# From listening to curating: Anthropological curatorship toward music playlist practices

**Fikra Ahnaf**

*Department of Anthropology, Faculty of Cultural Sciences, Universitas Gadjah Mada, Indonesia*

*Correspondence author: fikra.a@mail.ugm.ac.id*

| ARTICLE INFO | ABSTRACT |
|---|---|
| | Currently, the curatorial approach is expanding its influence beyond the limitations of museums and art galleries, transforming the experiences and significance of our daily existence. That is embodied, for example, in the curatorial practices of music playlists. In making a music playlist there must be a sound curation process where the songs to listen to are selected and included in the music playlist. Accordingly, this study aims to describe how users of analog (*mixtapes*) and digital (*Spotify* playlist) music playlists conduct their music curation process and perceive the relationships behind them. The curation process is analyzed using curatorial and anthropological frameworks, which also attempt to provide a fascinating background on preference formation and the curation process. Qualitative data was collected from a virtual ethnographic approach, with observations and unstructured-semi-structured interviews—offline and online—of 19 informants aged 21–55 living in Yogyakarta and Bandung and a literature review. The data obtained through this study focuses on two outcomes. First, sociocultural circumstances provide the basis for preference formation in selecting, curating, and making music playlists. Second, the particulars of each user's music playlist are related to self-discovery and individual identity. As a result, sociocultural circumstances persuade music playlist users' habits that attach to the curation process. |

## 1. Introduction

In his book *Curation: The Power of Selection in a World of Excess*, Bhaskar (2016) raises an intriguing question of why the term curation using as a keyword. Although museums and art galleries use curation as a method, the curator's role has changed significantly over the past two decades (Sansi, 2019). Nowadays, curation handles everything: conferences, websites, news, festivals, music playlists, clothing, etcetera. Now, curation is a lifestyle (Kathke et al., 2022). In other words, curation is omnipresent, and we are the curators (Bhaskar, 2016). The concept of curation suggests combining multiple aesthetic

norms to tell a cohesive story (Taylor, 2014). Humans transform the discard of sensations they experience into flows they create and control through curation. However, in everyday life, the curation process usually remains hidden and is not even directly recognized (Davis, 2017).

Curation in a broad sensibility refers to the selection and organization of materials. Humans are and have always been ontologically curatorial. The world is entire for sensory stimuli, which the subject filters, evaluates, emphasizes, accumulates, and ignores (Davis, 2020). Curation is a terrific word for this set of activities (Bhaskar, 2016). The curator's traditional job of collecting, managing, researching, and exhibiting artifacts in museums has expanded in many directions in recent years (Lubar & LaForge, 2020). In other words, curatorial work is not only executed by professional curators. We are curators in any set of activities (Kathke et al., 2022; Márquez et al., 2022; Morris & Powers, 2015; Taylor, 2014), such as music playlist practices. Today's music is curated. For example, *Spotify*, *Apple Music,* and other related music streaming platforms offer large song databases. The difference lies in the curation and organization of playlists (Prey, 2021). Both use curation principles, which also apply to the *mixtapes*. But analog music playlists and digital music playlists have different types and materials.

There have been substantial changes in the music industry and how people listen to music today (Morris & Powers, 2015). In the beginning, music was only consumed thoroughly by analog media such as vinyl[1], cassette tapes[2], or CDs[3], but later moved onto the digital music streaming platform. Since the late 1960s, people have made music playlists through *mixtapes*, which began as technology that allowed a DJ (*Disk Jockey*)[4] to play recordings from two or more turntables, mix them into the original mix, and record them onto a cassette tape (Moore, 2004), where it took a long time, complex processed and considerable costs. Nowadays, through *Spotify* playlists and other related music streaming platforms, people can effortlessly and freely make a music playlist. In addition, *Spotify* and other related music streaming platforms have developed a platform with increasingly diverse curatorial processes, where content is present using algorithms and music playlists depending on genres, moods, and others (Bhaskar, 2016).

Curation also plays a substantial role in the setting of music playlist practices. There must be a sound curation process where the songs to listen to are selected and included in the music playlist. However, the relationship between sound and curation often cannot be clearly described due to the nature and shape of the short, invasive, and immaterial sound waves (Lobley, 2019). Apart from that, this study aims to describe the user curatorial practices of analog (*mixtape*) and digital (*Spotify* playlist) music playlists in Yogyakarta and Bandung. The selection of these two cities stems from the growth of

---

[1] Vinyl is an analog storage medium. In other words, the vinyl disc contains a music physical record which is scanned by a sensitive needle called a stylus. Vinyl standard recorded: Albums are 12" LPs at 33 rpm, 7" EPs at 33 rpm, and 7" singles at 45 rpm. (Source: Diffen)

[2] A cassette is an audio tape for recording and listening to sound. Before the CD was introduced in the 1980s, many people bought their favorite music albums on cassette tape. (Source: Vocabulary)

[3] CDs are digital music storage media. In other words, music is encoded as binary data. The standard CD format is a two-channel 16-bit 44.1 kHz setup. The data is laser-processed and decoded for audio playback. (Source: Diffen)

[4] A person who presents or performs recorded popular music, especially on the radio or in discos. (Source: Oxford Languages)

music and the abundance of ethnographic records about music in these urban areas. Thus, this study focuses on two primary subjects. The first focuses on what, who, and how preference formation and curation processes are related to the user's sociocultural circumstances, and the second focuses on the user's curatorial practices and other music playlist-related practices. These two primary subjects help us to kindly the basis of curatorial practices. Curatorial does not unintentionally occur; something shapes and influences it. Therefore, the sociocultural circumstances can define the relations behind it. This study also describes the curatorial practices of music playlists using Bhaskar's (2016) and Davis's (2017, 2020) curatorial frameworks.

Using the curatorial framework of Bhaskar (2016) and Davis (2017, 2020), curation process can be able to examine more broadly. First, what Bhaskar (2016) named "principles of curation" are some principles for carrying out the curation process: (1) *selections*, (2) *decisions*, (3) *platforms*, and (4) *arrangements*. Everything from selection to arrangement goes through a process of preference formation. Second, according to Davis (2017, 2020), forms of curation can be divided into two categories: (1) *productive curation* and (2) *consumptive curation*. *Productive curation* itself refers to what people document, create, and share, including sharing content with limited audiences and social networks. It means that *productive curation* lies at the intersection of self-expression and respect for privacy because it facilitates the emergence of selective, expansive, and potentially private identities. *Consumptive curation*, on the other hand, refers to how people divide their attention between information and social networks. One way his curation of consumer products works is by manipulating the platform through affordability and selectively distributing attention across a broad network. In this form of curation, Davis also noted the external forces that play a role in the curation process and the limits of decision-making in the curation process, named *"third-party curators"* — that is, (1) *network curation as* a human-based curation and (2) *curatorial code* as a machine-based curation. In sum, the curatorial framework of Bhaskar (2016) covers curation in all media fields, while the curatorial framework of Davis (2017, 2020) covers curation in digital media form.

In addition, this study follows the term 'anthropological curatorship' used by Lubar & LaForge (2020) to designate this study — the phrase seems appropriate to refer to the curatorial practices described in this article as it raises fundamental questions about the relationship between anthropology and curatorial practices. This study also references Bonini & Gandini (2019), who describe gatekeepers as curators of music streaming platforms such as *Spotify;* Sansi (2019), who provides an example of how anthropologists began exploring experimental and contemporary issues such as curation; Siles et al., (2019), who define cultivating moods and emotions through music playlists; and Taylor (2014), who discusses the effects of the curation phenomenon and the implications it has on managing authentic identity online. Thus, the novelty of this study lies in the uses of Bhaskar and Davis's curation framework to describe the curatorial practices of music playlists and the implications while considering the sociocultural circumstances behind it — as it relates to preference formation and anthropological context.

## 2. Method

As mentioned in the previous section, this study is an anthropological curatorship of platform utilization, using Hine's (2000) virtual ethnographic approach as its fundamental method. Virtual ethnography involves intensive investigation of mediated interactions. This type of effort gives a new dimension to research on situated media use. The ethnographer's engagement with the medium is a valuable source of knowledge. Virtual ethnography can rely on the ethnographer as an informant and include reflexive aspects. How technology shapes interactions with informants are part of ethnography, as is the ethnographer's interaction with technology (Hine, 2000). Stationed on research subjects relating to technology, people (users), and their online physical and virtual interactions (Achmad et al., 2020).

According to the virtual ethnographic approach, this study was conducted from March to August 2023, with the participation of 19 informants aged 21-55 years in two research sites were picked into two categories: (1) physical and (2) virtual. First, Yogyakarta and Bandung were picked as physical research sites because both cities have growing technological and musical cultures. Moreover, in both cases, there is historical evidence that the musical ecosystem is growing immediately. Anthropologists have also produced numerous ethnographic reports on music-related activities in Indonesia, particularly in these two cities (see Barendregt & Van Zanten, 2002; Luvaas, 2009, 2012; Lysloff, 2016; Wallach, 2005; Wallach & Clinton, 2013). Second, virtual sites emerge through digital platforms such as *Zoom*, *Instagram*, *WhatsApp*, and *Spotify*. These platforms are used for virtual data collection for both observations and interviews. Beliefs about the Internet can have a crucial impact on how we interact with and through technology. Therefore, virtual ethnography can be used to gain a deeper understanding of the significance of technology and the cultures that enable and are permitted through digital sites (Hine, 2000).

As a participant, the researcher achieves the following activities: (1) desk review (2) observing and engaging in physical activity in the record store and virtual activity on *Spotify*, *WhatsApp*, *Instagram*, and *Twitter*, and (3) interviewing the music playlist users in Yogyakarta and Bandung. This study uses sequences of two interview conduction methods, called unstructured interviews and semi-structured interviews, to collect qualitative data. Unstructured interviews are always conducted at home while walking down the street, weeding millet, hanging out in a cafe, or waiting for the bus. Semi-structured or in-depth interviews are planned activities. Semi-structured interviews are open-ended but follow a prevalent script and cover a list of topics (Russell, 2006).

Regarding to Achmad et al (2020), the researchers can gain research access smoothly by meeting the essential criteria of being a virtual ethnographer, which includes openly informing the research subjects about the research being conducted. This study has provided explicit details about the subject research and the factors that cause individuals to assume the role of an informant. Informant criteria are selected categorically on age, gender, status, city, and use of music playlists to compare individual experiences. More specifically:

Table 1. Table of informants

| Initials | Age | Gender | Status | City | Music Playlist Utilization |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| NE | 55 | Female | Housewife | Bandung | Both (*mixtape* & *Spotify* playlist) |
| MA | 53 | Female | Housewife & worker | Yogyakarta | *Mixtape* |
| HP | 35 | Male | Worker & music apparels seller | Yogyakarta | Both (*mixtape* & *Spotify* playlist) |
| GS | 30 | Male | Musician & worker | Yogyakarta | Both (*mixtape* & *Spotify* playlist) |
| PS | 30 | Male | Worker & musician | Yogyakarta | Both (*mixtape* & *Spotify* playlist) |
| D | 29 | Male | Worker & music activist | Yogyakarta | Both (*mixtape* & *Spotify* playlist) |
| HE | 28 | Female | Worker | Bandung | *Spotify* playlist |
| PA | 26 | Female | Graduate student | Yogyakarta | *Spotify* playlist |
| FA | 25 | Female | Worker | Yogyakarta | *Spotify* playlist |
| TA | 25 | Female | Worker | Yogyakarta | *Spotify* playlist |
| TS | 25 | Female | Worker | Yogyakarta | *Spotify* playlist |
| NA | 25 | Female | Graduate student | Yogyakarta | *Spotify* playlist |
| GR | 25 | Male | Worker & musician | Yogyakarta | *Spotify* playlist |
| AB | 25 | Male | Worker & music activist | Yogyakarta | *Spotify* playlist |
| NT | 24 | Male | Worker | Bandung | *Spotify* playlist |
| N | 24 | Female | Worker | Bandung | *Spotify* playlist |
| P | 24 | Female | Undergraduate student | Bandung | *Spotify* playlist |
| RM | 23 | Male | Undergraduate student & music apparels seller | Bandung | Both (*mixtape* & *Spotify* playlist) |
| AN | 21 | Female | Undergraduate student | Yogyakarta | *Spotify* playlist |

Qualitative data was analyzed using the curation concept of Bhaskar (2016) and Davis (2017, 2020) after it was decisive that all required data were sufficient. Bhaskar and Davis's curatorial framework is used to examine and identify data. Their concept aims to uncover how curatorial forms and principles are achieved through these curatorial practices of music playlists. These analyses are also covered using the tables to be clearly and easily understood. In addition, following the virtual ethnography approach, this study also virtually argues by showing data on music playlist utilization in virtual life or Internet participators.

## 3. Result and Discussion

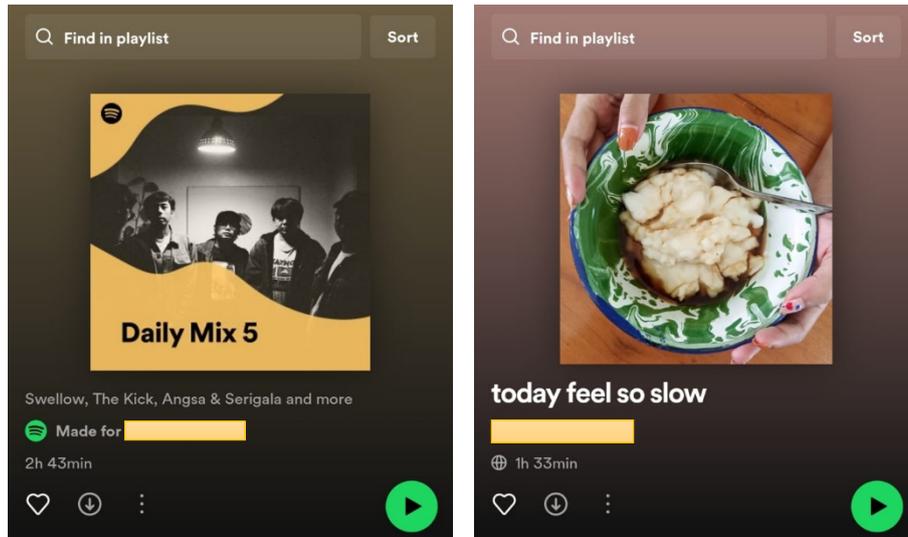- **Music playlists: From *mixtapes* to *Spotify* playlists**

In recent years, the recorded music industry has shifted away from selling physical records and willing subscription fashions that promote admission to giant collections of musical content (Morris & Powers, 2015). Rather than offline retailers, online platforms now dominate content providers (Prey, 2020). According to Durham & Born (2022), one of the most significant effects of the digitization of music over the last two decades, alongside the growth of the Internet, has been a massive shift in music distribution and consumption to digital distribution formats. Most Internet platforms for music distribution and consumption differ in their technical composition, licensing structure, and legal status. They are cleft into licensed digital download retailers such as *Bandcamp*, subscription-based streaming services such as *YouTube*, and ad-supported streaming services such as *Spotify* (Durham & Born, 2022).

*Spotify* is currently the world's most popular commercially licensed digital music service. Its popularity reflects consumer interest in new ways to consume music. *Spotify* has revolutionized the online music platform by offering a streaming service that does not require album purchases or digital downloads. Their catalog of over 70 million titles is available on demand through mobile and desktop applications, paid subscriptions, or ad-supported free accounts. *Spotify's* business model represents a shift from the traditional transaction of physical music assets to a fully access-based model (Durham & Born, 2022). As streaming services grow in popularity, increased people are consuming music by listening to playlists. People are now looking for great playlists with the right songs in the right place (Choi et al., 2015). In 2020, 30% of all plays on *Spotify* will be generated from curated playlists. A playlist is more than just a selection of tracks (Ivo, 2021). Instead of digital, analog playlists (*mixtapes*) became more popular before the big transition from analog to digital technology. *Mixtape* usually refers to a self-made collection of songs available on cassette (and later CD and other digital formats), while the term '*mixtape*' in any genre culture refers to independently released albums, often given away for free for promotional purposes (Moore, 2004). According to Sutton (2021), in the late 1980s, the cassette became the most popular format for pre-recorded music due to its portability, compatibility with trendy technology of the time such as the Sony Walkman, and specifically the ability for consumers to record and copy audio. Cassettes also had elements of anti-elitism when they were marketed as vehicles for popular music, while media of the past (long-playing records and reel-to-reel) and future (CDs) were marketed as ideal vehicles for classical music. With affordable blank tapes, amateur musicians and other people could more easily document their creations or overdub tracks to approximate studio performances, bypassing the gatekeepers of the music industry, while listeners could take on the role of DJ or curator by recording their favorite tunes from the radio, and so on (Sutton, 2021).
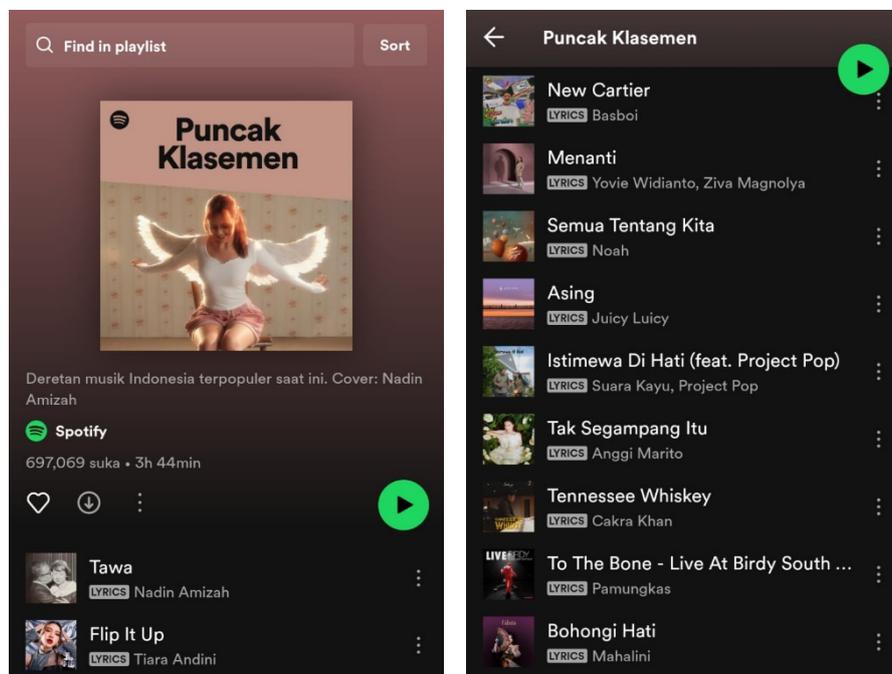
Picture 1. *Mixtapes* created by NE (a female, 55 years old).

Upon logging in to *Spotify*, one encounters a large choice of playlists. *Spotify* listeners have created over 3 billion of their very own playlists on *Spotify*. These user-generated playlists account for about 36% of *Spotify's* month-to-month content hours. Alongside playlists created with the aid of *Spotify* listeners are music playlists created with the relief of file labels (Prey, 2020). *Spotify* has millions of playlists. Created by *Spotify* users, a team of experts, and algorithms all over the world, these are a terrific way to get music in front of millions of potential fans. There are three main types of *Spotify* playlists: (1) *personalized playlists*, (2) *editorial playlists*, and (3) *listener playlists* (Spotify, n.d.). And platform-curated playlists can be further cleft into two extensive categories: editorial and algorithmic (Prey, 2020). Editorial playlists, such as *Spotify's* Rap Caviar or mood/genre-based playlists, are "handcrafted" by human curators; the decision to add, replace, or change the position of tracks within a playlist is supported by data and proprietary software (Bonini & Gandini, 2019). However, with algorithmic playlists, this curation process is further automated and personalized for individual streaming listeners, including *Spotify's* "Discover Weekly," "Daily Mix", and "Your Summer Rewind". Although streaming platforms protect the exact composition of their algorithms as intellectual property, and while those algorithms are constantly being adjusted and updated, there are some quite common observations about how they work (Prey, 2021).

Picture 2. Algorithmic playlist created by *Spotify* and listener playlist created by GR (a male, 25 years old)



Picture 3. Editorial playlist created by *Spotify*.

- **Music experiences: From individual to regional**

Listening to the songs is an experience that does not occur by chance. The variation among them is distinct. According to Prey (2021), a song is the basic unit of music. Song serves as an atom of the musical world; crafted by talented songwriters, brought to life by skilled artists, carefully selected by DJs, and made available for purchase as a single. By seizing the moment, one can summon forth a bygone era. The claim that the experience of listening to music is rarely about the song goes against intuition, and here's why. Listening sessions typically consist of specific arrangements of songs (Prey, 2021). However, the act of listening is also affected by their socio-cultural backgrounds.

Similarly, this notion holds for other musical encounters. Various situational factors can have a significance on the listening patterns of individuals, which include the specific activity in which the listener is involved (Woźniak et al., 2023).

This study classifies socio-cultural circumstances into two types: (1) individual and (2) regional. First, people's music and listening experiences shape individual musical preferences. Every person must go through a variety of distinct experiences. Second, it is imperative to observe a comprehensive environment to fully comprehend the interconnection between musical and listening experiences within individual realms with an inhabitation. The data encompasses a wide range of elements, enveloping the past and current life circumstances as well as interactions and connections with others. In sum, both intertwined data gather individual encounters closely linked to the surrounding environment.
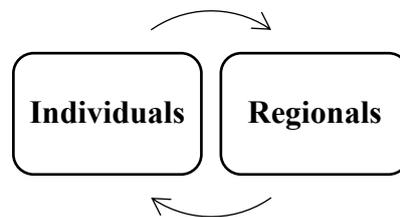


Figure 1. The cycle of musical experiences

Starting with individual points, several informants of this research study stated:

> "When I was kid, I did not have money, so I could not buy a cassette. As a teenager, I was used to music players because I lived with my parent's relatives. When I started working, I started earning money to buy music players, cassettes, etc. I already had money, so I made a mixtape." – NE (a female, 55 years old)

> "Who would have introduced me to this music if not for my parents? When I was a child, my parents would often play songs through a music player in the morning or evening. I do not know who it was, but I thought I had listened to it. But sometimes my parents play songs that we like too.' – TS (a female, 25 years old)

> "Remember, I learned how to make a mixtape when I was given a mixtape by someone, I had a crush on. I make my own using a double-sided cassette deck, then play and copy, including love songs that were popular. Maybe it is for someone that I love. So, the themes are love." – MA (a female, 53 years old)

> "I used to listen to idol groups (such as One Direction) a lot since I was a child because I had a DVD player at home. When K-pop came to Indonesia, my friends and I liked it, and we started mentioning and sharing K-pop to each other. I did." – N (a female, 27 years old)

The data has shown that the role of the closest people and media influences their musical experiences. Both play the same important role but at different times. However, we also get the economic background that NE can create her playlists. Economic backgrounds can affect musical preferences. Existing literature states that cultural consumption is

closely related to an individual social status which is generally measured by income (Liu et al., 2018). Socio-economic status in society can be characterized as the relative position of individuals, families, or groups within a social system that embraces particular social values (occupation, economic ability, level of education, literacy, etc.) (Bornstein & Bradley, 2002). On the other hand, even though the media are different, the individual contexts of the musical experiences are similar between analog and digital. So do others. Therefore, the most important keywords when referring to specific points in their musical experiences are those closest to them (family, neighbors, friends, etc.), the media (radio, Internet, etc.), and generally their economic background. More importantly, individuals from different cultural backgrounds may exhibit various traits; thus, the association between socio-cultural and economic factors and musical taste remains relevant in multiple national or cultural contexts (Liu et al., 2018).

Then, individual points can be broadly translated into regional points. As a regional point, Yogyakarta is often referred to as the cultural centre of Java. A special region within the Republic of Indonesia, it is the capital of the region and an important centre of education, cultural tourism, religious mixing, and pluralism (Richter, 2012). Yogyakarta also deserves recognition as a long-standing outpost of the Indonesian avant-garde, a centre of youth culture and political activism, artistic experimentation, and creative expression (Luvaas, 2012). Extensive comments from several informants (GS, HP, D, TS, etc) living in Yogyakarta stationed on the premise that musical and creative life in Yogyakarta has grown rapidly. According to them, this can be present from various places that facilitate those activities. For example, GS and HP are musicians and music activists who repeatedly gather in similar music scenes, music events, or other places related to musical activities in Yogyakarta. In nearly the same place, they produce musical preferences as well as share their musical references. Also, the production of preferences and the sharing of references presented on the other things regarding the music playlist period (between analog and digital). According to Popish (2019), in Bandung '90s era, friends also shared references when spreading information about music. Furthermore, when a wealthy boy could purchase a cassette abroad, many friends would stay at his house just to copy songs from that cassette to other cassettes to make a *mixtape*. NE, HP, and GS also confirmed this. According to them, one of the cheaper ways to make a *mixtape* was to copy a friend's tape, as you did not have to buy the tape you wanted to duplicate. As such, they only buy blank cassettes to use as a medium for making their *mixtapes*. It happened in Bandung. Between the communities, music is shared. So, at the time, the people of Bandung shared music references and *mixtapes* (Popish, 2019).

Thus, both Bandung and Yogyakarta show identical patterns in the distribution of references to musical ideas. This can also be influenced by the shape of the music retail industry (Wallach, 2008) and *Distro[5]* culture (Luvaas, 2012, 2013). Hundreds of shops sprung up across the archipelago, from small sticker-studded shops with a funky punk rock feel to high-end boutiques with a high-end graphic design feel (Luvaas, 2013). TS

---

5 The word *"Distro"* itself comes from the abbreviation for "distribution store" and its function is to receive deposits from various brands of local clothing companies that manufacture their own products. T-shirts, bags, wallets, jackets, etc. This apparel company does not yet have its own marketing department or wants to expand its marketing but is very "savvy" in distribution. (source: Wikipedia)

remembers being taken to a music store when she was a child to buy cassettes and CDs of her favorite pop musicians. The same experience with TS, PS, and P. The development of music was closely related to the existence of the music retail industry. Any names, such as Popeye or Disc Tarra in Yogyakarta (as mentioned by HP and GS) or Aquarius Dago in Bandung (as mentioned by PS and RM), have been witnesses to where the music retail industry has triumphed. Those places are one of the musical experiences of several informants. Music retail itself is related to affordability for the broader community, while *Distro* culture may be related to a minority of communities or community members (Luvaas, 2012), like PS, HP, GS, and D, who are musicians and music activists.

*Distro* could also play much the same role as music retail. According to Luvaas (2012), people go to *Distros* not to enlighten themselves but to get socially drunk. They go to the *Distro* to spend time together late, drink, and talk casually, but principally for fun. But during long hangout sessions like this, they find common stances on everything from music to fashion to politics and do some real cultural work. They generate ideas, discuss them, and participate in large-scale discussions of Yogyakarta and Indonesia. Participating in a *Distro* also puts the productive activities in which individual members of the scene participate under social scrutiny, are publicly discussed, and have meaning (Luvaas, 2012, 2013). For example, they play and talk about music, especially in relation to the era in which alternative, indie, or emo music is on the rise (as mentioned by GS and RM). However, technological and patternical have been shifted in Yogyakarta and Bandung, and largely in wider Indonesia, popular music and social relations are lifted by oppositional music that gained increasing momentum in the late New Order period through to the early euphoria of Reformasi (Richter, 2012; Wallach, 2008) and the existence of new media (Internet) (Luvaas, 2009, 2012, 2013).

On the regional side, shifting and technological advancement go hand in hand. For example, around 1996, with the easy availability of the Internet in Bandung, the floodgates for music opened wide. The Internet has provided information to thousands of young people — at least middle-class college and high school students — who have the time and the resources to do so (Luvaas, 2009). The same thing happened in Yogyakarta and other cities throughout Indonesia. The introduction of Internet technology has also impacted the speed of access to information (Wallach & Clinton, 2013). The liberation of media has also provided young people with an ever-expanding repertoire of identity typologies and a resource bank of genres, sounds, and ideas ripe for appropriation. The Internet has not only provided Indonesian youth with a wide range of aesthetic resources. It also gave us various tools to actively recreate this aesthetic ourselves (Luvaas, 2009). D and GS agreed that when the Internet came along and *Warung Internet* (*Warnet*)[6] started popping up in Yogyakarta, they started searching for music references on the Internet, downloading them, and copying them through flash disks and CDs. Moreover, when N, NT, TW, GR, or PA were still teenagers, music consumption shifted to music streaming platforms such as *Spotify*. They then use this platform to listen to and share musical references with each other. Additionally, social media such as *Instagram* and *Twitter* also play a significant role in spreading these references (see

---

6 *Warnet*, short for *Warung Internet*, means internet cafe in Bahasa Indonesia. These places were plentiful in the mid-2000s, when computers and Internet technology became more widespread, but they were still not as personalized as they are today.

Márquez et al., 2022; Taylor, 2014). However, some user-specific information (such as ethnicity and religion) is typically not available on online music platforms. In such cases, the user's geographic location can provide clues to the user's cultural information, thereby facilitating the improvement of music recommendation systems (Liu et al., 2018). Furthermore, the boundaries of the digital world have become blurred as they can cross the boundaries of physical regions. So, in the regional context, this point has changed from the physical to the digital. Both remain major influences that can be used as references for the socio-cultural background related to curatorial practices.

- **Curatorial through music playlist practices**

According to Taylor (2014), before the advent of the Internet, curatorship used to be controlled by a small fraction of the world population. This segment mainly included professional curators, television executives, established studios, and occasionally rebellious street artists. Most individuals had limited options when it came to showcasing their aesthetic preferences or sharing them with others. On the contrary, the data in this study do not entirely support this argument. Even though the playlist consists of analog, the task of selecting and organizing the songs relies on self-curation rather than being handled by a professional curator. For example: NE and GS have the authorization to select any love songs they desire for the *mixtapes* they curate. The process involves the purchase of empty cassettes, often obtained from flea markets for their lower prices compared to record stores. Afterward, they progress to accumulate, choose, and include the desired songs onto these blank tapes. This phenomenon is still prevalent nowadays, with the advent of digital playlists. Thus, one aspect that remains consistent when it comes to the practice of making analog and digital playlists is the act of 'self-curation'. Nonetheless, it should be prominent that their implementation is not always identical. The circumstances of self-curation being undertaken and utilized are also related to media and technological factors. In addition, personal preference formation is also strongly influenced by socio-cultural backgrounds.

Then, the curatorial framework according to Bhaskar (2016) and Davis (2017, 2020), will be used to examine the existing data. The data is then presented in tables (Tables 2 & 3) to subdivide and specify each curatorial practice that follows Bhaskar's (2016) principles of curation and Davis's (2017, 2020) curation theory. Regardless, here are the details:

| No | Principles of Curation | Presented Data |
|---|---|---|
| (1) | **Selections** | TW had her playlist filled with tracks from her preferred genre, which happened to be pop music. Similarly, GS, HP, and PS handpicked songs that drop under musical genres like alternative rock, emo, and indie pop. NE curated a collection of songs centered around the love theme, aptly titled "Love Songs." She handpicked a selection of songs from her favorite musicians, NCT, and other K-pop idols. Respecting the categorization of songs based on their period, NT chose songs from the earlier era, covering the 1960s to the 1980s. In addition, TS, GR, PA, HE, D, and the rest chose |

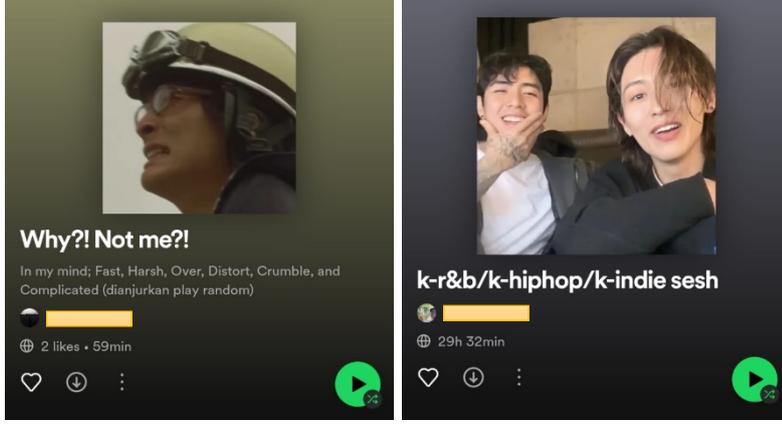| | | songs according to their desired moods or emotional states (such as sadness, happiness, and motivation). |
|---|---|---|
| **(2)** | **Decisions** | N presented their K-Pop fan's identity; NT presented their old song fan's identity; and GS, HP, and PS presented their alternative-indie music fans' identities. So, the decisions related to them are also relevant to sharing a playlist publicly or keeping it private. In the context of *Spotify* playlists, *Spotify* has a feature to make public or private playlists. One of them, like TW, does not share the playlists publicly because she chooses to make a private playlist that only she can relish. <br><br> *"I just don't want to share my playlists. So, my playlists are full of songs that I only want to hear in certain situations."* – TW (a female, 25 years old) |
| **(3)** | **Platforms** | This phase is the relationship between human and machine curators that applies to the platform (*mixtapes* and *Spotify* playlist). As stated by Davis (2017, 2020), actors in the curatorial process are related to two things: humans as curators (*network curation*) and machines as curators (*curatorial code*). It can be present in several examples, such as algorithmic playlists created by *Spotify* (related to their listening habits tracked by machines), editorial and listener playlists created by *Spotify's* staff and users (human-based), or *mixtapes* created by humans only. |
| **(4)** | **Arrangements** | During this phase, the individual decides to make and arrange a playlist based on several things like song-tracks listing, themes, images, descriptions, and so on. Example: <br><br> *"I use both. Between mixtapes and Spotify playlists, these two contain love songs because I once made a mixtape for someone I loved. Then, when I used Spotify playlists, I continued the same principles. I listed the songs from start to finish. It should match the message that I want to convey because the song goes from the slowest to the fastest, or vice versa, or by pairing it with the lyrics of each song. It is like writing a letter."* – GS (a male, 30 years old) <br><br> On the other hand, not every user abides by the same principles. When it comes to choosing songs, some individuals prioritize matching them to a particular genre or theme, but the order in which they are precise holds no significance. Additionally, *Spotify* offers a song shuffle feature, rendering the song order irrelevant. <br><br> Another example would be the theme creation, tailored to the preferences and desires of individual users, such as Indonesian songs, old songs, love songs, and more. In the context of *mixtapes*, even though not as versatile, images are also duplicated on *Spotify*, ensuring they align with the playlist's themes. It's worth noting that not everyone pays |

close attention to these images. Additionally, descriptions and captions are carefully chosen to reflect the playlist's themes and convey the playlist creator's intended message or description.



Why?! Not me?!

In my mind; Fast, Harsh, Over, Distort, Crumble, and Complicated (dianjurkan play random)

2 likes • 59min

k-r&b/k-hiphop/k-indie sesh

29h 32min

Picture 4. *Spotify* playlist created by GS (left) and N (right)

Table 2. Applying curatorial model according to Bhaskar's (2016) principles of curation

Playlists commonly begin with a heartfelt expression. In other words, people use playlists as a measured way to create, capture, and explore the emotions and feelings associated with different events and experiences in their lives. Playlists are more than just symbolic representations; they are realized as genuine forms of self-expression (Siles et al., 2019). The reason is that music serves as a platform that amplifies emotions, sensations, moods, and relaxation (Mendis et al., 2021). The presentation of data according to Bhaskar's principles of curation also conveys this interpretation. Playlists are realized as a form of self-expression in curation principles, where a process of selection and arrangement takes place. However, by examining the self-expression demonstrated through the curation of playlists, one can catch a glimpse of the distinctive qualities present in both research sites. In Yogyakarta and Bandung, the user playlists exhibit a remarkable distinction: they are divided into separate segments for popular and indie music. The music preferences of the informants in these two cities reflect the popularity of various genres. They seem to enjoy a mix of old songs, both Indonesian and foreign as well as K-pop idols and modern pop music. In addition, there is a growing resurgence of indie music. According to GS, HP, and PS, independent music is gaining popularity, leading to the making of playlists featuring these songs. The status quo concerning the definition of popularity for a genre or song is undeniably being questioned—but the focus of this study is not on the argument stated above.
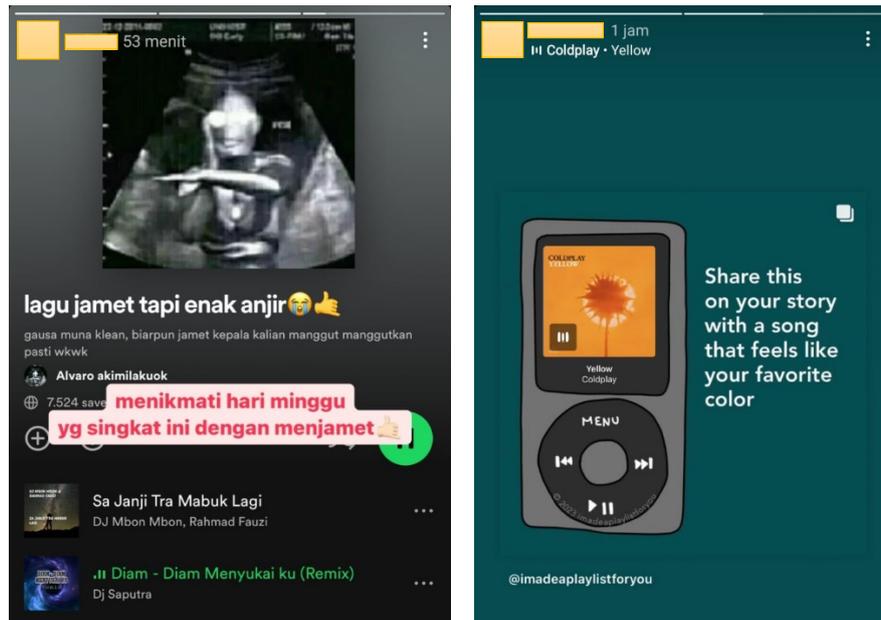
| | Agency | Curatorial Bounds |
|---|---|---|
| **Productive Curation** | In the *mixtape* context, playlist creation and sharing occur through the direct act of physical exchange. So, whether they gave their *mixtapes* or not depends on their decisions. Example: GS just shared a *mixtape* with someone he loves; HP distributed *mixtapes* to | Make a playlist by selecting and organizing song-track listings, themes, artworks, names, and descriptions (both *mixtapes* and |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | everyone to share reference materials; or NE has created a love song *mixtape*. However, in the *Spotify* context, playlist sharing occurs not only through physical, but also in other digital media such as *WhatsApp*, *Instagram*, and *Twitter*. This force also represents the practice of self-representation through selecting and organizing song-track listings, themes, artworks, names, and descriptions. | *Spotify* playlist). (**Network Curation**) *Spotify* algorithmic playlists (machine-based creation and curation). (**Curatorial Code**) |
| **Consumptive Curation** | In the *Spotify* context, "Public Playlist" and "Private Playlist" features also allow to them, specifically restrict whether they want or not to share their playlist. *Spotify* also has features to make it even more personal and private. People hide the recently played songs (other people's songs or their own), and then they cannot see other people or what they played. | People hide the recently played songs (other people's songs or their own). (**Network Curation**) *Spotify* features that make it personal and private like "Private Playlist" or hide recently played. (**Curatorial Code**) |

Table 3. Applying curatorial model according to Davis's (2017, 2020) curation theory

The idea of self-expression is also embodied by the curation form, just like how the principles of curation do. Moreover, self-expression in this study goes beyond the mere act of collecting, selecting, and blending songs to form playlists. These activities include sharing playlists with others or utilizing different platforms. Taylor (2014) explained that every medium provides a range of tools for self-expression and multiple methods of connecting with audiences. By employing them, people engage in self-curation and establish traditions. Individuals can carefully mold their images and selectively share content by utilizing digital tools. The job of making playlists serves as the prevailing method for organizing musical "content" on *Spotify*. People employ this technique for their own indulgence as well as to compile searchable collections accessible to other users and staff members. Playlist curation proves to be an invaluable resource in effectively managing music streams by users (Durham & Born, 2022). Streaming incorporates playlists as a vital component in its foundation (Ivo, 2021). Furthermore, sharing playlists can also be interpreted as a form of gatekeeping. An example of this situation can be realized when using alternative platforms such as *Instagram*, *Twitter*, or *WhatsApp*. They endeavor to offer references to individuals through this platform. However, most informants utilize it to mold their self-image. Subsequently, when inquired about the consequences of this self-curation, Taylor's (2014) viewpoint is accurate. When it comes to the realm of elite art, online curation doesn't purely present a challenge, as the original's aura continues to impact its price. However, the capacity for auto-curation does not rely on this market either. All the participants in this study

possess the power to accomplish various objectives using music playlists, such as shaping personal values, creating imagery, expressing themselves, and more.



Picture 5. Playlists shared on personal *Instagram* stories (by FA & HE)

## 4. Conclusion

This study utilizes the term anthropological curatorship to examine the connection between the curatorial practices of music playlists (both analog and digital) and their socio-cultural circumstances (musical preferences formation). The value of curation can be accurately determined and examined by analyzing music playlists, as they serve as a representation of cultural practices deeply rooted in our daily lives. In this scenario, it has been revealed that this study offers a reason that curatorial practices encompass more than simply choosing, determining, and organizing music playlists but also gathering and presenting. In addition, it illustrates the significant impact of socio-cultural surroundings on curatorial practices, both on an individual level and within specific regions. In simple terms, curatorial practices are not accidental. The curatorial process is formed by a multitude of experiences and circumstances that shape individual preferences. When discussing their music experiences, the significant keywords are the people closest to them (such as family, neighbors, friends), the media (such as radio and Internet), and their economic and regional backgrounds.

Moreover, in this study, self-expression serves as a common element linking analog and digital curation practices, as demonstrated by Bhaskar's principles of curation and Davis's forms of curation. Although, In Yogyakarta and Bandung, there is a notable disparity in user playlists as they are categorized into distinct sections for popular and indie music. This mirrors the prevailing music taste in both cities. Self-expression within this study also extends beyond the mere gathering, choosing, and blending of songs to create a playlist. Some of the activities encompass sharing playlists with others or utilizing various platforms. Sharing playlists can also be seen as a way of gatekeeping. When discussing the impact of self-curation, curation not only poses challenges but also

preserves the aura of the original work and affects its price. Nevertheless, the ability to automate curation remains separate from these markets. All study participants possessed the ability to accomplish diverse objectives through music playlists, encompassing the development of personal values, constructing an image, expressing individuality, and beyond—and curatorial become related in everyday life.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The author states there is no potential conflict of interest connected with the research, the authorship, and the publication of this article.

## References

Achmad, Z. A., Ida, R., & Mustain, M. (2020). A Virtual Ethnography Study: The Role of Cultural Radios in Campursari Music Proliferation in East Java. *ETNOSIA: Jurnal Etnografi Indonesia*. https://doi.org/10.31947/etnosia.v5i2.9787

Barendregt, B., & Van Zanten, W. (2002). *Popular Music in Indonesia since 1998, in Particular Fusion, Indie and Islamic Music on Video Compact Discs and the Internet* (Vol. 34). https://www.jstor.org/stable/3649190

Bhaskar, M. (2016). *Curation: The Power of Selection in a World of Excess* (M. Bhaskar, Ed.; 1st ed.). Piatkus.

Bonini, T., & Gandini, A. (2019). "First Week Is Editorial, Second Week Is Algorithmic": Platform Gatekeepers and the Platformization of Music Curation. *Social Media and Society*, *5*(4). https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305119880006

Bornstein, M. H., & Bradley, R. H. (2002). *Socioeconomic Status, Parenting, and Child Development* (M. H. Borsntein & R. H. Bradley, Eds.; 1st ed.). Routledge.

Brewer, J. D. (2000). *Ethnography* (A. Bryman, Ed.; 1st ed). Open University Press.

Choi, K., Fazekas, G., & Sandler, M. (2015). *Understanding Music Playlists*. http://arxiv.org/abs/1511.07004

Davis, J. L. (2017). Curation: a theoretical treatment. *Information Communication and Society*, *20*(5), 770–783. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2016.1203972

Davis, J. L. (2020). Theorizing Curation. In Deana. A. Rohlinger & S. Sobieraj (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Digital Media Sociology* (pp. 40–60). Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780197510636.013.5

Durham, B., & Born, G. (2022). Online music consumption and the formalisation of informality: exchange, labour and sociality in two music platforms. In G. Born (Ed.), *Music and Digital Media: A planetary anthropology* (pp. 177–219). UCL Press. https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv2pzbkcg.10

Hammersley, M., & Atkinson, P. (2007). *Ethnography: Principles in practice* (3rd ed). Routledge.

Hine, C. (2000). *Virtual Ethnography* (First Published). SAGE Publications Ltd.

Ivo. (2021, July). *The Spotify Playlists Ecosystem - History, Why Do They Exist and Their Evolution in 2021*. Stereofox. https://www.stereofox.com/articles/the-spotify-editorial-playlists-ecosystem/#

Kathke, T., Tomann, J., & Uhlig, M. (2022). Curation as a Social Practice: Counter-Narratives in Public Space. *International Public History*, *5*(2), 71–79. https://doi.org/10.1515/iph-2022-2046

Liu, M., Hu, X., & Schedl, M. (2018). The relation of culture, socio-economics, and friendship to music preferences: A large-scale, cross-country study. *PLoS ONE*, *13*(12). https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0208186

Lobley, N. (2019). Anthropological sound curation: from listening to curating. In R. Sansi (Ed.), *The Anthropologist as Curator* (1st ed., pp. 211–226). Routledge. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003086819

Lubar, S., & LaForge, S. (2020). Curatorship. In J. John. L. Jackson (Ed.), *Oxford Bibliography in Anthropology*. Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/obo/9780199766567-0229

Luvaas, B. (2009). Dislocating Sounds: The Deterritorialization of Indonesian Indie Pop. In *Anthropology* (Vol. 24, Issue 2). https://www.jstor.org/stable/20484539

Luvaas, B. (2012). *DIY Style: Fashion, Music and Global Digital Cultures* (1st ed). Berg.

Luvaas, B. (2013). *Exemplary Centers and Musical Elsewheres: On Authenticity and Autonomy in Indonesian Indie Music*. https://www.jstor.org/stable/24256934

Lysloff, R. T. A. (2016). Worlding Music in Jogjakarta: Tales of the Global Postmodern. *Ethnomusicology*, *60*(3), 484–507. https://doi.org/10.5406/ethnomusicology.60.3.0484

Márquez, I., Lanzeni, D., & Masanet, M. J. (2022). Teenagers as curators: digitally mediated curation of the self on Instagram. *Journal of Youth Studies*. https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2022.2053670

Mendis, B. I. L. M., Palihaderu, P. A. D. S., Satharasinghe, D. A., Premarathne, J. M. K. J. K., Dissanayake, A. S., Rajapakse, H., Karunanayake, P., Senarath, U., Wijesuriya, W., Keong, S. Y., Ho, W. Y., Subasinghe, W., & Dias, W. K. R. R. (2021). Exploration of Music Preferences among the Socioeconomic Stereotypes: A Cross-Sectional Study. *Journal of Advanced Research in Social Sciences*, *4*(4), 1–18. https://doi.org/10.33422/jarss.v4i4.540

Moore, T. (2004). *Mix tape: the art of cassette culture* (T. Moore, Ed.; 1st ed). Universe Pub.

Morris, J. W., & Powers, D. (2015). Control, curation and musical experience in streaming music services. *Creative Industries Journal*, *8*(2), 106–122. https://doi.org/10.1080/17510694.2015.1090222

Popish, I. (2019). *Bandung Pop Darlings: Catatan Dua Dekade Skena Indie Pop Bandung (1995-2015)* (1st ed.). EA Books.

Prey, R. (2020). Locating Power in Platformization: Music Streaming Playlists and Curatorial Power. *Social Media and Society*, *6*(2). https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305120933291

Prey, R. (2021). *Playlists and the Datafication of Music Formatting*. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/349324390

Richter, M. M. (2012). *Musical Worlds in Yogyakarta* (1st ed.). KITLV Press.

Russell, Bernard. H. (2006). *RESEARCH METHODS IN ANTHROPOLOGY: QUALITATIVE AND QUANTITATIVE APPROACHES* (4th ed.). AltaMira Press.

Sansi, R. (2019). Introduction: anthropology and curation through the looking glass. In R. Sansi (Ed.), *The Anthropologist as Curator* (1st ed, pp. 1–16). Routledge.

Siles, I., Segura-Castillo, A., Sancho, M., & Solís-Quesada, R. (2019). Genres as Social Affect: Cultivating Moods and Emotions through Playlists on Spotify. *Social Media and Society*, *5*(2). https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305119847514

Spotify. (n.d.). *Types of Spotify playlists*. Spotify. Retrieved August 31, 2023, from https://support.spotify.com/us/artists/article/types-of-spotify-playlists/

Sutton, M. D. (2021). 'To Unpack My Music': Elizabeth Wurtzel's Mixtape Aesthetics. *Comparative American Studies*, *18*(2), 142–158. https://doi.org/10.1080/14775700.2021.1979361

Taylor, Erin. B. (2014, May 16). *The curation of the self in the age of the Internet.* IUAES/JASCA Conference. https://archive.erinbtaylor.com/entry/the-curation-of-the-self-in-the-age-of-the-internet

Wallach, J. (2005). Underground Rock Music: And Democratization in Indonesia. In *Source: World Literature Today* (Vol. 79, Issue 4). https://www.jstor.org/stable/40158922

Wallach, J. (2008). *Modern Noise, Fluid Genres: Popular Music in Indonesia, 1997−2001* (1st ed.). University of Wisconsin Press.

Wallach, J., & Clinton, E. (2013). *History, Modernity, and Music Genre in Indonesia: Introduction to the Special Issue.* https://www.jstor.org/stable/24256931

Woźniak, M., Wysocki, M., Lis, S., & Kijewski, M. (2023). The Influence of Macro- and Socio-Economic Factors on the Consumption of Music throughout the Year. *Metody Ilościowe w Badaniach Ekonomicznych*, 24(1), 1–26. https://doi.org/10.22630/mibe.2023.24.1.1