Hedonic consumption: Music as a product

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ABSTRACT - Hedonic consumption is a relatively new field of study in consumer research. It offers a complimenting paradigm to the one of traditional information processing, focusing on the "experiential" aspects of the consumption experience which are subjectively based, such as sensation seeking, emotional arousal and fantasizing. To date, most studies have focused on consumer traits that would predict hedonic consumption as opposed to product traits that might elicit hedonic consumption. The study of music is proposed as an avenue for researching what characteristics of the person and the product interact to prompt consumption of hedonic products. A model for studying music as a product is presented.

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INTRODUCTION

Hedonic consumption is a relatively new field of study in consumer research that addresses the multisensory, fantasy and emotive aspects of product use (Hirschman and Holbrook 1982). It explores the consumption experience not as an information-processing event but via a phenomenological or "experiential view" defined as "a primarily subjective state of consciousness with a variety of symbolic meaning, hedonic responses and aesthetic criteria" (Holbrook and Hirschman 1982, p. 132). Hedonic products include those which arouse the emotions, aesthetic products such as literature, visual arts, and drama. The current paper focuses on one particular hedonic product category: music.

Music is very much a part of our daily lives. Billboard reports that recorded music is the fastest growing segment in the communications industry with projected sales to reach $6.1 billion in 1991 (Lichtman 1987, Mehler 1987). There is also a strong secondary market which includes concerts and electronic equipment. Marketing studies have explored music's effects in advertising (e.g. Park and Young 1986), the role of music in classical conditioning experiments (Gorn 1982, Bierley, McSweeney and Vannieuwkerk 1985), and the effect of music as a background on purchase behavior (Milliman 1986, 1982, Smith and Curnow 1966). Yet, very little has been done in the way of consumer research to explore why people "consume" music. The treatment of music as a product has been relatively ignored. Music has a unique characteristic in that it is initially consumed, generally speaking, through the radio and/or television media before it is purchased. One usually hears the music through some media vehicle before buying it. [Some consumers may purchase a new release on the strength of their knowledge of the artist or composer without previous exposure. However, the author maintains that the consumer has expectations either based on projections from previous experience or on "review" recommendations similar to those given for new books and movies.]

Consumption of music is also repetitive. One buys recorded music to be able to experience the music more than one time and to be in temporal control of the consumption. Psychologists and music educators are interested in studying the human reactions to music, the former group to understand aesthetic behavior (e.g., Berlyne 1971) and the latter group to influence it (Yingling 1962, Trolie 1976). Research in the psychology of music has three areas of interest, composition, performance, and listening, or music appreciation (Sloboda 1985). While each area has unique properties for research, the emphasis of this study focuses on the listener/consumer. A shortcoming in the music research literature is its almost total exclusion of popular music. Psychology of music studies commonly ignore examples of music other than "serious" (Konecni 1982). A few characteristics of popular music have been studied in this context (e.g., Russell 1986), but the field remains largely unexplored. Considering the amount of dollars and time spent on popular music, research which focuses on popular music can, no doubt, contribute to the advancement of understanding the phenomenon of music listening.
The purpose of this paper is to suggest research avenues for music as a product. Its objectives are to blend the marketing and music literature to define what characteristics of consumers and what characteristics of music interact to produce consumption/purchase and present a viable explanation of music preference and purchase behavior. First, the hedonic consumption literature is analyzed. Second, research in the psychology of music is presented, focusing on studies that might relate to music preference, to define what variables are involved in perceiving and responding to music. Lastly, a paradigm for studying music as a product is advanced, which will incorporate the variables and responses which may have the strongest influence on music preference and purchase behavior.

**HEDONIC CONSUMPTION**

Hirschman and Holbrook (1982) introduce hedonic consumption as an explanation for the consumer behaviors that deal with the multisensory, fantasy and emotive phases of product usage experience. The authors define four hedonic perspectives: mental constructs, product classes, product usage, and individual differences. The basic area of concern for all the perspectives is the role that the subjective, emotional part of man plays and to what extent it may dominate a consumption/purchase situation. These hedonic perspectives are meant to enhance, not replace, traditional consumer behavior theories. In a similar article, Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) compare an information processing model of consumer behavior, arguing that while much of consumer behavior can be explained by conventional research, it neglects an important segment of the consumption experience, namely, fantasies, feelings and fun (e.g., leisure activities, variety seeking, sensation seeking, hedonic response). One objective of hedonic consumption research is to monitor and predict emotional reactions and fantasy imagery during product usage. What is necessary also are measures which predict (responses) cause to a person to purchase a particular hedonic product.

Hirschman (1983) identifies four types of hedonic behavior. Problem projection proposes that people engage in activities which confront them with unhappy realities in order to better cope with these situations. Role projection is those activities which permit individuals to self-project into a particular role or character. Fantasy fulfillment purchasing is the use of products to help construct fantasies and augment reality. Escapism is those activities which allow the individual to escape unpleasant realities or distract themselves from unpleasant events. The author analyzes these different types of behavior against the demographic predictors of age, education, occupational status and birth order and the sociophysical predictors of ethnicity, imagery, social isolation, novelty seeking, sensation seeking, adult information exposure and childhood stimulation exposure to ascertain the characteristics of persons who engaged in each type of behavior. In a similar study, Hirschman (1984) uses the aforementioned demographic and sociophysical predictors to identify the consumer who engages in experience seeking. Experience seeking is defined as an overall phenomenon that represents consumption as the generation of internal thoughts and/or sensations which constitute the content of the experience. Experience seeking is the weighted average of three constructs, cognition seeking - experience sought to stimulate thought processes, sensation seeking experience sought to stimulate the senses, and novelty seeking - the desire to seek out novel stimuli. Both studies found descriptive background characteristics that help define these different consumer behavior profiles.

Some methodology testing has also occurred in the area of hedonic consumption. Havlena and Holbrook (1986) compare two typologies of emotion, Mehrabian and Russell's PAD dimensions and Plutchik's emotional categories. Using reliability, internal validity and external convergent validity as criteria, the authors' results favor the Mehrabian and Russell approach. Holbrook (1986) investigates aesthetic responses to design features in clothing using canonical correlations analysis. He uses the independent internal variables of visualizing/verbalizing tendency, intrinsic/extrinsic motivation, and romanticism/classicism and devises measurements of them. Results show that these variables do, in fact, influence aesthetic responses to clothes design. As Holbrook notes, a limitation in this study is the utilitarian nature of clothing interacting with the aesthetic dimension.

The research reviewed above has focused more on hedonic behaviors than on products. When a product was studied it had some non-hedonic or practical value. The study of music as a product would provide a more purely hedonic focus.

**Reasons for listening to music**

According to Sloboda (1985), "The reason that most of us take part in musical activity, be it composing, performing, or listening, is that music is capable of arousing in us deep and significant emotions," a position echoed by Havlena and Holbrook (1986). On the analytical side, Hartz (1984) argues that "music (or musical thinking) offers a more direct access to mental process than, say speech; since the manipulation of perception and recall is so central to it" (p. 246). Listening to music requires the discrimination and assimilation of melody, harmony, rhythm, tempo and instrumentation, to name a few of the elements of music, via a series of complex and as yet rather unexplainable processes (Sloboda 1985). Hirschman (1984) describes one type of consumer behavior as cognition seeking, where an individual seeks to discern cause and effect relationships. It follows that music can also provide cognitive stimulation.

Music listening is also influenced by social factors. Although there is no denying the possibility of some primitive responses to music, most of our responses to music are learned. At an early age we learn to discern the cultural characteristics of music. Minor mode and slow tempo may denote sadness in Western music; however, no such cultural meaning is placed on Eastern music. In other words, what sounds sad to a Westerner may not sound sad to an Easterner (Sloboda 1985). Social pressures, such as peer pressure among teenagers, may also help to decide what an individual will purchase. Music may be purchased as much for its social status as its own intrinsic value. A Yuppie may buy assorted classical works to impress his/her superiors. People use music to facilitate and/or supplement social situations. Going to a concert may be as much a social event (i.e., dressing in a tuxedo) as it is a musical event.

**VARIABLES INVOLVED IN MUSIC LISTENING**

Prince (1972) offered an extensive paradigm for research on music listening involving three general variable categories, listener-variables, affective and associative responses and perceptual and learning processes. Listener characteristics include personality, musical ability, and socially-educationally derived attitudes toward music. The listener's general state of attention may be influenced by these characteristics. Affective and associative responses include physical changes, feeling-tone responses, and visual images, all of which interact with each other. These responses are input for the perception of patterns and musical preference. Perceptual and learning processes encompass the entire gambit of information processing variables including memory storage and retrieval, concept development and insights. Music preference may also result from the cognitive understanding of the music.

**Listener characteristics**

In a review of the psychology literature, Bertyne (1971) addresses the different aspects of individual differences as they pertain to aesthetic behavior. Five principle traits are found to influence aesthetic appreciation: 1) tolerance of complex situations; 2) tolerance of ambiguity of feelings or perceptions; 3) breadth of attention and the accuracy with which details of objects or events are noted; 4) independence of judgment; and 5) a capacity to escape the everyday and take interest in the unusual aspects of things (i.e., stop and smell the roses along the way). The first three traits indicate a willingness to approach and explore novel situations and the fifth a propensity to experience phenomena. Hirschman (1980) describes the consumer construct of inherent novelty-seeking innovativeness which is the desire of the individual to seek out novel stimuli. Wheeler (1985), reviewing just the music literature, also found evidence to suggest that the manner in which people play and respond to music may provide information about their personalities. However, since different personality scales were used in the different studies, results were difficult to compare. In her study on the relationship of personal characteristics on mood and music enjoyment, Wheeler
used the Personality Research Form (PRF), FormE, which encompasses 22 scales, and got some rather ambiguous results. Musical preference was defined as a person's liking of the music at a particular moment with no long-term commitment. Musical taste was defined as a long-term commitment to musical style. The study found that taste predicted preference, in this case, liking jazz and classical music predicted liking the selection of music, which was Chopin's Barcarolle. Musical taste was divided into the seven style categories of rock, disco, country, classical, folk, jazz, and soul. Not one of the 22 scales appeared in all seven categories, therefore, it was concluded that no specific characteristics predicted taste across musical styles. This finding may be due to the narrowness of the PRF scales. No one PRF scale encompassed all five of the aforementioned traits. However the scales that do show up more frequently have elements of the five traits, therefore giving some credence to perhaps a "bundle" of traits that could predict purchase preference.

**Proposition 1:** Personality traits that emphasize the individual's propensity to approach, explore and experience novel phenomena will be positively correlated to their music preferences and frequency of consumption.

The intensity or magnitude of an experienced emotion is an important aspect of any emotional response. Larsen and Diener (1987) present as a stable individual characteristic, the notion of affect intensity, defined as the typical intensity with which individuals experience their emotions. Affect intensity is anchored on one end by people who experience their emotions mildly with little fluctuation and on the other end by people who experience their emotions strongly and who are emotionally reactive and variable. "Given the same level of emotional stimulation, individuals high on the affect intensity dimension will exhibit stronger emotional responses, regardless of the specific emotion provoked" (p. 2). Affect intensity differs from emotional variability in that affect intensity does not measure frequency of the experienced states, only the magnitude. The premise is that over time, people who experience intense positive affect will also experience intense negative affect. In reviewing the literature the authors find that individuals who score high on affect intensity tend to engage in day-to-day activities that are more emotion provoking than do low affect intensity. This characteristic could be a partial explanation for listening to music. Music is an activity- that can provide emotional stimulus on a daily basis. It would logically follow that high affect intensity people would engage in more frequent consumption of music.

**Proposition 2:** The higher a person's affect intensity, the more an individual will consume music.

A controversy within the music community concerns the role of music training in the appreciation and enjoyment of music. Ortmann (1927) proposes that training has a strong effect on reactions to music. The more training one has the more one enjoys music. Responses of the trained and untrained listener were found to be markedly different by Hargreaves (1982), with the trained listener focusing more on the objective aspects of music and the untrained listener on the subjective aspects of music. Focusing on the analytical detracts from the emotional, which is the more natural way to respond to music (Yingling 1962). Edmonston (1966), however, found that music training did not enhance or disrupt one's appreciation. This particular variable is of some interest as it pertains to different music styles and its role in influencing music preferences needs clarification.

**Proposition 3:** Music training should not interfere with music preferences unless it blocks the individual's ability to experience the emotion of the music.

Responses to music

Psychologists and music educators have conducted numerous studies in the search to identify and categorize the listener responses to music. A review of representative studies (shown in Table 1) show a clear consensus that music evokes the broad categories of sensory, emotional, associative (imaginal), and analytical (objective/cognitive) responses. Sensory includes the primal responses to music, the motions and attractions that are inspired by the music. Emotional represents the feelings one has such as joy, sadness, or rage. Associative depicts the images, memories or situations that the music evokes, which is outside of the actual musical content. Finally, analytical describes the objective, cause-effect, logical sorting of the music in which a person may engage. [Note that Prince's paradigm encompasses the four musical responses. The interaction of the affective and associative responses can be likened to the sensory, emotional and associative responses. Perceptual and learning processes, especially those of concept development and insight strongly suggest the analytical response.]

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<td><strong>CATEGORIES OF RESPONSES</strong></td>
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**Affective responses**

As stated earlier, emotion is one of the primary ingredients of music appreciation. Meyers (1956) contends that "Emotion or affect is aroused when a tendency to respond is arrested or inhibited" (p. 14). Pleasant emotions are those that are aroused and then resolved properly. Music is pleasing if it first arouses apprehension and then dispels it. Payne (1961) takes emotion a step further to the concept of aesthetic emotion, emotion that is involved in experience or contemplation of the arts. Aesthetic emotion is defined as a generalized mood, or a feeling of worthiness, inspiration or exultation. In her study she shows that: 1) Aesthetic emotion is more extensively experienced than everyday or specific emotion; 2) People sometimes do not participate in the emotion of the music, but only recognize it; and 3) Music possesses both an emotional and intellectual element.

**Proposition 4:** The more pleasingly emotional the music, the greater preference for the music.

Another area correlated to that of emotion is the notion of the intensity or "experiential" aspect of music which corresponds to Prince's (1972) feeling-tone responses. Swanson (1978) defines "experiential" as a person being moved from within by purposes that are simply not his own, with participation being, in part, voluntary. Other terms for this phenomenon may be amount of participation or absorption. Numerous studies show this aspect of music. Myers (1914), calls this the intra-subjective response to music, where the subjects describe "Sometimes I lose myself in the music...I felt the effect of being carried away, partly emotional, partly strain and tenseness of body." However, Myers points out that the "surrender must be under voluntary control" or the subjects distrust the responses. Ortmann (1927) describes a sensorial response to music, which he explains as a psychological necessity. This sensorial response is the foundation for all "higher level" responses to music. Building from Myers and Ortmann, Yingling (1962) defines sensory as "Responses which evidence tension of posture, actual or incipient motion of the body or parts of it, or an awareness of a need for the listener to approach or withdraw from the source of the music or source of tension connoted in the music".

Zajonc and Markus (1982) state "A preference is a behavior tendency that exists not so much in what the individual thinks or says about the object, but how s/he acts toward it...The study of attitudes, aesthetics, decision-making and consumer preferences must take as its basic aim the prediction of what is taken, approached, bought and married" (p. 128). As Payne (1961) found, one may recognize but not participate in the emotion of the music. Sloboda (1985) confirms this notion of being aware of but not participating in the emotion of the music. A key to music preference may be the music's ability to draw in the consumer, its experiential power.

**Proposition 5:** The more absorbing or "experiential" the music, the greater the preference for the music.
Perceptual and learning processes

It is not in the scope of this paper to do an exhaustive review of the cognitive literature. For a very up-to-date presentation of the field the reader is advised to consult Sloboda's The Musical Mind - The Cognitive Study of Music. In his book, Sloboda points out that cognitive theories have done well at explaining the "how" of music listening; however, they have not done all that well at explaining the "why". Mathematical formulas developed under information theory can be used to measure information but cannot be used to measure affect (Trollo 1978).

MODEL FOR STUDYING MUSIC PREFERENCE AND PURCHASE BEHAVIOR

From the research mentioned above it is apparent that certain variables may be strong predictors of music preference and purchase behavior, as illustrated in Figure 1. The individual's propensity to approach, explore and experience phenomena and affect intensity dimension will positively impact the emotional and experiential responses. Musical training should correlate positively to analytical music responses. Of these responses, it appears that the emotional and experiential responses would have a positive impact on music preference while a strong analytical response might have a negative effect on music preference and purchase if it dampens the other responses. Music preference will have a positive relationship toward purchase behavior.

Managerial implications

The ability to predict music preference would be a help to the music business. Hurley (1986) reports that picking new musical groups to promote is at best a combination of experience, intuition and luck, with failures as prevalent as successes. At this point, cognitive research does little to explain creativity and taste. People who are picking winners are going with their gut feelings. As one editor put it, "I just hope that if I can't put a book down, there are thousands of other people who can't either" (p. 24). It does not take an heroic leap of imagination to see that her hedonic, or experiential view is what draws her most to a book. More to the point she believes that is what will sell the book to the public.

CONCLUSIONS

Hedonic consumption is a significant part of our daily lives, exemplified by our consumption of music. Thanks to the phonograph, radio and television, music is now easily accessible and impacting our lives in this century more than any other century before (Konecni 1982). To date, consumer researchers have not empirically tested these hedonic products. Considering the growth of the record industry, it is important to understand and predict the elements of a hedonic product that impel the consumer to purchase the product. Music as a product provides consumer researchers with a viable, researchable product whose basic psychology is well studied. Explaining the consumption of popular music will also fill a gap now prevalent in the music research literature. A study of the experiential aspects of music will benefit both consumer research and music research.

REFERENCES