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Decision on submission to Poetics

Poetics <em@editorialmanager.com>
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To: Omar Lizardo <olizardo@soc.ucla.edu>

Thu, Apr 21, 2022 at 10:08 PM

Manuscript Number: POETICS-D-22-00041

Discovering Focused Microgenre Communities

Dear Professor Lizardo,

Thank you for submitting your manuscript to Poetics. Based on the advice of three experts and my own reading, I would like to invite you to revise and resubmit your article to Poetics after revisions. If possible, please address the comments below in a response memo and resubmit your revised manuscript by Aug 21, 2022. I can offer some flexibility with that deadline, if needed; simply let me know if that turns out to be the case.

Although I will primarily direct you to the full suggestions from the reviewers (included below), I will briefly share a few thoughts and synoptic comments. First, I would note that I was fortunate to secure timely reviews from three well-established scholars with a great deal of expertise relevant to your paper. What's more, they are very familiar with Poetics and represent an important part of your audience. As you will see, your paper inspired divergent responses and recommendations that run the gamut from style to substance and from accept to reject. However, I am opting for the "R&R" because I think that the approach taken in the paper is highly relevant to our readership and should be made available to them in one form or another.

At the same time, both R2 and R3 raise questions about the theoretical contributions and substantive lessons learned. Other comments anticipate objections from certain types of Poetics readers, others suggest ways to streamline the paper's presentation, and so on. Of course, there are many ways to address these concerns, and I will leave it to you to decide how to respond. I can think of ways, for example, to connect your findings more directly to Poetics (among other) papers that focus on "intra-genre" variation, various "paths to appreciation," and culturally dissonant or "discrepant tastes" in music -- ideas often generated through discourse-based or ethnographic approaches that seem to be largely validated by your approach and findings. On the other hand, I can see merits in streamlining the paper and focusing more exclusively on the methodological contribution, perhaps opting for something more akin to a research note. I plan to seek reviews of your revised manuscript from within the pool of current referees. Please let me know if you have any questions as you proceed with revisions.

To submit your revised manuscript, please log in as an author at https://linkprotect.cudasvc.com/url?u=https%3a%2f%2fwww.editorialmanager.com%2fpoetics%2f%2c&c=E,1,_Vfd0M4p4LKXBh3l1BteMBZT8RoD3_oRJg7D9qOSG9Dp3TnggXIVqS0K18rluQm5OAwTBcS2MgoZhW5bn1oh94ToWNmaNLsu_m6Bu0P&typo=1 and navigate to the "Submissions Needing Revision" folder under the Author Main Menu.

Poetics values your contribution and I look forward to receiving your revised manuscript.

Kind regards,

Vaughn Schmutz

Editor-in-Chief

Poetics

Editor and Reviewer comments:

Reviewer #1: In "Discovering Focused Microgenre Communities," the author builds upon criticisms among theorists of musical genre who argue that the coarse-grain labels used in survey research do not legibly correspond to how people consume music in practice, either because they ignore where boundaries overlap or because they ignore heterogeneity within genres categories. As a solution to this problem, the author recommends a link-clustering technique that, performing hierarchical clustering on a matrix describing the similarity of person-genre dyads, identifies a set of "link communities." This procedure enables the analytic retrieval of microgenres, enabling the analyst to differentiate distinctive ways that survey-takers understand macro-genres through reference to their larger pattern of choices within the survey. The proposed method introduces an intriguing tool into a growing repertoire of techniques available for the network-analytic study of culture. Specifically, the method promises to increase the analytic utility of coarse-grain survey categories such as genres or, as suggested in the conclusion, identity labels such as "liberal" or "conservative." This latter suggestion ensures the paper should be of interest to readers beyond the paper's immediate audience of those who study musical genres.

Personally, I find this manuscript incredibly exciting and smart. I admire its use of relational thinking to make a good-faith effort to resolve a recurrent issue in the use of genres in survey research, and I like the introduction of a new network tool for cultural analysis. Perhaps most importantly, it has implications for quantitative social science as conventionally practiced that the author just begins to articulate. I see it as an ideal-typical Poetics article, both in terms of its subject matter and its use of formal models of culture. I think that the paper is deserving of publication in its current state, though I do have a few suggestions that the author may wish to address.

First of all, I think there is a tension in the paper's (more modest) aims of identifying heterogeneity in how people respond to coarse-grain genre variables for the purpose of resolving conceptual issues with the theorization of genre and its (more radical) aims of further "exploding" the distinction between survey data and relational network data. I would love for the author to further develop and articulate the critique provided of quantitative social science as conventionally performed (here, primarily taking the form of FA and LCA), in particular how conventional methods essentially obscure a wealth of relationships that can be better exploited by methods that can account for the data's inherent "relationality." At points, you suggest that "we stop looking at the usual survey data that forms the bulk of empirical material in the quantitative study of taste as 'survey data' (e.g., data collected on the characteristics of individuals in the form of 'variables')" and you

depict the methods you use as offering a decisive break with tools commonly used by practitioners to "fit statistical models to such data." There is something here that seems paradigm-breaking, perhaps in ways analogous to ways previously suggested by forebears such as Andrew Abbott (1988) and Mustafa Emirbayer (1997). I was awaiting a moment at the end where you return to this theme in a more polemical way. I don't want to encourage the author to have to turn the paper into something unwieldy. But, in the end, the paper's implications clearly transcend the case, the paper could easily accommodate this relative detour, and it would help expand the paper's audience beyond sociologists who study genres. At any rate, I would leave this up to the author to determine whether he or she wanted to address this.

Second, I suspect some of the macro-genre critics would remain somewhat dissatisfied about what your proposed method would call micro-genres. As you note, "the idea ... is that the macro-genre nodes (e.g., 'Classical') assigned to different clumps represent micro-variations of the macro-genre label that differ primarily in a relational or structural way; different 'types' of 'Classical' are different because their audiences make distinct choices with respect to the other genres in the survey" (*italics mine*). It seems to me that the ways the link-clustering technique draws boundaries do not seem likely to correspond to the way that these critics might like to draw boundaries. For instance, such critics may wish to criticize hip-hop as a microgenre on the basis that connoisseurs of the genre may make finer-grain distinctions between East Coast hip-hop, West Coast hip-hop, trap music, Southern hip-hop, crunk, etc., that refer to something about stylistic qualities of the music in those genres, and claim certain kinds as superior. The microgenres you identify, on the other hand, have as their reference boundaries between types of audience. I don't wish you to try to "prove" that your microgenres qualitatively differ from one another (unless you can somehow readily do so), but I think it would behoove your argument to be clear as possible about the limitations of your approach, especially as regards the macro-genre critics' concerns: Ultimately, the method does not seem to capture multiple "variants" of a genre so much as multiple kinds of "audience."

Third, I think you could acknowledge some legitimate precursors to the spirit of your approach. I think that Amir Goldberg's RCA could be charitably interpreted as attempting to accomplish something similar to what you are doing: exploit the relationality of survey datasets to analytically isolate distinctive ways of, say, "preferring" what are treated as univocal cultural objects. "The idea ... is that the macro-genre nodes (e.g., 'Classical') assigned to different clumps represent micro-variations of the macro-genre label that differ primarily in a relational or structural way; different 'types' of 'Classical' are different because their audiences make distinct choices with respect to the other genres in the survey" ... This is an idea highly congruent with Goldberg's approach, in my interpretation. In fact, you could even say that your method improves on Goldberg's in some respects. For instance, Amir Goldberg's RCA can only get at as many "jazzes" as there are distinctive

cultural schemata to be identified — say, a highbrow-popular "jazz" versus a contemporary-traditional "jazz" — using a modularity-based criterion for community identification. Likewise, RCA always identifies as many genres as there are schemata, whereas your approach can identify more (e.g., six jazzes) — or fewer (as in the case of opera), when the data doesn't warrant such multivocality.

Finally, I'd like to comment a bit on the use of logistic regression in your creation of demographic profiles for each microgenre. Despite engaging in a conventional form of analysis in producing these profiles, the link-clustering procedure's splitting the "dependent variable" into multiple "different" dependent variables beforehand enables us to perform research that recognizes the principle of equifinality: I think it is possible to interpret your results as identifying multiple causal "recipes" to becoming a fan of a given musical genre. In this sense, your work has certain resonances with more recent work by Ronald Breiger (2009) that exploits the "duality of cases and variables" to provide better social-scientific explanations.

There are also minor typographical errors throughout that the author should correct before publication. Missing parentheses, missing words, some figures do not have labels, etc.

Reviewer #2: This study offers an innovative approach to analyzing existing survey datasets on cultural tastes and social stratification, redefining the unit of analysis as a relational entity (persons-by-genres) and then analyzing a reconfigured dataset. The core results identify demographic segments within broader taste communities which resonate with previous work on musical preferences and offer a few surprises. The strength of the paper is in its methodological contribution. The theoretical context and implications of this contribution could be better specified.

*The introduction ends rather abruptly, and would be improved by adding a summary paragraph stating the research objectives for this study and giving an overview of the approach taken. It seems the main contribution of the analysis is offering a more nuanced interpretation of demographic segments, as a way of saving existing survey data based on "macro" genre labels. Explaining this more would help the reader to anticipate the extended examples and arguments in the methods section (pg. 4-10) as well as the detailed results, which are the most interesting part of the paper (pg. 17-27), but which are not emphasized in the introduction or conclusion.

*The micro-genre concept could be better motivated. Critiques of "macro" genres could be explained in more detail, for example, research on how "organizations and other powerful institutions, make sociologically relevant distinctions within those macro-genres categories" (pg. 3), and, studies of performers which do not "drop the label" but which do find "distinctions based on performers" (pg. 3). Based on the brief argument given, it is not immediately clear how studying smaller or "micro" genres avoids the limitations of the genre concept itself, i.e., the problems of internal heterogeneity and overlapping boundaries. It is asserted that "For people [survey respondents?], the unit of selection and judgment is the micro-genre not the "broad" genre classification" but no evidence for this claim is offered. By the time we get to the naming of a "micro-genre perspective" (pg. 11) it is still unclear how micro-genres are being defined, how they relate to previous research on similar phenomena, and what this new perspective encompasses.

*After a lengthy methodological set-up, the proposed contribution is explained: using a link clustering approach to redefine the unit of analysis (pg. 11). This is a simple and powerful innovation in the analysis of cultural tastes, but it seems like it could be explained more plainly in the introduction, where the value of relational analysis is already emphasized. Outlining the contribution up front might make the paper more clear and obviate the need for lengthy methodological "toy" examples (pg. 4-10). In this section, it would help to more clearly justify why a "person-to-genre network" (pg. 13) should be taken as a valid operationalization of the concept of micro-genre.

*The results are interpreted in terms of "micro-genre communities" (pg. 19) most of which are distinguished by characteristics of respondents, for example by "ethnoracial, social class, and generational status" (pg. 21), with little to say about discourses of musical genre per se. If this is so, it would suggest giving more emphasis to explaining genre communities and less to the scale of genre labels. For example, why are these micro and not meso genres? How might these distinctions relate to ethnographic or other "micro" studies of musical scenes?

*The methodological contribution produces interesting and interpretable results, but the implications drawn in the conclusion are rather narrow. Given all of the detailed explanation of micro genre communities (pg. 17-27), what are the suggested directions forward for key debates in the analysis of cultural tastes and social stratification? For example, a brief critique of "macro-classifications" (pg. 28) is offered, but how might this new data structure suggest revisions or amendments to existing research on such discourses?

Reviewer #3: This article shows how a link-clustering approach works in terms of discovering micro-genres of music. Using conventional survey data of respondents preferences for a number of genres, the author illustrates how a link-clustering approach differs from other alternatives (Factor Analysis, LCA, MCA). The author first shows these approaches and how they are incapable of usefully disaggregating genres into different sub-genres. The paper then walks through the same data with a link-clustering approach. Results show how this approach is capable of inducing a number of subgenres based on how respondents similarly link these genres in their preference profiles. This approach is consistent with work on univore-omnivore genre preferences, but offers the ability to cut genres up into multiple micro-genres that are discovered in survey data. The resulting micro-genres are then validated by showing how these represent different sociodemographic subgroups, pointing to a duality between micro-genre and audiences.

I think the article does a fine job of completing what it sets out to do. However, I am uncertain that it makes an empirical or theoretical contribution. To me, the article reads very much like a methods piece from an introductory textbook. If I were wanting to introduce students to the link-communities approach, I would highly recommend this article. It does a great job of showing what is distinctive in this approach and how it can be used in an exploratory fashion. It does not do more than that for me.

One might reasonably ask what we have learned in a deeper way from this approach. As it reads now, the method largely confirms what we already know: genres vary in terms of their sociodemographic niches, and some genres are really artificial Frankenstein's monsters in this regard. Others, as the author notes in the article, have tried to move beyond asking about genres, or have started to include more fine-grained measures of artists to better examine how tastes operate with respect to status, symbolic boundaries, etc. Consequently, I don't think I really learned anything important that can speak to ongoing debates in this literature, and instead the article defends itself on methodological grounds.

I am therefore not convinced that the article takes on a substantive issue or theoretical debate in a serious enough fashion for the Poetics readership. As a smaller point, the article retains some language that in my reading is a bit silly, and adds to its introductory textbook feeling—e.g., "Get relational!", "to the rescue", "work the magic"). I would liked to have seen how this approach contributes more to ongoing issues and debates in the field, and I look forward to seeing the link-communities approach applied in a more targeted theoretical and substantive fashion in the future.

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