDs becoming the most sought-after format throughout the 1990s (Plasketes 1992, 111). Finally, the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century saw the dominance of the digital age transform the music sphere, resulting in compressed MP3 downloads and then streaming services such as Spotify. The arrival of a new listening format has typically seen the outdated medium retreat into the shadows, rarely gaining new consumers and retaining a small following of dedicated listeners (Plasketes 1992, 109). However, there is one format that has avoided this trend – the vinyl record. The record was falling out of fashion by the end of the 1980s as consumers were increasingly looking for portable music that could be listened to at any time or anywhere, and the cassette filled this requirement perfectly (Mall 2021). As the 1990s arrived and the CD took over from the cassette, it was widely believed that the record was now gone for good (Plasketes 1992, 110). Surprisingly, by the 2010s there were hints of a vinyl return, and by the 2020s it was evident that records were back for good. In 2022 vinyl record sales in the US outsold CDs for the first time since 1987 and produced a revenue of \$1.2 billion following 16 consecutive years of growth (Friedlander and Bass 2023), demonstrating the longevity of the format and its following of new and long-term consumers. This unprecedented return was signalled by Alessi the subsequent year, saying records faced “17 years of relentless growth in one of the most volatile industries in the world” (Alessi 2024), reflecting the sheer magnitude of the resurgence against this intense backdrop. But what led to its revival, and why did listeners feel a connection strong enough to bring records back even when there were more convenient formats available? In this paper, the overarching research question ‘was the

vinyl revival a reaction to the growing dislike of digital music services?’ will be considered, through the study of academic and popular discourse surrounding the causations of the vinyl revival, and the use of interviews exploring participants’ experiences with both records and digital music platforms. The increasing number of consumers purchasing records and the possible reasons for this has been considered by scholars like Yiqian Guo (classism and nostalgia) (Guo 2023), Graham Jones (the power of independent record shops and their communities) (Jones 2018) and Josh Greenberg (multiple causation theory including factors like nostalgia and sound quality) (Greenberg 2024). While it’s agreed that multiple factors combined to generate the resurgence, an overarching connection between factors has not been considered. The ease and relative affordability of streaming services compared to vinyl suggests that physical formats should be irrelevant to modern listeners, yet the records’ return suggests otherwise. This creates a phenomenon that will be studied at length to produce a deeper understanding of listeners’ preferences and the wider industry.

Many schools of thought are produced when considering the causations of the vinyl revival, from the importance of nostalgia (Whitehouse 2023) or physicality (Fernandez and Beverland 2018) above all to Record Store Day (Bates 2020) or social media’s power over consumers (Guo 2023). Whilst these factors (and more) form a valid path of enquiry, the possibility of a central determinant to connect these theories can be explored. The notion of distrust in the age of digital music stands out as a link between each possible reason for the vinyl revival, as is discussed in *‘I Almost Feel Like Stuck In A Rut’: How Streaming Services Changed The Way We Listen To Music* by Michael James Walsh (Walsh 2024). As the dislike in society’s growing reliance on digital technologies can explain why listeners find materiality, physicality or nostalgia important, the connection between the disapproval of digitisation and the simultaneous revival of vinyl forms the core of this thesis.

Personally, I have witnessed a growing number of people choosing to consume records recently, be that those who grew up listening to records and are reverting to this, or those in the youth market who are searching for an alternative to digital media. This trend intrigued me, and from speaking to younger consumers about what drew them to records, I felt compelled to consider this at a deeper level. This led me to consider the youth market who appear to be deliberately rebelling against the digitisation they are accustomed to in favour of an older format more commonly associated with their parents. From this it became apparent that the connection between the vinyl revival and the dislike of digital music formats needed to be studied in greater detail, through both secondary research and interviews with young consumers.

The research discussed in this paper generates a perspective on the cause of the vinyl revival combining multiple causational factors with the notion of digital distrust, producing a new take on the resurgence. The trend of portable and accessible music has been disregarded, favouring an older technology which is arguably more static and requires more procedures to use. By studying the reasons behind this case at a deeper level, predictions relating to future industry trends can be generated and society's changing opinions can be monitored closer than before to gauge whether this is likely to occur again.

This research is based upon academic and popular discourse, sales figures and interviews with consumers and retailers. Whilst the theories of authors are paramount in creating a valid and reliable research avenue, the opinions of record consumers can ultimately provide the most insight into the resurgence by considering the opinions of the customers themselves. My interviews with retailers, industry professionals and listeners will be considered in addition to

writings by authors like Graham Sharpe (Sharpe 2024), Sophie Whitehouse (Whitehouse 2023) and Michael James Walsh (Walsh 2024) who use interviews as a core aspect of their work. These help to showcase a broader array of vinyl consumers and add greater depth to my findings.

Key discourse from varied sources is studied in the literature review, before the methodology chapter expands upon the interviews conducted for this paper. The magnitude of the record resurgence is then scrutinised - it is widely recognised that records remained a core aspect of multiple subcultures such as dance music (Jenewein 2021)(Montano 2008), and so the extent of the revival in this area is questioned, along with the initial reasons for the decline in the format compared to the simultaneous rise in CD sales. Following this, the reasons behind the revival will be assessed – these include factors relating to the item itself such as physicality, materiality, sound quality and aesthetic variations, to factors relating to the listening experience and the consumers themselves like nostalgia and community creation. The final chapter collates all of this and investigates the link between these factors and digitisation, examining the current reliance on digital technologies and the desire to rebel against this.

When studying those who purchase and listen to vinyl records, a variety of consumer demographics become apparent. Some may view themselves as a record collector, meaning that they purchase records to add to a collection of music. Collectors may seek out rare or valuable records and purchase multiple copies of the same album in different variations to be able to say that they own both versions. Some might not play the records they purchase and keep them as a solely collectible artefact whilst others use them as their primary form of music consumption. Some may not identify as a record collector, for reasons like owning a

small number of records or purchasing records as a form of music to listen to rather than something treasurable. In these instances, the term record buyer or consumer may be preferred. This research considers vinyl purchasers in their many forms, and so the terminology of record collector, buyer and consumer is used interchangeably in this paper, with all phrases representing anyone who actively owns records regardless of how they personally identify. The term ‘records’ can also be misleading as there are many variations in the record format, but here it relates to all forms and sizes – singles, EPs or LPs.

A variety of literature is key, including *“Taking a Chance on a Record”*: *Lost Vinyl Consumption Practices in the Age of Music Streaming* by Sophie Whitehouse (Whitehouse 2023). Along with this, *As the Record Spins: Materialising Connections* by Karen V. Fernandez and Michael B. Beverland (Fernandez and Beverland 2018) and *Vinyl Record: A Cultural Icon* by Dominik Bartmanski and Ian Woodward (Bartmanski and Woodward 2018) are both key literature due to the varied perspectives and reasons for the revival that they present. In the popular discourse realm, the article *‘I Almost Feel Like Stuck in a Rut’*: *How Streaming Services Changed the Way We Listen to Music* by Michael James Walsh (Walsh 2024) provides an insight into the growing dislike of streaming which, although not directly linked to records, evidences the dislike of digital music platforms which is valuable here. These and other literature will now be discussed at length in the literature review.

## Literature Review

Both academic and popular discourse has been considered here, utilising an array of key literature. The topic of the vinyl revival has been widely discussed by authors across the research spectrum, with theoreticians generating explanations for the resurgence and for its initial downfall. However, records are first and foremost a listening format which appeals to diverse consumers, and so significant literature has been written with the buyer themselves in mind – be that popular discourse books about record collecting and industry changes following the resurgence like *On The Records* by Graham Sharpe (Sharpe 2024), or online blogs for consumers explaining the technicalities of records and reasons for the revival that consumers may identify with like *The Enduring Appeal of Vinyl in the Digital Age* from Vinyl.com (Vinyl.com 2024). Academic and popular writings are used here simultaneously as they provide contrasting perspectives for different readers, meaning that the scope and generalisability of this paper is wide and its findings are well informed, accounting for both stances.

A key article is “*Taking a Chance on a Record*”: *Lost Vinyl Consumption Practices in the Age of Music Streaming* by Sophie Whitehouse (Whitehouse 2023). Whitehouse conducts semi-structured interviews with record consumers from the UK indie pop scene, discussing their love of records, reasons for sticking with the format and the impact on their musical scene amongst other points initiated by the interviewee. While the study’s primary focus is physicality and materiality through a nostalgic lens, Whitehouse also considers the impact of digital technology on consumers, which interviewees share their dislike towards. This shows why the impact of digitisation on consumers should be further explored as Whitehouse doesn’t link this dislike to any other causal explanations but accepts that digital distrust has

encouraged consumers to stick with records. Although this paper is focused on one sub-genre, its findings are still valuable and can be generalised to other demographics through interviews with consumers from other scenes to increase its applicability.

Rebekah Farrugia and Thomas Swiss's work *Tracking the DJs: Vinyl Records, Work, and the Debate over New Technologies* discusses digitisation within electronic and dance music (Farrugia and Swiss 2019). Through discussions with DJs from these scenes and the study of new technologies available to them, the authors gather opinions from interviewees about the growing inclination of DJs to change their performance style and digitise. Whilst the ease of transporting music digitally is acknowledged, many see these methods as inauthentic and a departure from tradition. This desire to remain with a physical format in a digital era shows that DJs feel a pull towards records, due to the expertise of the DJing craft associated with records and the nostalgia attached. For DJs, records are their instrument, not just a music listening format and so they are likely to have a deeper connection with records compared to digital software. Although this only considers one demographic, it can evidence the prolonged appeal of vinyl and be used in tandem with other writings to demonstrate that, for a genre historically dominated by records, consumers want to remain with the physical formats they know even if digitisation may be easier.

*As the Record Spins: Materialising Connections* by Karen Fernandez and Michael Beverland centres on records' materiality, going beyond discussing the physicality of the format to present factors which contributed to the vinyl revival (Fernandez and Beverland 2018). Through interviews with consumers and observations of interactions, processes and events held in record stores, they provide a comprehensive insight into the impact of materiality and

physicality on consumers without disregarding other possible influences. The paper shows consumers' dedication to the format and explores the anthropomorphism associated with records, presenting varying possibilities as to why listeners continue to purchase records. The connection between records and digital platforms are discussed, with participants showing a small willingness to interact with digital technologies (solely using them for podcasts or background music) but the overwhelming feeling of not purposefully listening to music digitally is noted. This reinforces the view of vinyl dedication against a backdrop of digitisation, making the concept of rebelling against digital formats a valuable area to study.

Digital distrust and dislike are explored in Michael James Walsh's article '*I Almost Feel Like Stuck in a Rut*': *How Streaming Services Changed the Way We Listen to Music*, where 49 regular streaming users were interviewed about their feelings towards the format (Walsh 2024). The notion of distrust is paramount throughout, with participants describing feeling trapped by the algorithmic nature of streaming, the lack of digital privacy and the passive listening it promotes. Although this article does not directly link to records, it is valuable within this paper to provide insight into the downsides of streaming services, explaining why listeners may gravitate towards a tangible music platform like vinyl. This demonstrates the wider possibilities that are not discussed by Walsh and initiates further research into digitisation and the vinyl resurgence.

The popular discourse used in this paper includes *The Vinyl Revival and the Shops that Made it Happen* by Graham Jones (Jones 2018). Jones uses his experience in the record industry and independent shops to highlight the evolution of record shops after the vinyl revival, enticing everyday consumers and giving an academic insight into the issues which faced

these shops and how they rebounded. Jones's industry experience means that his points are well-founded and based around his pre-existing knowledge, while his discussions with record sellers across the UK ensure that the book is generalisable and not based solely on his experiences, making it a highly valuable work.

These works focus on one factor, but others have considered multiple reasons simultaneously, reinforcing the view that many elements led to the revival. Greenberg discusses marketing, nostalgia and forms of listening in *The Triumph of Vinyl: Vintage is Back as LP Sales Continue to Skyrocket* (Greenberg 2024) while Guo describes classism, social media and record rarity as revival reasons in *The Comeback of the Medium: The History and Contemporary Revival of the Vinyl Record Industry* (Guo 2023). Popular with consumers, Vinyl.com's *The Enduring Appeal of Vinyl in the Digital Age* considers artwork, sound quality, physicality and collectability as reasons for consumers gravitating towards records (Vinyl.com 2024). These examples show that across the spectrum of academic and popular writings, many authors believe that multiple factors caused the vinyl revival, explaining why the wide variety of vinyl consumers buy or collect records. This also initiates the question of whether there is one overriding factor that links these theories together, which is the focus of this paper.

## **Methodology**

Alongside secondary research from academic and mainstream sources, this paper utilises interviews providing insight into the thoughts of consumers and industry professionals. This widens the reliability and accuracy of the paper whilst ensuring that the discussions within secondary sources truly reflect the opinions of the consumers themselves.

Many writings surrounding the vinyl revival and the record industry include interviews with participants or personal recollections from the author (if they are a record consumer or collector themselves). Farrugia and Swiss conducted interviews with DJs to discuss their opinions of new technologies in their industry to gain first-hand insight (Farrugia and Swiss 2019), while Whitehouse conducted interviews with consumers from the indie pop scene to study their practices and views (Whitehouse 2023). Authors within the vinyl sphere often include personal opinions and memoirs to increase the validity of their study, using their own experiences to broaden their theoretical paradigms. Graham Sharpe intersperses his experiences purchasing records with tales from his friends and colleagues (Sharpe 2024), Elliott describes his experiences of Record Store Day (Elliott 2014) and Haywood recalls his family's connection with records and their identification with the Afrofuturistic artwork on their chosen record sleeves (Haywood 2021). This demonstrates how interviews and personal experiences are used throughout the discourse, showing that it was vital they formed a key part of this paper.

In these studies and other literature, interviews or memoirs are not always the core component as they often provide additional evidence or reinforce theories. For this reason, I chose to conduct a small number of interviews so that the findings can be used alongside

previous studies rather than standing alone. As secondary research is vital within this paper, the interviewees and experiences discussed in secondary research is also considered here. This meant that a smaller number of research participants were needed to supplement pre-existing research and reinforce their findings.

I conducted six interviews with a range of participants to ensure that the work was representable of the diverse population of record consumers. This included two newer consumers, one long-term consumer, a home audio consultant and owners of two independent record shops. The interviews were semi-structured with some questions being asked to all interviewees and others depending on the type of consumer. Despite being industry professionals, the audio consultant and record shop owners were also asked questions applicable to the long-term consumer as they are record collectors in their free time.

Participants Orla and Emma are both younger than 23 and began consuming records between the ages of 13 and 15 and so are new consumers and part of the youth market. Alternatively, Phil and audio specialist Simon had been consuming since childhood – listening to their parents’ collections during records’ heyday, sticking by the format during its decline and still consuming after the revival, classifying them as long-term consumers. This means that my interviews cover those consuming prior to the vinyl revival and those who began consuming following its return, so the responses can be generalised to people across the consumer spectrum.

Simon identified as a “consultant in the home audio business” (Figure 1) where he promotes and reviews playback equipment (particularly turntables) alongside working with companies

to develop new products and provide guidance using his knowledge as an audio mastering engineer. As he has been in the hi-fi industry for over 20 years, he provided insight into the industry before, during and after the vinyl revival, allowing us to discuss the changes in both consumers and industry workers. Simon spoke about high-end, expensive equipment marketed at audiophiles and cheaper turntables sold in high street chains or specifically marketed at younger consumers (Figure 2), ensuring that all consumers are considered and accounted for. This increases the applicability of this paper as the full spectrum of consumers have been considered over the course of the interview process. Simon's views are also valuable as they provide an industry insight which complements consumers' opinions, something not included in pre-existing studies. This broadens the scope of this paper and reinforces its argument as it is backed by vast, diverse industry knowledge.

The owners of two Edinburgh record shops were also interviewed – Umbrella Vinyl and Thorne Records. Umbrella Vinyl opened in 2023 and Thorne Records opened in 2022, meaning both began trading during the vinyl revival, however all shop owners had vast experience in the industry prior to the revival, with this knowledge informing their responses – Josh from Umbrella Vinyl owned an independent record label and had been selling records in Hong Kong for many years, while Mark from Thorne Records had been working in record shops since the age of 16.

Josh and Laura from Umbrella Vinyl sell second-hand records, specialising in jazz, funk, soul and global music records. They sell solely vinyl records and accessories, including some records pressed on Josh's independent label. This is the opposite of Thorne Records which sells only new records (and a small selection of cassettes) of all genres from rock and pop to

hip-hop and a wide selection of independent Scottish artists. As he stocks brand new records, Mark can participate in Record Store Day (and does so enthusiastically) whereas Umbrella Vinyl are not eligible for the event as they only stock specialist second-hand records. Both shops have a regular customer base and host events including concerts and listening parties, gaining more customers and increasing their local presence. These differences ensured that a wide variety of records and consumers have been considered in this paper – from those that purchase only second-hand records and those who search for specific artists, to consumers of new records or those who purchase music from a wide variety of genres. This increases the generalisability of this paper, ensuring that its findings can be applied to all consumers and retailers.

As part of the interviews, participants were asked about their favourite records. These spanned a variety of genres and artists, from iconic artists such as The Beatles (Mark from Thorne Records (Figure 3)) and Freddie Mercury (Emma (Figure 4)) to lesser-known artists like Waxahatchee (Orla (Figure 5)) or from non-pop genres such as Bulgarian bagpiper Nikola Atanasov (Phil (Figure 6)). This shows that participants are interested in a variety of genres and so all musical tastes and scenes are accounted for within this paper.

## **Has there been a resurgence in vinyl records?**

The study of the vinyl revival cannot be considered without first examining the extent of the resurgence. While scholars and sales figures show that there was a significant resurgence in the format (Mall 2021), the reasons behind its downfall, the overlap between records and CDs, and the continued dominance of records in various subcultures must be noted.

With the arrival of cassette tapes and CDs, records' status was diminishing by the end of the 1980s. Consumers craved portable music, and vinyl records couldn't compete with new technologies (Plasketes 1992). Following the introduction of the Sony Walkman in 1979 (Soul Case 2024), record sales decreased across the next decade until cassette sales prevailed in 1985 (Zywietz 1995). Whilst some consumers stayed committed to their original format, the majority felt a pull towards accessibility and practicality – cassettes and CDs take up less space, allow you to play music on the go and don't damage as easily as records. Throughout the 1980s this trend was becoming more evident, with Plasketes writing that record collectors at the time saw the CD as leading the vinyl to "certain death" (Plasketes 1992). 1984 saw the final year of vinyl dominance where it held 53.88% of the UK's music sales, and by 1985 this had reduced to 47.53% with cassette sales making up 49.69% of total music sales. Sales changed dramatically in the subsequent four years and by 1989 record sales formed only 23.3% of the market, with CDs overtaking them at 25.65% (Zywietz 1995).

The rise of CDs and downfall of vinyl continued into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, and by 2001 record sales made up only 1.16% of the market compared to CDs 96.77% (Zywietz 1995). The final deadly contributor was the introduction of Low-value Consignment Relief (LVCR) in 2009. This form of tax exemption meant that low value goods imported into the EU weren't

subjected to VAT or customs duty, in the hope that this would speed up the importation process. This didn't directly impact vinyl as they were not under the £18 threshold, but it changed the CD market dramatically. Mail order businesses in the Channel Islands such as Play.com exploited this (Goodley 2013), utilising their geographical position with the UK and their non-EU status. These companies priced their CDs lower than UK businesses because of LVCR, meaning consumers were drawn to importation rather than purchasing from local shops (Jones 2018, 9). The combination of the lower price of imported CDs compared to records and the decreased footfall to shops selling both formats proved fatal to the industry. When the loophole was removed in 2012, the damage had already been done and £165 million VAT per year was lost along with over 1000 record shops closing (Jones 2018, 11). For many sellers' CDs were a way to diversify their business as they take up little space and generate a large profit while allowing records to be showcased alongside (Jones 2018, 14), and so with less people shopping locally for CDs, records were also receiving less publicity. With the importation of CDs and decreased footfall to record shops, the domination of CDs was complete and records faded into the background with their sellers.

Records remained prominent in some subcultures, including the dance scene. Since the 1980s the dance scene had revolved around vinyl, particularly white label records (records released with a blank inner label as a promotional copy or from a short pressing period) – these were often anonymous, released quickly and inexpensive, meaning DJs could visit a specialist shop during the day, purchase new white label records to play that night before discarding them and repeating the process, keeping clubgoers interested night after night (Jenewein 2021, 78). This continued following the rise of the CD with DJs preferring to use turntables and scratching methods to create effects rather than adopting new digital technologies (Montano 2008) (Farrugia and Swiss 2019). The feeling of authenticity and commitment to record

culture prevailed across the DJ community, suggesting that the notion of a vinyl revival is not applicable everywhere as this community stuck by records. Their audiences also preferred the use of authentic methods, further evidencing this. The physical manipulation of records is a visual experience, so audiences felt that they were witnessing a skilled artist when watching a DJ with records because they could see the process (Farrugia and Swiss 2019). However, this is one subset of the industry and so cannot be generalised despite vinyl records continuing their domination in other scenes like world music (Brady 2021), audiophiles (Bartmanski and Woodward 2018, 172) and dedicated collectors (Sharpe 2024). These sites show that vinyl records never completely ceased to exist as they continued within smaller scenes, but their mainstream popularity and sales figures declined until they reached a point of insignificance in the wider industry. From here, any return of the format would be seen as a resurgence, demonstrating that the vinyl revival did occur.

## **Why was there a vinyl revival and how did it occur?**

Varied causal explanations behind the vinyl revival have been suggested, and many factors interlink. Due to the parameters of this paper, they cannot all be considered here, but the most significant explanations are examined.

### **Record Store Day**

Record Store Day (RSD) began in the US in 2007 as records were regaining attention. The annual event arrived in the UK in 2008 and was designed to celebrate and promote independent record stores through exclusive releases and in-store events including parties and performances (Record Store Day UK 2026). RSD has received mixed opinions from sellers and consumers alike, but Mark from Thorne Records simply said, “I can’t be bothered with people being negative about Record Store Day.” (Figure 7) For him, the event is a celebration which fuels his business financially whilst helping the record community prosper. He calls it “Mother’s Day for record shops” (Figure 7) and this feeling is shared by consumers including Orla who has bought something at RSD almost every year since she started collecting (Figure 8). Whilst the event is targeted at consumers, RSD highlights independent record shops and boosts their sales, often leading to them gaining new perennial customers following RSD (Jones 2018, 18). RSD is not open to all shops – chain record shops such as HMV cannot participate as the event is only open to independent shops selling new vinyl (meaning Umbrella Vinyl cannot participate as they only sell second-hand records, despite being an independent shop).

RSD’s main promotional technique is the release of limited-edition records. The event aims to showcase music appealing to diverse listeners but has been criticised for focusing on

mainstream artists targeted at younger consumers, rereleases of older artists' back catalogues (Bates 2020, 697) and giving little support to indie artists (Bates 2020, 694). It is unfair to argue that these criticisms outweigh the event's success – there are always ways to improve (which should be considered) but the publicity that RSD has given to independent record shops has fuelled the industry and led to increased sales in independent shops from only 78,400 units in 2008 (RSD's first year) to 1,280,700 units in 2017 (Jones 2018, 16), making it a large contributor to the vinyl revival. A significant reason for this is desirability – although remaining stock is available after RSD, many of these limited-edition records sell out instantly and become collectable items. Customers queue outside before the shops open in the hopes of being fortunate enough to get an RSD edition, showing the desirability of these items and the lengths customers will go to in order to purchase them. Simon described purchasing an RSD edition of a Siouxsie and the Banshees live album, saying he “Got it home, put it up against the original [studio version] and it didn't sound as good, but I still queued up and bought it because of the fact they're limited editions and there's something desirable.” (Figure 9) This demonstrates the longing to own these rarities regardless of price and quality, showing that RSD's sales strategy works effectively. However, this has opened the event to resellers who attend to purchase rare records and sell them online at a higher price (Coates 2011). RSD has attempted to combat this by watermarking images so resellers cannot advertise before the event, but they believe that the impact of these resellers is overstated, commenting that only 1% of RSD stock is resold (Jones 2018, 19).

RSD has a new ambassador each year to increase publicity, such as Paramore, Taylor Swift, Pearl Jam and Dave Grohl, showing the varied genres supported by the event (Record Store Day 2024). The event utilises social media to reach a younger demographic, with both new consumers I interviewed being aware of RSD (Figure 10), and Orla participated regularly

(Figure 8). This shows the importance of using digital technologies to assist sales of analogue formats and demonstrates the positive impact that modern technology can have on the industry despite being its direct competition. An alternative advertising platform used is advertising within the independent shops themselves. RSD run an online store locator where customers can find participating record shops (Record Store Day UK 2026) who typically adorn their windows with posters advertising the event to encourage passers-by. When I visited Thorne Records, Mark's shop was covered in advertising materials to attract customers and promote his participation.

RSD is influential in areas aside from record sales. A key result is the expansion of the community feeling surrounding independent record shops. RSD sees many shops hosting concerts and providing refreshments, allowing consumers to connect with one another and meet like-minded people while celebrating the object that binds them together – records. Orla found the event to be “a nice opportunity to, like, be around other people who are also interested in that” (Figure 8), demonstrating how a variety of consumers enjoy the day. This explains why RSD has helped instigate the vinyl revival, from producing more albums and increased revenue, to creating a community event that draws consumers to local shops resulting in them purchasing on the day and throughout the year.

## **Nostalgia**

Nostalgia has influenced long-term consumers to return to vinyl and encouraged new listeners to explore a format that they didn't necessarily grow up with. For long-term consumers, records reproduce emotions from a previous era – memories of childhood and exploring their musical identities for the first time. Greenberg discusses how vinyl “evokes

nostalgia to construct and reconstitute memory” (Greenberg 2024) and this is reinforced through my interviews. All the long-term collectors reminisced about growing up with records and saw them as one of their earliest musical exploratory experiences. Phil spoke about his parents’ record collection and how this followed him into adult life, purchasing music on vinyl that he listened to as a child or reliving memories with musician friends through the records they made together (Figure 6). Simon shared his dad’s taste in records and enjoyed the ability to reminisce through a format that also helps him find new and memorable music (Figure 11). Josh and Laura discussed their love of finding records on holiday to remind them of their shared experiences (Figure 12). This shows the value of nostalgia and how it encourages consumers to commit to vinyl. Even when the music itself isn’t nostalgic, the emotional connection with the record format generates memories, demonstrating why older consumers have continued to purchase records or returned to them. This discussion of nostalgia is reinforced through Whitehouse’s study where participants commented on the nostalgia of records, and the notion of it being separate to the music itself (Whitehouse 2023), expanding the view that nostalgia led to the vinyl revival.

Nives remarks that records are not nostalgic for new consumers who grew up with CDs or digital formats (Nives 2015), however the new consumers I interviewed described a feeling of nostalgia akin to that described by the older collectors. Emma stated “I just quite like the whole nostalgia of it all [...] it’s like the way it was supposed to be listened to” (Figure 13) despite not growing up with records. This shows that nostalgia is a selling point for those who didn’t experience records in their youth but instead associate them with an earlier, non-digital period. Orla explains her nostalgia differently, saying “you can kind of trace what your taste has been over time.” (Figure 14) She grows her collection while looking back to her previous purchases in a nostalgic manner, showing that newer consumers may be nostalgic to

a time before they were born or are nostalgic towards their own growth. This demonstrates that nostalgia can be a reason for purchasing records for new and old consumers, becoming a plausible cause of the vinyl revival.

## **Social Media**

“It’s got its place and there’s interest” (Figure 15) said Simon about social media within the record community. While he doesn’t participate, he acknowledges its power to sell and promote records, particularly to younger generations. This was seen following the announcement of Harry Styles’ fourth album *Kiss All The Time, Disco Occasionally*. Within hours of the album’s announcement, TikTok was flooded with videos explaining and reviewing the different vinyl editions being released (@vesselsofmusic 2026) (@rubyonmusic 2026). This demonstrates the thrill in younger generations when an artist releases music on vinyl, and one can infer that using social media to discuss a new release would have prompted other viewers to purchase the vinyl, contributing to the revival.

Creators use social media to show off their collections, explain their technical set ups or unbox new records, amongst others (@listeningwithlacey 2025) (@recordswithgracie 2026) (@lucymwaddell 2024). This was mentioned by Orla, saying “in like group chats and stuff you would talk about the vinyl you had, or you would do like vinyl collection posts” (Figure 16) showing how she interacts with records on social media. The conversations on these platforms broaden the online record community and therefore contribute to the revival by maintaining a discussion and continual marketing directed at those already purchasing records and those considering taking up the format.

Social media is also utilised by sellers; Josh and Laura of Umbrella Vinyl delighted in discussing their additional business due to regular social media posting, reaching a global audience and creating an online community to support their in-person one (Figure 17). Consumers who interact with them through social media contact them about records they have shared, and customers enter the shop based on encountering them online. This shows how social media usage can materialise into in-person shop visits and record sales and has therefore contributed to the vinyl revival.

### **Special editions**

Special editions are not unique to RSD – artists frequently issue an album on different coloured vinyl or release versions with bonus tracks. For critics such as Fosbraey, this is unnecessary when considered alongside their high price point and marketing at the youth market (who typically have less disposable income and therefore it is unlikely that they can afford multiple different editions) (Fosbraey 2024), but when talking to consumers themselves it becomes clear that this is valued by new and long-term listeners. Orla took a collector’s mindset, saying “to be able to say like ‘oh well I have the exclusive vinyl for this or that artist, you get it at this show’ I think was like, you know, umm something I felt was important” (Figure 18), showing how this exclusivity encouraged her to purchase special editions and value them highly. This explains why, with a push for more special editions came more record representation and more sales, contributing to the vinyl revival.

The perspective that coloured or limited-edition vinyl generates more sales is a valuable one, but it also creates controversy amongst consumers and theoreticians. Orla and Simon admitted that they bought coloured records regardless of their sound quality – Orla felt that

“if the album artwork and then the colour of the vinyl and the music all feels aesthetically similar, then that makes for a kind of enhanced experience when you’re listening to it” (Figure 19) while Simon agrees that coloured vinyl can look better and can have a better sound than a black pressing (Figure 20). Emma disagreed, believing that coloured vinyl sounds worse and is prone to warping due to its poor quality, showing how this view is not universally held (Figure 21). Orla and Simon agreed that the coloured aspect is a novelty and a selling point, but one that they are open to buying into (Figure 19, Figure 20). Alternatively, Phil and Emma displayed no interest, seeing them solely as a marketing ploy (Figure 21, Figure 22). This generates an interesting juxtaposition as new and older consumers fall on both sides of the debate and so age or their amount of time collecting cannot be used to generalise. Fosbraey falls in between, acknowledging that artists like Taylor Swift releasing varying editions can be seen as a way to generate more income, desirability and competition between fans, but he acknowledges that he has purchased similar repressings of albums by The Beatles or Pink Floyd without finding an issue, and so maybe a coloured variant isn’t one either (Fosbraey 2024). Coloured vinyl is not a new phenomenon but in recent years it has become more popular, appealing to younger consumers purchasing records primarily for their aesthetics as Fosbraey discusses (Fosbraey 2024). Despite this, it should be argued that these albums have generated more vinyl sales and an increased discourse around the topic, benefitting the vinyl resurgence and heightening consumer engagement.

## **Community**

The concept of community is rife but varied within the sphere of vinyl records. Including online and in-person communities and those surrounding independent shops, the power of

interpersonal connection between consumers was a significant reason behind the vinyl revival. All interviewees mentioned being part of a community either in the past or presently, showing the significance that this has (Figure 16, Figure 17, Figure 23, Figure 24, Figure 25). This is reinforced through the findings of Fernandez and Beverland's study, where participants discussed the object's materiality being able to bring people together (Fernandez and Beverland 2018).

Phil discussed the importance of sharing records with others, swapping and recommending records to his friends and feeling a community connection from this, which he regarded as a key attractive quality (Figure 23). This ability to share music with others strengthens the bonds between consumers and encourages people to purchase more, as Simon says "*Skinty Fia* Fontaines D.C., that was available on a 45" rpm double vinyl, sounds amazing compared to the single. So we'll say "oh get the double vinyl one not the single"" (Figure 24) showing how consumers have the power to persuade community members to purchase specific records. This can be seen as one reason behind the vinyl resurgence, due to increased spending from within communities. While this is not unique to records as CD consumers also created communities, it is not typically associated with streaming, meaning that it is paramount in the record industry because it is not a core aspect of society's most consumed format.

Communities exist both online and in-person; Orla discussed the community feeling during visits to independent shops on RSD (Figure 8) but also admitted to being in online vinyl communities when she was younger (Figure 16). Whilst primarily focusing on the music and favoured artists, she mentioned how the conversation would turn to records and the variants

released. This digital power is also utilised by independent record shops, with Umbrella Vinyl recalling how social media has been game changing and has a “community feel to it because people don’t come to record shops like this unless they want to, you know, engage with a particular kind of music.” (Figure 17) While they do use other social media platforms including Facebook, they discussed the impact of Instagram at length, assigning it more significance. This shows how Instagram has created an online community around them whilst also directing consumers into the shop and the in-person community surrounding it. Increased footfall brings increased revenue, contributing to the vinyl revival.

Umbrella Vinyl and Thorne Records discussed the importance of their regular customers and the community they create. Mark discussed ordering records that he knows will interest his regular customers (Figure 25), while Umbrella Vinyl mentioned their concern towards regulars if they don’t visit and that they “want people to come in and be part of that crate digging community.”(Figure 17) This shows the power that a community can have on shop owners while increasing their revenue, contributing to a thriving environment which entices others, showing how this community connection can snowball and becomes a key reason behind the revival. This sentiment is shared by Bartmanski and Woodward, saying that record stores are “social spaces where knowledge and feelings are shared. Store proprietors are often experts in the field and typically play a role of tastemakers for a local community and beyond.” (Bartmanski and Woodward 2018, 174) This reiterates the importance of a community to its members and the wider industry, strengthening the power of the format, creating more consumers and contributing to the resurgence.

## **Sound and technicality**

“I just loved the sound of them” said Emma when considering what drew her to records (Figure 26). This shows the power of the sound itself, becoming a core part of the format’s appeal. All interviewees discussed their attraction to records’ sound quality, feeling that they cannot replicate this elsewhere, demonstrating the pull that the format has and explaining why the vinyl revival occurred. Orla and Simon commented on the warmth and richness of records’ sound (Figure 27, Figure 28) with Orla comparing this to MP3s which she believes don’t possess this depth (Figure 18). MP3s compress music into a smaller file size which is not done by records, meaning a more rich and detailed sound is produced by records, drawing consumers in (Vinyl.com 2024). The sound quality of vinyl is dependent on the quality of the playback device used, but the lack of compression is a feature applicable to all.

A key subsection of vinyl consumers are audiophiles. They prioritise sound quality and technicality, listening to music in its purest format instead of just listening to a particular song or artist. They traditionally spend time searching for the best sound system and studying it, before playing records on it and judging the interaction between the two (Neglia 2021, 31). Simon remarked how the word ‘audiophile’ traditionally had negative connotations (as their inclination towards specialised playback equipment was seen as pretentious and elitist by some) but is now seen positively as the industry caters to the demographic through audiophile listening bars or high-end sound systems (Figure 29). This shows how the industry has adapted to include varied listeners, broadening the amount of people choosing the format and contributing to its resurgence.

## **Artwork and additional features**

Records' aesthetics are key in appealing to consumers. My discussions found that new listeners in particular highly value the visual appeal and the time taken to create a cohesive aesthetic that fits the music. Orla stated, "I think I would be put off buying an album that I like if the album artwork is really ugly 'cause then that kinda defeats the purpose" (Figure 30), demonstrating the impact that aesthetics can have on revenue. If the artwork complements the music, the likelihood of a consumer purchasing it is increased, and the listening experience is then impacted, showing how the artwork can change a consumer's opinion and their musical experience (Vad 2021, 11).

Compared to other physical music formats, records typically include additional features or clearer visuals. The inclusion of liner notes and lyric sheets which are more visibly accessible than those included with CDs (due to the larger size) appeals to consumers, believing they are getting more value for money and an enriched experience. Emma saw this as a reason for purchasing records over CDs because the effort is increased (Figure 31), which is an opinion also held by participants in Fernandez and Beverland's study (Fernandez and Beverland 2018, 1160), increasing the reliability and validity of the perspective.

Aesthetics can introduce new consumers to the format while encouraging pre-existing consumers to purchase records they haven't previously heard of. Both shops interviewed described how the artwork or promotional materials can persuade customers to purchase the record (Figure 32, Figure 33), showing the power this can have. Consumers believe they are purchasing a full package with multiple appealing factors, and the artwork is the first step in introducing them to the music within. Mark discussed how some young consumers have

purchased records to display rather than to listen to (Figure 33) and while this is a minority, it influences record sales and have therefore contributed to the revival. Mark complemented these consumers, believing that records are a piece of art (Figure 33), and Umbrella Vinyl shared this view saying “we can look up and see all these amazing covers, and I think that’s definitely one of the attractions of buying records” when considering their displayable nature (Figure 32). Simon described buying a record because of intriguing cover art (Figure 28), with this being shared by eleven of Whitehouse’s participants (Whitehouse 2023, 73), demonstrating that this is a selling point of records and can be used to explain why and how the revival occurred.

### **Listening types**

Records lend themselves to types of listening which are not associated with other formats – collective listening and dedicated listening. Collective listening involves the convallescening of people around one format or album, typically involving the sharing of albums in a group and discussing the music or pressing. This is not applicable to solely vinyl records but is less likely to be seen elsewhere as the community is weaker or is used as a background to another experience rather than being the focus (Greenberg 2024). Independent record shops often offer collective listening experiences to increase customer engagement (Calamar and Gallo 2009, 186), but these also occur autonomously. Umbrella Vinyl discussed the desire to share records and regular student customers who visit the store to purchase shared records for their flat (Figure 34). This demonstrates the interpersonal connections possible through record consuming and provides evidence behind why consumers may prefer this format, contributing to the resurgence of vinyl.

Dedicated, or deep, listening is attentive and purposeful, with consumers often setting aside time and physical space for this purpose. This is not unique to vinyl but is typically associated with the format due to its physical requirements (size, static playback equipment etc.) and the time commitment needed to listen to an album in one sitting. It can involve experimenting with technical settings (like changing the needle or adding a slipmat (Murray 2024)) or studying musical specificities (Greenberg 2024). All consumers interviewed discussed the desire to create a dedicated listening experience when using records which they didn't feel towards alternative formats (Figure 27, Figure 35, Figure 36). Phil saw this as “a healthy thing that's kind of disappearing from society” (Figure 36) while Orla described the initial process of selecting and setting up a record as an active listening experience (Figure 27). This demonstrates consumers' desire for attentive listening which they feel is not offered elsewhere, creating a connection between the listener and the format, contributing to records' appeal and thus igniting the vinyl revival.

### **Physicality and materiality**

One of the most discussed reasons behind the record resurgence is physicality and materiality. When asked for the best things about records Emma said, “definitely the physical aspect of it” and this view is shared by all other interviewees (Figure 31). Whilst Orla and Umbrella Vinyl commented on the difficulties storing and maintaining records (Figure 37, Figure 38), all weren't swayed by these challenges and saw value in the physicality of the format, enjoying the tactility and visual appeal in tandem to the music (Figure 18, Figure 28, Figure 31).

Mark happily described records' imperfections as "little memories" (Figure 39), a positivity which is shared by other consumers (Bennett and Rogers 2016, 31). The delight towards these faults which were deliberately removed from newer formats shows the pleasure that consumers feel towards records, explaining why many were drawn to the format during the revival.

Ritualistic aspects including the requirements to flip over records or maintain them also attracts consumers. This has been eliminated from modern formats, but once again creates a process which consumers enjoy – Mark said "listening to a record you have to stop, slow down, listen to the album one side at a time, you know, hold it in your actual hands, two hands, you know, turn it over" (Figure 39). This procedure creates an emotional connection between the listener and the format, something that is missing from digital music and therefore explaining that the revival occurred to complete this missing connection. Although this was an inconvenience before the revival as consumers searched for portability and fewer procedures, the domination of digitisation in society suggests that the record industry needed digital formats to take over for consumers to take comfort in these traditional aspects, rather than finding them an inconvenience (Foucart 2019).

The weight of a record helps consumers feel that they are getting high value for money which is often not felt with other formats. Many consumers feel that records are too expensive (as was discussed by most of my interviewees (Figure 37, Figure 40, Figure 41)) but they acknowledge that they hold a higher value for money due to their additional features, size and material. This is expanded in Fernandez and Beverland's study, where the physicality and tactility are seen as equal to its high price (Fernandez and Beverland 2018, 1160). This

demonstrates that consumers feel a strong connection to records and their physicality to purchase them regardless of price, explaining why the vinyl resurgence occurred at a time when records are more expensive than before.

## The impact of digitisation

Whilst it is evident that the vinyl revival did occur, the modern domination of streaming services and digital music cannot be overlooked. Although more consumers are turning to records, the overriding format in society is digital and not physical (streaming services) - in 2014 physical music made up 32% of music sales in the US market, whereas streaming and digital downloads generated 64% (Friedlander 2015). By 2024 this had evolved, with physical music sales stalling at 11% of revenue compared to streaming's 84% (Bass 2025). This vast difference demonstrates the power and popularity of streaming services in society despite the vinyl revival. The primary music format for both new consumers interviewed was streaming, and both older interviewees admitted to using streamers alongside records. This reinforces the power of streaming in society, but also generates a wider question – if streaming is the most popular format currently, why did some consumers turn to physical music, particularly vinyl records? Whilst there are many possible answers to this, one sticks out as the most significant – a distrust in the digital age and a desire to rebel.

Walsh discusses this in *'I Almost Feel Like Stuck In A Rut': How Streaming Services Changed The Way We Listen To Music*. Outlining consumers' distrust towards digital services, Walsh describes the algorithmic power in deciding what listeners hear along with the lack of privacy and passion that his interviewees felt (Walsh 2024). This is shared by my interviewees, with Orla and Emma describing the lack of control they have over streaming compared to records (Figure 13, Figure 42). Although streaming makes music consumption easier due to its accessibility, portability, price and immediacy, its algorithmic nature leaves consumers craving freedom, which can only be obtained through changing its algorithmic design. Despite many consumers curating playlists themselves to escape the algorithm, when

searching for new music they often feel trapped within music that the algorithm thinks they will like (based upon the previous music they have listened to), removing their opportunity to find something truly different or new (Walsh 2024). Digital playlists can be created within a few taps, with or without input from the listener and yet offer a weaker emotional connection compared to the dedication and time needed to curate a collection of records (Vinyl.com 2024). Often consumers are less inclined to share their digital playlists with others due to fear, embarrassment or a lack of musical knowledge because of its algorithmic creation (Couturely Sound 2023), whereas vinyl collectors typically display their music proudly, evidencing their time and commitment when creating it. This demonstrates a desire to rebel against digital music which can be used to explain why the vinyl revival occurred.

The reasons behind the revival of vinyl outlined in the previous chapter have one thing in common—they link to a desire to rebel against digitisation. Whilst scholars have discussed these reasons independently, considering the possible overarching factor of distrust in digitisation as a mutual cause is worthwhile. Although these explanations are worthy as their own avenues of enquiry, considering them together creates a more valuable field of study which can inform future research or influence the industry on a larger scale than only studying one possible causation.

RSD can be connected to the distrust in digital services as it advocates for independent record stores, aiming to convince consumers to purchase in-person locally rather than shopping online via large corporations. Whilst this departure from online shopping is not unique to records and has been prominent for many years, RSD explicitly sets out to do this, setting it slightly apart from other initiatives. This demonstrates the dislike in digital purchasing by

industry members and record shop owners, and RSD's popularity and support from consumers shows that listeners also wish to depart from this digitisation. This consumer withdrawal from digital technologies is two-fold – by choosing a physical format and choosing to purchase in-person, a dislike towards two digital technologies is evident.

Although consumers like Orla purchase records online outside of RSD showing that they do interact with digital services (Figure 43), the notion that one must shop in-person to gain the sought-after RSD releases reflects a key dislike of digitisation (Harvey 2017).

This digital dislike is also clearly shown through the paradigm of nostalgia. While some newer consumers may have grown up with both digital platforms and physical formats like CDs, it is unlikely that most consumers will feel nostalgic towards digital formats because they are modern platforms which cannot be viewed through a nostalgic lens – they don't remind consumers of a previous time as they are still present in society, and only the youth market can reminisce about growing up with them. Considering that everyone I interviewed and Whitehouse's study (Whitehouse 2023) saw nostalgia as a main reason for consuming records, it is evident that nostalgia is a key factor behind record purchases. With consumers distrusting digital platforms, they are choosing to find something nostalgic to combat this dissatisfaction and so vinyl records become an alternative. The combination of nostalgia and rebelling against digital music results in a powerful commitment to records, demonstrating how distrust in digitisation has increased the power of nostalgia on consumers.

Despite social media being a digital technology, it can also be used to demonstrate a dislike in digitisation. Social media provides a platform for consumers or sellers to discuss records with others or promote items they have for sale, ultimately moving relationships away from the

digital world and into the physical. Although these platforms do allow interactions to remain digital, my discussion with Umbrella Vinyl showed that they regularly materialise into in-person interactions, reflecting a conscious decision from consumers to depart from the digital sphere (Figure 17). The use of a digital platform to promote an analogue format shows consumers are willing to interact with the digital era for their own purposes, but don't want to fully commit to its domination and so only use it to make connections which they can bring into the physical world. This inference may not be applicable to all but can be used to understand why the discussion of an analogue format occurs over social media to a small extent. This trend is prominent within the youth market, as Record of the Day discusses how Generation Z use social media to initially enter the record sphere, but are ultimately searching for an in-person community, showing how they use digital platforms to become passionate about records before departing from this into the physical world (Record of the Day 2025).

Through digital platforms, special editions can be released with additional tracks, but they possess no visual appeal compared to a physical record. The aesthetic appeal of coloured pressings and differing record sleeves is a significant selling point, demonstrating that consumers want to rebel against digitisation through purchasing these editions. Although special editions are not unique to vinyl (they were prominent on CD), consumers are drawn towards the vibrancy of a coloured record which Vinyl.com states creates a "unique charm" (Vinyl.com 2025). On streaming services all albums are the same with only the small cover artwork changing, but coloured vinyl creates a diverse aesthetic dimension between records which consumers search for (Vinyl.com 2025). As Orla and Simon mentioned, they actively purchase records on coloured vinyl if it adds to the overall aesthetic of the album (Figure 19, Figure 20), something they cannot do through a streaming service and its standardised layout. As these features aren't possible through digital services, consumers are turning away from

streaming to a physical format where they can engage with music that has an audio and physical appeal. This shows dislike towards the removal of aesthetic differences through digitisation, creating a dislike in the digital age of music.

Although online record communities do exist, most occur in-person surrounding independent record shops or consumers listening together and sharing records. This was shown through my conversations with Thorne Records and Umbrella Vinyl (Figure 17, Figure 25, Figure 34), as well as in writings by Jones (Jones 2018) and by Svetlik writing for *What Hi-fi?*, where he discusses the importance of the conversations in independent shops which cannot naturally occur through digital platforms (Svetlik 2026). This reflects a scene of like-minded people who want to meet in-person rather than gathering online which doesn't generate the same degree of interpersonal connection (Svetlik 2026). This shows that consumers dislike the digitisation of community interaction, as they search for a physical community space rather than isolating themselves through digital technologies. With social media creating a purpose-built space for consumers to connect, listeners who go against this in preference of an in-person community shows their distrust in digitisation and need to rebel against it.

Online communities allow a degree of anonymity and the chance to discuss specificities with like-minded consumers globally, but these platforms can be segregated, biased and facilitate gatekeeping by community members, further justifying why consumers feel distrustful and turn towards an in-person community space that facilitates social learning and unprompted conversations (Tanrui 2025).

The compression used to reduce digital file sizes is not required for vinyl records, creating a richer and warmer sound than digital music (Greenberg 2024). Whilst all consumers have a

different view of which format sounds better, many record consumers believe that the sound quality of records is a selling point, as was demonstrated in my interviews (Figure 18, Figure 27, Figure 28). This shows a rebelling against the digital age as consumers are turning away from a compressed format in search of a richer sound which cannot be obtained digitally (Vinyl.com 2024). Vinyl has a distinctive sound due to its lack of compression, playback process and the detailed procedure of creating individual grooves on a record to capture every feature, and these unique qualities keep consumers wanting more even when a digital format may be logistically easier (Vinyl.com 2024), showing a preference for the sound quality of records and a dislike towards the digitisation of music.

Much like with special editions, artwork is more important for record purchases than streaming. Although artwork is shown on streaming services, it is smaller and less clear than on a record. For consumers who value an album's aesthetics, the cover's clarity and additional features like lyric sheets and liner notes are vital. This aesthetic importance was discussed through my interviews and was a key selling point for the younger consumers in particular (Figure 14, Figure 31). As this is not available to the same degree in digital platforms, consumers are showing their dislike towards digitisation and choosing to consume records instead. Participants in Fernandez and Beverland's study mentioned the importance of record sleeves, saying how they saw CD covers as less meaningful due to their decreased size compared to records, and one can infer that the smaller size of artwork on streaming services must therefore be even less meaningful to some buyers (Fernandez and Beverland 2018). This is broadened through Whitehouse's study, where interviewees discussed the practice of "taking a chance on a record" because of the album artwork, a custom which they believe doesn't exist through digital platforms, evidencing that consumers have turned away from

digital music due to the inability to discover new music because of its eye-catching artwork (Whitehouse 2023).

Dedicated listening is more associated with records and less important to digital technologies, showing that consumers dislike digitisation where this concept is not paramount. One of the main selling points of digital music is that it is transportable and can be listened to whenever the consumer desires, however many people feel that it then becomes background noise rather than something that is purposefully being listened to (Pelly 2022). Although this may be viewed as a positive to some, record consumers are accustomed to the ritualistic aspects of setting up a record and listening intently and so view the passive aspect of digital music as a downside (Spratley 2026). This inspires them to commit to records, evidencing their dislike for digitisation and the lack of deliberate listening associated with it.

The notion of a tangible object which can be held and admired whilst playing music is something that record consumers gravitate towards and view as a key reason for purchasing records over other formats. With digital music, there is no physicality involved and so a lack of physical connection with an object is clear, demonstrating why consumers wanted to rebel against the growing digitisation and remain with a physical object (Fernandez and Beverland 2018). The feelings associated with holding a record and looking at something physical cannot be replicated through digital music formats and so consumers who are desiring this physicality will be inclined to rebel.

These factors demonstrate that consumers are searching for a format with deeper connections than digital music. By showing how these explanations for the vinyl revival can be connected

through their rebellion of digitisation, one should consider the possibility that the growing distrust and dislike towards the digitisation of music in the modern era is the overarching reason behind the vinyl resurgence.

## Conclusion

This paper has investigated the causes of the vinyl revival and how distrust in digitisation may have contributed to the resurgence of records. While many possible causes for the revival (such as physicality and RSD amongst others) have been discussed by theoreticians and in this paper, the overarching notion of a distrust in digital music platforms (like streaming services) can be used to connect these explanations and generate an all-encompassing causation. The restrictive, algorithmic nature of streaming services combined with the diminishment of album artwork and lack of physicality and nostalgia suggests that the negative connotations of streaming have pushed consumers towards vinyl, evidencing why this notion of digital distrust and dislike should be further studied.

Through popular and academic discourse, the varied causes of the vinyl revival were considered alongside the findings of interviews with consumers and industry professionals. These provided depth and ensured that the opinions of consumers themselves are accounted for within the sphere of record industry research. Whilst the participants expressed their dislike towards digital services in varying ways, their reasons for consuming records point towards this theory of digital distrust contributing to the vinyl revival. Participants in pre-existing studies share these views, and the discourse indicates a need to find an overarching causation such as the dislike of digital formats. By using these different methodologies, this paper is generalisable to the wider consumer demographic and is reliable, with the possibility for its findings to be used beyond this setting. Although the primary focus of this paper is the vinyl revival and how it may have been caused by a growing distrust of digitisation, the findings could be transferred to other areas of society if used alongside research which directly connects to the field of enquiry.

Whilst it is not paramount that the vinyl revival is explained by one causation, it can help guide future research, industry changes and explain the mindset of consumers on a deeper level. The origins of the revival are typically attributed to multiple causes, capitalising on the notion that all consumers think differently and so will be attracted to the format for different reasons. However, this is limited and prevents the industry from studying deeper trends or predicting future developments.

This connection between digitisation in society and a return to traditional formats is not unique to music, prompting further research into this phenomenon on a wider scale with the possibility to link this to other musical or non-musical formats. The work in this paper is not conclusive and should be investigated further to provide greater industry insight and create a deeper understanding of consumers' opinions, but it provides a valuable starting point and highlights a key research area. It should be noted that this paper does not suggest that a distrust in digitisation is the only possible connection between the causal theories, it simply highlights this as one possibility. The connection between these theories should be studied to a greater degree and other possible links may become apparent, such as the growing media publicity of records or retromania, but researchers must be considerate and allow for the pre-existing reasons behind the resurgence to be covered under their overarching theory.

## Appendix

### Figure 1 – Simon

*Perfect! So, what exactly is your job title?*

Simon: That's an excellent question! That is asked of me by my kids, everyone that I meet in the pub, and sometimes my wife! Okay, so essentially, I'm a consultant in the home audio business. The majority of my work involves promoting and umm, organising reviews of high-end stereo home audio equipment. The other part of my job involves developing that equipment with my clients umm, which includes sound tuning other products, using my experience as a audio reviewer and journalist and mastering engineer from my previous years. So that's what I do!

## **Figure 2 – Simon**

*So you mentioned about younger people kind of having inherited all this nostalgia and turntables, do you think this is then, obviously we picked up on a trend of younger people reverting back to listening to vinyl records, has this then materialised in itself with them then going on to buy their own turntables? Have you seen that kind of development in the industry?*

Simon: [...]I get to see the figures, you know and stuff like that, and they are generally on the rise year on year, okay, as well as vinyl records. Umm, the sweet spot for younger people is around £300, something like this, okay, and so there's a couple of companies, mainly two companies that make very, very good products at that price point, which is Pro-Ject based in the Czech Republic and Rega in the UK. They're where I tend to put people towards and their lower end products, okay, I would say are a really good starting point for the high level of audio. They're a high, there are cheaper products from like Sony or Audio Technica that you'll find in John Lewis. You'll go to John Lewis, you'll see affordable turntables, you know. They weren't there even maybe five pre-Covid, they weren't around, you know, so when you start to see those kind of products in a department store, in John Lewis, you know it's in the, the market is growing, cause they look at data, those companies look at data. They're not interested in if you see it in a film or a movie, all they're based on is sales figures, and if they're in those kind of shops, then you know that the sales figures are increasing. Umm, so there is an important interest in younger people and it's generally around £150-£500 mark, that's the kind of uhh, that's where younger people tend to spend money on a turntable.

## **Figure 3 – Thorne Records**

*And then finally, this might be a bit of a tricky one – what is your favourite record that you own and why?*

Mark: *The White Album* by The Beatles is my favourite album of all time, just because it's four sides of loveliness and it's got, and it's a great vinyl record as well. It's gatefold, it's got that kind of mysterious white sleeve with and embossed Beatles, it opens at the top, there's posters, there's pictures, it's the four Beatles doing their own thing, so that is my answer.

#### **Figure 4 – Emma**

*So what would you say your favourite record is that you own, and why is that the case?*

Emma: Oh it's gotta be Freddie Mercury's *Mr. Bad Guy* cause the album originally flopped and it never remastered so I didn't think I would ever, ever find it, and I found it in some random shop in Ayr so, that's my most prized possession! (laughs)

#### **Figure 5 – Orla**

*What is your favourite record that you own, and why?*

Orla: Oh (long pause) oh I don't know, that's really hard. There's a lot that I really like, there's some that are kind of for... I suppose there's musically the ones that I like the most. Like I do have probably my favourite album which is called *Tiger's Blood*, (by) Waxahatchee, I have that on vinyl, that was a gift, umm so I like to be able to listen to that album because I listen to it so much on streaming, to actually listen to it on vinyl is a nice experience.

#### **Figure 6 – Phil**

*What do you feel when you listen to or interact with vinyl records and its culture?*

Phil: Umm, it's quite record specific that because some of the records, you know, there's a kind of a nostalgia for me because I often listen to music that my friends have made, some of which I'm participating in, so you know there is a nostalgia for the event itself rather than the fact it's just a record. Sometimes it is a little bit of a nostalgia for a kind of childhood thing... I'll tell you another favourite record! A record that was in my parent's record collection – we used to go to Hungary every year because my dad's Hungarian, and at the time, really when I was a kid, the Hungarian record shops were absolutely full of vinyl records, a lot of it weird stuff from Poland and Czechoslovakia as it was then, umm that arrived in Hungary and was worth, I mean cost pennies, so we literally used to go home with armfuls of records. One of which is a record of a Bulgarian bagpiper called Nikola Atanasov who's, I think, a genius, who recorded in the 1950s and it's the most incredible music and uhh yeah, but you know, obviously when I listen to that there's a kind of nostalgia for the childhood and my own history of that record, as well as kind of enjoying the circumstances of it being recorded.

## **Figure 7 – Thorne Records**

*What is your opinion of Record Store Day?*

Mark: Umm, my opinion is I can't be bothered with people being negative about Record Store Day. Umm, independent shops who take part in Record Store Day like for instance Umbrella Vinyl can't take part in Record Store Day because they don't, you know whatever. So independent shops that do officially take part in Record Store Day who then complain about it I find insane, it's shooting yourself in the foot. I don't have any cynicism about it, it's like Mother's Day for record shops, it's a wonderful thing. Everybody always complains about things becoming very corporate and "oh this and that", I just think it's a wonderful thing that, it was invented twenty years ago to get independent shops a real boost, this is pre that 2017 thing I spoke about and it's really worked. It's a joyous day where people come, spend loads of money, umm and have a drink, have a dance, have a really good time. It's a great, positive umm, vibe that is only good for independent record shops.

## **Figure 8 – Orla**

*Are you aware of Record Store Day, and if so, have you ever participated in it, and what is your opinion of it?*

Orla: Yes I have. I've been, I've queued outside at like before the stores have opened umm, a couple times, and I tend to most years at least since maybe like 2019 something like that, I've bought something. Umm, maybe other than last year, I can't remember buying – no I think I did. Umm, I'm probably less into it now but I definitely follow it. I mean I think it's nice, I think it's a good thing, I definitely don't have kind of strong opinions either way, I don't think like we need to be encouraging people to buy more vinyl or something like that, I know that's part of it. I guess part of it is also the kind of like... political aspect of kind of independent record stores versus big chains. I don't think that like consumer decisions makes much of a difference to that, and I think that is the logic behind it which I don't really buy into, but I think it's nice and it's a kind of, a nice opportunity to like be around other people who are also interested in that and it's quite interesting. I think though, when I did queue outside cause I really wanted one, I definitely felt like I was like the youngest person there (laughs). So it's interesting, you see different types of record collectors in that way.

## Figure 9 – Simon

*Are you aware of Record Store Day and, if so, what are your opinions of it and have you ever participated in it?*

Simon: Yes, well I've bought stuff by turning up to RSD, that's the one time I will go to a local record shop. I once actually when Theo was younger [his son] drove to Swindon, they didn't have what I wanted, I then drove to Marlborough, and I did think to myself, I shouldn't really, but I did think to myself "what am I doing? I'm spending money on fuel!" So that's my negative about it! The positive about it is it's good, right. Whether it attracts the right new demographic or not, I doubt very much, because if you queue up in those lines it's middle-aged dads with beards, you know, that like craft beer. Not that I'm stereotyping, but I am, the stereotypes are there for a reason. It's basically people like me and my pals queuing up to buy records, in my experience, okay. You will see, what I do find really genuinely endearing is that you will get female people there as well, that's a positive you know! (laughs) In that respect, to get away from the middle-aged dad thing. But I participated, I think the recordings are good, you often get them afterwards if they've not sold out but if there's something specific that comes out that I'm interested in, I will queue up and buy it. Sometimes they don't sound that good, to be honest. I've done that before where I've queued up, paid fifty quid for a *Siouxsie and The Banshees* live recording – the reason that I queued up to get it is that I was at that gig in like 1985/86 and so therefore it has a bit of a personal connection you think "oh I've gotta buy that!" Got it home, put it up against the original and it didn't sound as good, but I still queued up and bought it because of the fact they're limited editions and there's something desirable. But I'm a middle-aged old geezer, well older middle-aged, so it doesn't really – I get it, but it's, I think it's what they call preaching to the converted, in a way.

### **Figure 10 - Emma**

*Are you aware of Record Store Day and have you ever participated in it?*

Emma: I'm aware of it, never participated in it

*What are your views of it, kind of your knowledge of the event?*

Emma: I know that it's... I know a lot of stores do participate in it and you do get some performances in some of those as well, I know that they highlight records but I think that's all I really know

### **Figure 11 – Simon**

*What do you think are the best things about records and record consuming?*

Simon: Another good question. (pause) Nostalgia. I first picked up a record, my dad used to play jazz records at home and he used to play, he had pretty good taste in singers, really good singers like crooners – Matt Munro who was a bus driver but also a really good singer, you know, Matt Munro, Brook Benton a black American singer who was brilliant. Not obvious ones but he also liked Ella Fitzgerald and jazz classic, American songbook kind of classics. So that was the first music I listened to on records before I was like, ten, you know. Nine, eight years old, he used to play them at home and so for me, I'm sure as it is with a lot of other people my age, there's a nostalgia involved a bit where you can actually indulge in that nostalgia but also with new music, that's good, okay.

## **Figure 12 – Umbrella Vinyl**

*What do you think have been the biggest changes to the record selling industry in recent years?*

Josh: [...] I think there's something quite unpredictable about going record shopping. Not only do you not know umm, what you're gonna find, what kind of music you're gonna encounter, but you don't know who you're gonna meet or the conversations that are gonna come out of that. We've bought records all around the world and we've met some really extraordinary people and had some fantastic times

Laura: Yeah really connected with people

Josh: So it's a kind of gateway to other human interactions

Laura: Yeah, you know if we're going on holiday somewhere we will definitely be going and looking for records in that particular place and then you can remember where you bought – that's something as well I think, you know if you're just streaming something, that's fine you've purchased it or whatever, but we remember like “oh do you remember we picked this up on holiday in such and such a place” and that's like a great memory, isn't it. It's something added that you bring home when you're travelling or whatever, so yeah.

## **Figure 13 – Emma**

*What do you feel when you listen to vinyl records or you interact with anything to do with records and its culture, e.g. a record shop, turntables, that type of thing?*

Emma: Umm... I just quite like the whole nostalgia of it all. It's very... being a music lover it's just a different way of consuming music and it's like, especially my favourite bands being like Queen, it's like the way it was supposed to be listened to. And then even in record shops I do enjoy the whole flicking through, actually getting to see. I feel as if you're being introduced to more music that way, whereas streaming platforms are a lot very “oh you listen to this, you're going to like this”, it's not really helping me branch out much.

### **Figure 14 – Orla**

*What do you think are the best things about records and record consuming?*

Orla: Umm, yeah I think it adds an extra kind of aesthetic dimension. Umm, I also do like the fact that it's something that is, it's a physical representation of your musical taste at different times, so it can be a nice thing if, you know, you're introducing someone else to your record collection, you can kind of trace what your taste has been over time. And then similarly, when I started collecting and then I got records given to me by my Dad that he didn't actually use anymore, I could see like which ones of those are songs that he still listens to because I know what they are, what ones are like random that haven't been brought up again. So I think you get a more, an easier way than through just like you know, old playlists or something, you can really trace the taste I think because of that aspect of active listening and of curating a collection it shows like these are the most important albums to me at this time.

### **Figure 15 – Simon**

*Do you interact with the culture of vinyl records on social media or through any other online platforms?*

Simon: No! No, because I don't want to get embroiled in it to be honest. Me personally, no because there's a tendency to get involved like all aspects of social media, you know, where you think you know best and someone else thinks they know best and really, ugh I can't be bothered with it! I don't, that's a no! But it's got its place, you know, it's got its place and there's interest, that's a good thing.

## **Figure 16 – Orla**

*Do you feel that you are a part of a community with other record consumers? Either an online one or an in person one.*

Orla: Currently no. When I was at the height of collecting records, and maybe this was also to do with like lockdown, but I think also just as a teenager, online music communities, I was big into like a kind of, on twitter I guess, like online kind of indie music umm sort of thing, around like some of the umm bands, Boygenius and like things similar to that. So definitely like vinyl was an aspect of that, in like group chats and stuff you would talk about the vinyl you had, or you would do like vinyl collection like posts and stuff, so I think I definitely have been in the past but not now.

*Do you think, either now or in the past, have you encountered vinyl records on social media, as part of the things that you look at and are interested in?*

Orla: Yeah, yeah. I think in kind of music communities online, and I think I still get that, like that's sometimes how you find out about like a new album or a new variant of an album, like you'll see that there's a post about it. So yeah I think so.

## Figure 17 – Umbrella Vinyl

*In terms of your clientele, do you mainly have regular customers or are you seeing quite a lot of new and varied people coming in day on day?*

Laura: Definitely got our regulars, like literally people who come in every week, like someone who comes every Friday. If they're not here its very odd, or someone who comes every Saturday, umm but we also, what perhaps we didn't envisage, umm is how many people follow us on Instagram that, you know, will interact with us and buy records from us so that was something which was brilliant. So although we're all about the analogue, you know digital media has really helped so Instagram is a brilliant place for people sharing records and like recommending records to each other

Josh: Oh it's been invaluable

Laura: Absolutely

Josh: It's totally, totally unexpected and it's global, it's a global audience

Laura: Oh absolutely

Josh: So we ship umm

Laura: To the US, Asia, Europe and people are you know, so we've got a website as well which we've kind of redone last year so that sells things, but actually people just messaging us on Instagram and just saying "oh I've seen you've got this" so that can be regular people as well, or it can be sort of new customers who've just found out about us or have just searched a particular record perhaps they're looking for and they saw that we had it, umm so it's a combination and I think, umm we have different

Josh: I was gonna say, to that end we also have a lot of people, a lot of overseas visitors who, umm will have potentially seen us on social media and come in and they behave as if they know us well because we post a video every day (laughs)

Laura: Cause every day we have our daily recommendations, so they know is Josh or Nick you know, they're like "oh hi!" we're like we don't know you (laughs) but yeah

Josh: So that's really nice, it does have a sort of community feel to it because people don't come to record shops like this unless they want to, you know, engage with a particular kind of music

Laura: Exactly! I mean you obviously, you could buy records online just, but we want people to come in and be part of that crate digging community and that's really nice, and we have good chats with people you know, umm... but yeah, so I think it's a combination of regulars. I think people like record collectors, if they find a good record shop that stocks stuff that they like they want to stick with them you know, and we want them to stick with us so I think it's umm, it's good for both them and us (laughs) if we can feed their habit! (both laugh)

### **Figure 18 – Orla**

*What drew you to records initially?*

Orla: Umm I think I liked having the physical thing like to look at the art, pick it up. I liked the sound quality, I think if you grew up with MP3s, phones, that sort of thing, having something that has a bit more depth in quality is good as well. And then yeah I think also I was quite interested in I guess different music sort of subcultures like as a teenager that was a big part of my identity, so to be able to say like ‘oh well I have the exclusive vinyl for this or that artist, you get it at this show’ I think was like, you know, umm something I felt was important.

### **Figure 19 – Orla**

*Have you ever been persuaded or influenced to buy a record because it's been pressed on either coloured vinyl, or liquid filled vinyl, anything like that, a novelty aspect of it?*

Orla: Yes. Yeah, I think that goes together with the kind of visual element. I think especially if the, the thing that is special about it, I have bought a couple for the kind of novelty of it, but I think also if I feel aesthetically that that fits with the music, I like that as a whole thing. If the album artwork and then the colour of the vinyl and the music all feels aesthetically similar, then that makes for a kind of enhanced experience when you're listening to it. So sometimes it's a novelty, but I'd say it's more influenced by how relevant that coloured pressing or that kind of novelty feature actually relates to the music.

## Figure 20 – Simon

*What's your opinion on the new trend towards coloured vinyl records or liquid filled ones, anything like that, where you see the new kind of marketing...I don't wanna use the word marketing ploy but to get younger listeners with different variations?*

Simon: Okay, umm, I remember buying coloured vinyl records in the late eighties, mid-eighties, they've always been around, you know. Not always but they were around then, umm, and they're a novelty really. Now there's a school of thought where some people say "oh, coloured vinyl" you know, or... I've forgotten what they're called, the ones that actually create movement, you know when they're playing, you know the ones I mean?

*Yep*

Simon: They've got a...I'll think of the word in a minute. "They don't sound as good as..." Here's the thing – I can't say for sure but I don't think that's the case, to be honest. Cause I've got a repressing, for example, of *Unknown Pleasures* which was a Joy Division 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary repressing, and I've got an original and I played them together and I tell you, that remaster sounds damn good, it sounds better, you know. And it's on a clear vinyl, you know, so I don't think, some people may disagree with me, but I personally don't think using my own ears of like thirty years of listening, that there are significant palpable listenable differences, it's all to do with the pressing itself, how it's mastered, and which master tape they actually use. I think that's the important thing, but I think it's a good thing, I think they look good and they look good on a turntable. I buy lots of coloured vinyl, I'm not a purist, you know. I buy ones with patterns and I tend to buy it because of the music and the record as opposed to the colour situation. If I see one that's black and one that's in colour, I will buy the colour just for the heck of it, cause it's a novelty, yeah.

### **Figure 21 – Emma**

*To what extent do you think your record purchases are influenced by the album artwork or the pressing, any kind of additional visual features as opposed to the music itself?*

Emma: Umm I've definitely come to learn that records that are coloured, the plastic, pressing are really bad quality and they warp really easily. I do find the ones recently that have been the trend with *Saltburn* and... is it Lady Gaga's new one? With the liquid inside... I've been seeing quite nasty things about them like going all mouldy and all that, so it's... I definitely do just prefer a plain black pressing, umm... I'm trying to think, I do actually have a Beatles *Rubber Soul* I've got a green pressing of that one... it's warped. Completely knackered (laughs) so I don't, yeah I think, I know they're trying to be creative and stuff but the life aspect of it isn't really gonna last as long or it's just another ploy to get you to buy more

### **Figure 22 – Phil**

*Same question then in terms of pressings – are your record purchases influenced by a record being pressed onto, say a coloured vinyl or a liquid filled vinyl, anything like that?*

Phil: Yeah not at all, not at all

### **Figure 23 – Phil**

*Do you feel a part of a community with other record consumers, either an online one or an in-person one?*

Umm, an in-person one certainly, umm most of the, a lot of my friends who are outside of, actually I have to say, really outside of the classical music community umm, but all the people I know who are non-classical musicians are keen vinyl lovers and so there's very much a kind of a, umm a lot of exchange of records between one, between us we tend to swap things that we've found that we like or lend things to one another, yeah.

## **Figure 24 – Simon**

*Do you feel as if you are a part of a community with other record consumers? Either an online one or an in-person one?*

Right, in a way, yes. Don't actively, I've got a few mates in my industry who I know have good taste – when I say good taste, it's the same as mine – and we'll kinda talk about “have you heard this, have you heard this, have you heard that?” It's mainly about the music first and then I'll say “oh this is actually quite a good pressing” you know. For example, an example is, uhhh *Skinty Fia* Fontaines D.C., that was available on a 45” rpm double vinyl, sounds amazing compared to the single. So we'll say “oh get the double vinyl one not the single” right, so that's my friends in the industry, and like, there is that kind of community. I don't actively participate in these things because quite often life is too short, you know! But, I do realise there is a community – I can be a bit cynical about it, I really shouldn't be because any interest in what I do, I should be really happy about, you know! And the fact that more younger people are getting involved, I genuinely think is a really cool thing, but I don't really feel part of any active community, but I know I am part of a community, if that helps.

## **Figure 25 – Thorne Records**

*Do you have regular customers or is your clientele mainly new or occasional visitors?*

Mark: Hugely regular but also, with Edinburgh being the second most visited city in the United Kingdom, umm we get loads of tourists and lots of people walking past the shop going “oh what's this, this is nice.” But any record shop has to be built on its regulars because that's, those are the, yeah. The regulars are what makes the shop, gives the shop its character and what helps me curate what's in the sections. I order based on, I can think you know Bill, John, Dick, Tom, Harry, Susan, you know whatever, will want that record, I'll order a little bit more presuming, you know. So yeah, regulars are a very important part of any business really.

### **Figure 26 – Emma**

*So, what drew you to vinyl records?*

Emma: Umm it was mostly just my love for older music, and I got a record player really, really young – it was remastered LPs I got, my very first two, and it was Queen and Prince and it kinda stemmed the love for it then, I just loved the sound of them.

### **Figure 27 – Orla**

*So do you feel like you get the same or a similar experience when you listen to music digitally as you do when you listen to a vinyl record, or is there differences between the two?*

No, I think it's definitely different, I think there's an aspect of sound quality, umm I think you get umm, you can notice that it's less compressed, it feels like it's got I think more bass. But then also I think just like a better dynamic range, and a bit more clarity umm, so I think the sound is different. I think the experience is different as well, I think whenever I listen to something on vinyl I'm like, you know occasionally it'll be in the background but often that's something that I'm focused in on, whereas I listen to music all the time, like via kind of streaming, and it'll be on but I'll not be thinking about it. I think the act of actually taking a record out, deciding which one, playing it, turning it over, that makes you think about it so it's probably more of a active rather than a passive kind of listening experience for me. I would say that's the main difference.

## Figure 28 – Simon

*To what extent are your record purchases influenced by either the album artwork, any additional features like liner notes or the pressing itself?*

Simon: Okay, fairly significant. I don't normally judge books by the cover anymore but sometimes I do, okay. I joined a record library when I was 14, someone said to me, invariably "if you wanna learn about music, whether it's classical, whether it's jazz, whether it's what have you, you know, if you like the look of the cover generally, but not always, a lot of the time that cover reflects what's on that vinyl record" okay. So it's a good litmus test in some respects – if something has modern art on it, you think "well it might be modern music" if it's classical, for example, you know. You're not gonna have Mozart, you'll very rarely have Mozart, with a bit of modern geometric art on it or something like that, you know, it's normally modern 21<sup>st</sup> Century like Webern or Schoenberg or something like that which has these modern things. Likewise for pop or jazz or what have you, if there's something reflective or artistic in the cover, I will sometimes buy – if there's a sale at Rough Trade, I look at the album covers, okay, if there's stuff I don't know, I mean quite rare stuff or odd stuff or underground or something that's not in the mainstream and I'll look at the cover and then I'll listen to it on Qobuz, and if it sounds one musically interesting and two well recorded, I'll buy it. Play it through my computer here just to check that I'm not buying something that's really not gonna work, and I can often tell if a recording's good through my little, we actually use HomePods, the big ones on my thing, so something half-decent and I will buy due to covers in that circumstance. Other times, like I've just said, I will buy reissues if I know they're gonna be good. I will also buy, even though they're not always as good as you would imagine, the half-speed masters, okay, they can sound really good and they were pioneered by a guy called Miles Showell, he's a mastering engineer at Abbey Road, and they basically cut the acetate master at half-speed, which is a long, boring process but what it means is you get more information on that disc and they sound pretty good in general. Not always, but in general. I do, if there's an album I like or a recording that I'm interested in I will often buy those because of that pressing. And they're invariably packaged really well, they look good just like the Deutsche Grammophon ones. They're not cheap but the whole package that they sell to you is significant and that makes a difference too, you're buying something that's really tactile and nice, nice to feel, nice to put on a shelf.

### **Figure 29 – Simon**

*So if we look at the, as you've kind of said, kind of pre-Covid, the what's considered kind of the period of the vinyl revival, have you noticed following that, a bigger trend in the industry? Have you noticed more people working there? A bigger demand for your role?*

Simon: Right, so there is maybe not, it's maybe not got to the point, as I was saying a bit earlier, where there's enough people coming through that wanna do it as a living or see it as a viable umm, future kind of career, you know. Umm, but in many ways this interest and these sales figures do create a buoyancy in the market which keeps it afloat, you know, because before this, pre-Covid, it was a very slowly declining spiral, you know. The amount of people that were interested in it, it became that it was more of a kind of nerdy kind of, I call it top shelf material, kind of interest, you know. Whereas now the word *audiophile* is used in advertising, you see it audiophile listening bars, it's no longer a dirty word, it used to be for like weirdos and those kind of people. So it's, those chains have kind of been broken, in a way, which is a good thing, but it's all, it doesn't really manifest itself, as far as I can see, in, in companies growth for that market of those kind of people coming into it for a, as a career. It's more them as a hobbyist, end user, you know.

### **Figure 30 – Orla**

*To what extent do you think your record purchases are influenced by either the album artwork or any additional features such as liner notes?*

Orla: Umm, I think liner notes sometimes. I think like more so than that, lyric sheets I think is probably more significant. It is interesting to read the liner notes but I feel like, in terms of adding to the listening experience, having lyric sheets is useful and it feels nicer than just looking them up online whilst you're listening. And then album artwork I think definitely makes a difference, like there are albums I've probably wanted for that reason. Obviously I think the music comes first, you have to like the music. I've never bought an album that I had no idea about just cause the artwork was nice, but yeah I think it makes a difference. And I think I would be put off buying an album that I like if the album artwork is really ugly cause then that kinda defeats the purpose of wanting to actually have the physical version if you don't really wanna look at it. So yeah, I think it makes a difference but it's not the main thing, obviously the main thing is the music.

**Figure 31 – Emma**

*So what do you think are the best things about records and buying records and listening to records?*

Emma: Definitely the physical aspect of it, like you can actually look at the album, look at the effort that's went into the artwork and obviously tracklists and even the posters you get sometimes, I love it! When I was younger I'd put them all up on my wall... I feel as if with digital you kinda lost that. Yes, you still get a tracklist but it's all very grey, wee small album picture up at the top, so it's kinda... lost that effort level.

### **Figure 32 – Umbrella Vinyl**

*To what extent do you think your customer's record purchases have been influenced by album artwork?*

Laura: I think that's why Instagram can be really good for umm, record selling because you can just post these wonderful images and people really kind of like "ooh that's nice!" and then they might look into it

Josh: The weird thing though about having an account where you mainly post album covers is the algorithms recommend things to you that bear no relation to music because it's only going on the image [...]

Laura: Umm African American singers or musicians but yeah, I don't know umm, I mean we like working in the shop because we can look up and see all these amazing covers and I think that's definitely one of the attractions of buying records for us, you know it's the whole thing, it's this wonderful item and the, you know, just lovely

Josh: I think it's, I think it's more than just the artwork, if you think about we, we have a few people umm that send us records from around the world so we've got a guy in Brazil, we've got a guy who goes to Ghana and Nigeria, we've got people in Japan. When we order stuff from, I think particularly the Nigerian and the Japanese stuff, the Japanese stuff comes with these umm

Laura: Wonderful obis

Josh: These obis, which is

Laura: Just means belt

Josh: Paper belt, and there's something about umm, there's something about that whole package which is just

Laura: It looks lovely doesn't it

Josh: Appealing, and if it's particularly these blue note albums which have got a very very high design aesthetic to the, like, like that [showing a Japanese record] they sell quickly and you know people, people like to have them up on their shelves and show them off cause they're, they are cool and that's indisputable

Laura: So yeah that's gonna be attractive

Josh: And the Nigerian records, particularly the Fela Kuti's that have a kind of fairly wild style to them, people always admire them. Whether it's the music or the covers selling it, I don't know

Laura: Might help

Josh: But I think it does help

Laura: There are some record labels like ECM for example have got a very sort of stylised type of cover. You can kind of guess the record label or the genre from the cover, and that's fascinating

Josh: I think people definitely listen to the music if the cover looks cool, but they don't necessarily buy it because the cover looks cool! (laughs)

### **Figure 33 – Thorne Records**

*And to what extent do you think your customers record purchases are influenced by the album artwork as opposed to necessarily the music on it?*

Mark: Umm, a little bit but not hugely. I think, I think a lot of people go “oh these young ones, they just buy them to hang them on the wall.” I don’t get that vibe a lot from a lot of people. Some people do, good on them, they are bits of art, umm I certainly as much as I love music I love a nice album sleeve as well you know. Even something that influences people are the stickers on the album and what I mean by that is the stickers really sell it, so if you’ve just got an album and it says whatever, it’s the album, but then the sticker says “blue vinyl blah blah blah” maybe like a little line of like a review with five stars or whatever, that, they’re called hype stickers, that really helps influence a sale. You know, pushes it forward umm, but you know, one of the things that the physical format gives you over streaming is the sleeve, that’s one of the plus points. It does influence in the sense that it’s part of the whole package.

### **Figure 34 – Umbrella Vinyl**

*So with these customer demographics you've mentioned about kind of people from all over, what kind of age ranges are you looking at? Do you particularly have lots of young consumers or kind of a few or...?*

Laura: Umm so our sort of regulars are probably mostly older generation who have been collecting records for a long time and that's always, you know, been their umm medium

Josh: I thought you were going to say men my age!

Laura: No! (both laugh) Older! But mostly, the majority are men, the customers, mostly I'd say older and they've got disposable income which is great, but we have got quite a good relationship with a few different organisations at Edinburgh University for example, umm and a lot of students, I think people appreciate that second-hand records you get such good music for not that much money, so compared to a new record which is probably £30/£40, you can come in here and get a great record for £12 or something you know, which you'll really, really enjoy, and I think that's obviously helpful for students if you're thinking about money umm, budgets or things like that

Josh: Also one thing we've noticed is that, umm students seem to be more, more keen on buying records to share.

Laura: Oh yes!

Josh: To play in communal spaces which is

Laura: Oh this is the flat sharing, yeah

Josh: Which is a really, really nice idea so you might get a group of people coming in and buying a set of records that they can have for the house. I can't imagine how you'd work out who owns what! (laughs)

Laura: That's what I was saying to the two ladies who were flat sharing "oh you've got this for the flat, that's great!"

Josh: Yeah, it's wonderful! And I think it underscores the importance of, umm community with records, that people, people want to hang around and talk to each other. So umm, it can get a bit lively in here on a Saturday afternoon! (laughs)

### **Figure 35 – Emma**

*So how, you say about really enjoying listening to vinyl records and the nostalgia of it, how is this different to when you interact with music in a digital format? So digitally, how do you find it different, a different sensation between the two?*

Emma: Yeah I feel as if, with digital, I'm just kind of passive listening not really, unless you want to, you're not really focusing in on it. Whereas, like I mentioned before, the records you have to actively go, flip the side, change it over, change what album you're listening to – it's a lot more personal your choices, whereas digital can literally just be anything's playing and you don't really need to have a say.

### **Figure 36 – Phil**

*What do you think are the best things about records and record consuming?*

Phil: Umm, I mean I think, you know as a musician I mean I like the fact that it encourages a dedicated listening experience, I think the fact that there's hardware involved and you're, if you're listening to a record the implication is that you're going to a dedicated listening space in your home, umm I like all that, I think that's a good thing, a healthy thing that's kind of disappearing from society. Umm, I've forgotten the rest of the question!

### **Figure 37 – Orla**

*And then on the reverse of that, what do you think are the downsides to records and record consuming?*

Orla: Umm, it's expensive. It's hard to store like in terms of, in my flat now I don't have the space and I'd also be worried that they'd get damaged like in process of moving or like because it's not as like, you know, it's a flat so it's not quite as like stable in terms of like you know umm temperature, like you know, shaking floor, if people have their washing machines on the entire flat shakes, so like I'd be worried about all of that stuff so I think like, the fact that they are so expensive and then also like delicate in a lot of ways makes it difficult to like integrate it into like daily life, daily listening to music cause it feels like a bit stressful. I think those are probably, yeah the main things.

### **Figure 38 – Umbrella Vinyl**

*What do you think are the downsides to records and record consuming?*

Laura: The space that they take up! (laughs) That is probably the only downside I think!

Josh: Yeah, they have their own gravity! (Laura laughs)

Laura: They're not light! Yeah we're moving house because we need more space for our records! Not even joking!

Josh: That's true! (both laugh)

### **Figure 39 – Thorne Records**

*And then some questions for you as someone who I assume listens to vinyl records as well as selling them! What or how do you feel when you listen to or interact with vinyl records and its culture?*

Mark: Well our world is so fast paced and listening to a record you have to stop, slow down, listen to the album one side at a time, you know, hold it in your actual hands, two hands, you know, turn it over, look at it. Umm, it's like a moment just with you and the artist or the art or whatever. Umm, I enjoy all its, you know, its pops and crackles and these things are little, they're little memories you know "oh god, wait a minute, why's that scratched? Oh yeah, I scratched that at a party, oh god that was a good night!" There's lots of beauty, you know it holds memories vinyl, umm and changes throughout time, deteriorates but I don't see that as deterioration you know, we all get a bit wrinkly so yeah, I just think it's a beautiful you know, hundred-year-old format that never really went away. People are like "oh it's making a comeback" I'm like well it just disappeared for like fifteen years but ultimately it's been here for a hundred you know, and it'll be here for a hundred more I would imagine, unless we kill ourselves!

#### **Figure 40 – Emma**

*Has there anything, kind of, stopped you or discouraged you from either buying more records or consuming them more often?*

Emma: For buying them definitely price, like they're really expensive and I think because it's a novelty type thing, for example like remastered albums are all like thirty, if they're popular like The Beatles it's like £70, it's really expensive. Whereas you can still get some originals that are dirt cheap but there's scratches and there's a lot of defects to them so it's just... being a student I've kinda stopped buying into them now (laughs) so hopefully it's something I can pick back up.

#### **Figure 41 – Thorne Records**

*What do you think are the downsides to records and record consuming?*

Mark: Price. Just the price. I think they're more expensive than they should be. I don't think they're horrifically priced, I think sometimes older people like in their sixties or seventies who don't buy records anymore will come in and they don't realise they're being rude; I think it's rude, they'll be like "oh my god!" You know, and I sometimes remind them I say "well how much did your house cost back in 1970? How much did your car cost back in 1970?" And if we're looking at the jump in vinyl prices as a percentage it's nothing on what it costs to buy a house, and it's those people who are complaining about the cost of vinyl who are sitting in a £500,000 house that they paid £10,000 for thirty years ago. But in saying that, I think the price is the downside, that is it. Now, as well anything that is created has a carbon footprint. There is that too but I'm gonna let other people worry about that, there's other people worrying about that and that's okay. I'm not gonna worry about that. But for me, the thing that I need to worry about is the price and I am worried about it.

**Figure 42 – Orla**

*So talking about these differences then, how do you feel when you interact with records and their culture, versus how do you feel when you listen to music digitally?*

Orla: Umm, I think there's a, there's an increased sense of like, kind of, probably individuality in the sense that on streaming services a lot of the time you will choose one or two songs or an album you want to listen to, and then the rest of it's just kind of the algorithm, and if it is that sort of passive listening you kinda have that on in the background. You have to think more for yourself if it's a record, so I think the kind of culture there is more one of kind of, I guess also you're paying a lot more so if you want to buy a record that's kind of saying 'that's part of my musical taste in a very distinct way and I care enough to spend twenty, thirty quid on a record' I think that, yeah it's the culture I suppose is one of more like taking your own musical taste in your control and then also taking it more seriously because it's a bigger investment.

**Figure 43 – Orla**

*How often do you visit or purchase records from an independent record shop, a chain record shop or online? Which of those is typically your most used form of selling?*

Orla: I'd say in recent times I tend to like buy it online and pick it up in person from Assai Records, which is independent. I mean they have a few stores but just like three in Scotland. That tends to be where I will go, umm I quite like buying them in person, I think I tend to do that and I don't go to the chain stores as much. I think they've gotten much more expensive, but then also they just sometimes don't have umm the music that I'm looking for so. If it is online though, it is like independent stores.

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