

**Project Title:**Rocking Online: Digital Publics and Pakistani Music

**Abstract:**

The purpose of my dissertation is to address the following question: How are publics enacted by contemporary musicians via digital media in Pakistan? Furthermore, I would also like to consider how the rise of digital musical publics as a social form refigures pre-existing markers of identity (class, ethnicity, religious sect). I seek to investigate in particular how digitally-mediated spaces (e.g. social networking sites, video sharing services) establish collectivities of music creators and consumers. Music in Pakistan is a promising arena of social production to focus on both because of how it reflects the literature on South Asian publics (discussed below), and how it is one of the key areas in which digital mediation is forming new collectivities. My reason for looking in particular at the digital technology and mediation is not because I claim it is intrinsically different from previous eras of technological change (e.g. telephone, radio, television). Despite claims of instantaneous and constant connection via the Internet, there is important scholarship that emphasizes how information continues to be impacted by lag (Dumit 2011) and prone to degradation (Larkin 2008) even in more recent technological infrastructures. And there are strong patterns in how people discuss internet media that harken back to the early phase of other technologies (Mosco 2004). At the same time, it is vital to study this medium in particular (online media) precisely because at this historical juncture there is so much affective energy, both optimistic and wary, about digital media from my informants and more broadly in Pakistan. By situating this popular music publics as a social form at a moment when networked computers and online platforms have not yet become banal technology in Pakistan, I follow Vincent Mosco's (2004) work on the 'digital sublime'. Especially as this group of musicians and the digital-material publics they seek to create around their content exist in a larger environment of fevered enthusiasm for online commerce and 'e-governance' as a panacea to society's ills. Contemporary anthropology of Pakistan has already begun to look at the relationship between culture and nationalism through studies of lived Islam. Nuanced studies by Khan, Hull and Iqtidar look at the social meaning generated by the meeting of liberalism, Islam and national identity. Their arguments can serve as a foundation for further work on cultural production