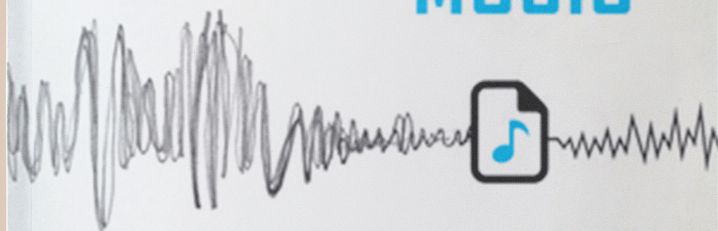# SELLING
DIGITAL
MUSIC

FORMATTING
CULTURE

JEREMY WADE MORRIS

Selling Digital Music: Formatting Culture

Jeremy Wade Morris

by Sam Babin

In **Selling Digital Music, Formatting Culture**, Jeremy Morris explores the digitisation of popular recorded music and its impact on the music industry. Morris highlights key points in the history of the distribution and consumption of recorded popular music from the 1980's to the 2000's to demonstrate that the transition from physical objects, like CDs, to digital music files was not an accident, but an intentional project that required great effort from hobbyists and technologists.

The book contains case studies of five different technological developments, which are identified as the most impactful contributions that led to the reshaping of the music commodity. These advancements and trends, organized into the five main chapters of the book, are software media players, metadata, file sharing, online music retailing and cloud computing. To investigate the technologies, Morris analyzes archived content, including academic research, trade articles and popular press materials. The case studies pay close attention to the labor that went into the creation of these significant developments.

Even though it is a common belief that digital music files are cheap, plentiful, and degrading to the quality and value of the recorded music commodity, the author argues that digitisation did not disrupt the role of recorded music as a commodity, but transformed it into something rich, special, and complex. Morris emphasizes that digital music files are tangible objects that, interestingly, become so through the use of technology. This work clarifies that although digital music files seem different from other physical objects, like vinyl records and CDs, they do have material attributes, such as interfaces (e.g., computers and digital portable devices) that are integral and required to access digital music files.

Selling Digital Music, Formatting Culture focuses on the digitisation of popular music, but provides insight into the more general issues of technological convergence and the transitional nature of cultural goods. It offers a revisualization of cultural commodification by shining light on the transformation of cultural commodities into digital objects. The knowledge this project provides can be applied to many areas beyond popular music because digitisation is currently occurring across many other cultural industries. Beyond a focused explanation of the complex history of digital music distribution and consumption, Morris explores wider issues related to industry, commerce, and popular culture.