Twitter Thread by nilay patel

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@reckless

I’m on vacation so of course I am thinking about how music is expressed on different formats, like this new Chris Stapleton record I got for Christmas. Note that it only has three tracks on side A and the center is blank - the album came on 2xLPs, like a lot of new vinyl.



My oldest records, like our beloved 1974 copy of Sticky Fingers (with real zipper sleeve!) are packed tight to the center. What’s going on?



The inside of a record spins slower than the outside, so the inner grooves are packed tighter, with more distortion and limited dynamic range. Physical formats have all kinds of weirdness like this that shape music itself. https://t.co/F1pxKVyGdL

But when vinyl was the only music format, no one wanted to flip records all the time. So everyone made use of the whole side, and artists and engineers would order albums to have the quieter songs on the inner grooves.

But now that streaming exists, no one's thinking about album track order that way. And vinyl is selling well, but in relatively small numbers, and as much for the physical experience of handling the records. And no one wants to compromise inner groove sound quality.

So half of the new records I've bought recently are 2xLPs with no inner tracks. Like this very pretty copy of Taylor Swift's Folklore



Distribution formats shape culture, and culture shapes distribution formats. It's one of my favorite things to think about. (Because I am a giant nerd.)

Here's a terrific @estellecaswell video on how longer disco songs drove the dominance of the 12-inch single. (Including New Order's Blue Monday, one of my most treasured records. That sleeve!) https://t.co/rsZNYFzlns



And here's @charlieharding and Nate Sloan with an episode of Switched on Pop that explores how streaming has restructured songs themselves. Tech and music, locked in a forever-dance: https://t.co/GxAggunIUA

(I'll go back on vacation now.)