THE MUSIC I LIKE (...) THE PEOPLE I HANG OUT WITH! IDENTITIES, VALUES AND PREFERENCES AMONG ROMANIANS

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Abstract: Music preference has been proven to correlate with personality traits, personal values and belonging to a certain group or social class. Previous studies stressed upon the fact that music preference impacts both the social and the personal identity. While music preference has been correctly used by social scientists, marketers and musicologists as a symbolic differentiator between groups and as a marker of group belonging, this perspective is now challenged by the changes in the society and culture that we observe, such as the intensification of cultural hybridization, the rise of temporary and imagined communities, that may replace the real communities, and the advocacy for equality, diversity, and tolerance. This paper explores the relation between music preference and music identity in the case of the Romanian Generation Y members, the so-called digital natives. The results of the quantitative research presented here support the idea that music preference is perceived by youngsters as important, in terms of personal identity construction and expression, but, depending on the personal values they have, as having little to no relevance in terms of their social identity. As the digital natives have started to replace the members of the X Generation and the Baby boomers in the working environment, the findings have multiple implications for professionals in the social sciences and for marketing professionals.

Keywords: personal identity, social identity, personal values, music preference, digital natives

1. INTRODUCTION

Music is a fundamental communication medium, used by people to share emotions, intentions, and ideas they would not be able to transmit using the spoken language, or non-verbal communication (Macdonald, Hargreaves & Miell, 2002). Trevarthen (2002:21) stressed upon the fact that sensitivity to music, our capacity to understand and be moved by music, is even connected to our ability to become socialized, as the process of socialization is facilitated by the music caregivers sing to the newborn.

Music's connection to human experience is so profound that music interferes with the construction and expression of identity. This connection involves many aspects of the human being, relating to our biological bodies, to our ways of thinking, our beliefs, our preferences, and our sociability. The roles music plays in our lives have been addressed, since the beginning of the 20th century, by specialists in musicology, popular music studies, film music studies, but also by specialists in psychology, sociology, psychiatry, cardiology and neurology. Their approaches have

in common the belief that music offers a reflection of or is linked to basic human psychological characteristics that describe both the person as an individual and the person as a member of a group of people. In this paper, we embrace the perspectives commonly used in social sciences.

2. THEORIES ABOUT MUSIC AND IDENTITY

Many people believe that the music they listen to communicates more information about themselves than their hobbies, the films they enjoy watching, or the books they read (Rentfrow & Gosling, 2003:1238). Studies show that music preference can also play an important role in the process of knowing another person, because the music we love provides information about our agreeableness, emotional stability, and openness (Rentfrow & Gosling, 2006:239). Almost anyone can correctly identify important personality traits, the ethnicity, the personal values of a stranger, or his social class belonging, based solely on a list of the stranger's favorite singers and songs (Rentfrow, McDonald & Oldmeadow, 2009). While the majority of people agree that music helps them define and communicate

important aspects of their identity, youngsters seem to be eager to use music as a primary resource for identity shaping (North, Hargreaves & O'Neill, 2000, Ruud, 1995, Ter Bogt *et al*, 2011).

Exploring the relation between people and music, Hargreaves and North (1999) observed that music plays for its listeners a cognitive function, an emotional, and a social function. These functions influence personal identity management as follows: on the cognitive level, music stimulates or inhibits human capacity to perform cognitively, and can help evoking autobiographical memories; on the emotional level, music regulates mood and eliminates stress; on the social level, music is an instrument used for interpersonal identity construction and expression. Refining these findings, Boer and Fisher (2012) have identified seven roles people attribute to music: (1) they listen to it as a background sound, while they do something else, (2) they use music in order to remember people or moments, (3) they use music as a diversion, when they want to dance without thinking of anything, (4) they use music as a carrier of emotions, (5) they use music as a means to improve their emotional state, (6) they see music as a reflection of the self, and (7) they use music to gather people, in order to engage in a common activity with them (concert, party etc.).

Born and Hesmondalgh (2000) found that although people seem to use music for a variety of reasons, when it comes to identity shaping using music, they all seem to fit in one of the following four categories. Some people use music to create imaginary socio-cultural identities for themselves, even though they do not desire to translate it into their daily lives. Other people express within musical creations emerging social identities. Some people are able to reproduce, through music, archaic social identities. Others reinterpret music representations of existing social identities, in order to create new ones. Although this modern view is factual and objective, during the last century researchers in social sciences used to portray music preference as a predictor of (mainly negative) psychological traits, and some even aimed to explain erratic behavior (such as drug abuse) referring to the consumption of specific music genres, considered deviational, in group settings (such as crack cocaine and hip-hop music).

2.1. Music genre theory. Is the oldest form of connecting music and identity on the social scale, and offers a means to articulate music products and their listeners. Music genres are conventional categories that help popular music producers to organize music productions according to demographic, ethnic and social imaginary criteria (Brackett, 2003:243). Negus (2004) insisted that music genres actually operate as social categories, while Born (2011) stated that music genres are projections made artificially over the existing social groups, and have the potential to reconfigure them. In this paradigm, it is believed that the listeners of a specific genre share values; lifestyles and political options, among other characteristics (see North & Hargreaves, 2007a, 2007b, 2007c). This approach was present in the British and American literature during the 60s and the 70s, and was linked to political change. Music genres were used to express differences based upon social class, gender, and ethnicity (Shepherd, 2003:74). Now the music genres are considered fluid, mixed, unstable (Hennion, 2003:89), and it is believed that most of the people experiment the phenomena of proto-identification with many music genres during their life, a thing which leads to having fragmented musical imaginaries as adults, and various music identities, which may even be in conflict (Born & Hesmondalgh, 2000:33).

2.2. Subcultures and music preferences. Music subculture theory adds to the music genre approach the idea of culture, with a drop of ideology on top. It was believed, during the 60s to the 80s, that music preferences were at the center of music subcultures (Beer, 2013). Subcultures were seen as revelatory regarding the relations between the working class and the middle class (Hebdige, 1979/2002), and were considered to offer accurate reflections of the existing social relations (Born & Hesmondalgh, 2000:31). Music subcultures were mainly used to explain consumption models of the youth and youth delinquency (Muggleton, 2005).

The homogeneity model of music subcultures and music genres stated that people belonging to a music subculture shared psychological features (Gardikiotis & Baltzis, 2012) and that they were also perceived by people belonging to other music subcultures as similar, through the existence of extra-musical associations that suggested the ethnicity, age, credibility and even the level of attractiveness of the group members (Kristen & Shevy, 2012). Music subcultures were used to articulate the borders of collective identity and to differentiate between cultural systems belonging to different groups (Born & Hesmondalgh, 2000: 32).

2.3. Social identity theory (SIT). Created in the 70s, it was used to explain the group conflicts that were present in Western societies at that time. SIT shows how group identity develops and operates, and proves the role music plays in creating and expressing collective identity. Subcultures were useful in explaining how people preferred to live and behave, under the influence of popular culture and of the media. SIT helped

experts understand where authorities could intervene in particular parts of the society, in order to quiet social unrest. Music preference analysis, correlated with psychological traits investigation, took the back seat but the idea that music can participate in community building, given its power to communicate relevant messages to real or imagined communities (Morris, 2013), and its role as differentiator between people, has not been lost.

Although SIT was not used at that time extensively in correlation with music subculture, the SIT model was soon enhanced with information about the roles that music can play in identity shaping. The enhanced model of SIT explains the social identity formation using the following structure (Giles *et al*, 2009, Tajfel & Turner, 1979): (1) classification – people create in their minds groups of similar people, using a system of categories correlated with stereotypes and extra-musical associations, (2) identification – people evaluate the way they perceive the world and their music preference and place themselves within a group, (3) making social comparisons – using a series of criteria that they consider relevant, among which we can consider music preference, people compare their group and other groups, favoring the group they belong to and consequently increasing their self-esteem, and (4) people try to differentiate themselves from the others in their group, in order to be able to create unique identities for themselves.

Larson and Richards (1991) state that young people are very sensitive to these phenomena, as they cherish their belonging to the groups (as groups help them learn who they are) and evaluate themselves using the value judgments provided by other group members. Listening to a type of music, adopting a specific type of behavior in relation to music, helps them maintain better relations with other group members (Parkhurst & Asher, 1992) and allow them to continue to explore the world in search of their identity. This should not lead one to believe that music preference is the central point of identity formation process. While music preference and the feeling of belonging to a group have been considered almost intrinsically connected for many years, recent research (Ter Bogt *et al*, 2011) prove that youngsters rarely use music to construct their social identity, but rather listen to music to regulate mood. Moreover, people tend to explore various cultural resources until they decide to embrace a specific identity. Their chosen identity modifies as time passes, as they gather more information.

2.4. Music and identity in the era of supercultures and music scenes. Today the cultures are so interconnected that the concept of subculture became useless (Bennet, 1999). People now have a broad cultural offer from which to choose when deciding what resources they would like to use when they define who they are.

Lull (2001) made an in depth analysis of the current situation of culture approaches and introduced, as a result, the concept of superculture. Supercultures cannot be located in a specific geographical place, transcend national cultures, and function as cultural matrixes that people construct for themselves in order to explore the dynamics of the cultural spheres. As personalized clusters, multiplexes, and networks, supercultures give people the opportunity to understand themselves, to explore their identity and the sense of belonging (Lull, 2001:132). In this context, subcultures can be understood only as symbolic representations of social networks and practices, which favor a particular way of seeing the world (Martin, 2004), but people who share this way of seeing the world do not live in the same geographical place, and do not know each other. These people do belong to a community through their shared personal values. Consequently, subcultures tend to become linked to imagined communities, which are virtual, open, hybrid, creative, productive and democratic (Lull, 2001).

While exploring the existing cultural resources, people visit music scenes, or the spheres of sociability, creativity and connection, which model cultural products (Straw cited by Janotti, 2012:8). Scenes work as highways for cultural products, and as nodes that facilitate the circulation of cultural products and creativity in specific domains. Scenes can offer virtual or actual places for fandoms to manifest, but also welcome people who are temporarily interested in a topic, shopping around while drawing their own superculture. Some people decide to stick to a small part of a scene and to create their identity using resources provided by that scene. These are the people who participate in creating fandoms. But fans are not necessarily part of social structures based upon these preferences, like fan clubs (Hills, 2002/2005), and may circulate between scenes and even change their attitudes towards the cultural products.

2.5. Music identity and personal values. In this new context, authors like Gardikiotis and Baltzis (2012) decided to approach the relation between music preference and human characteristics referring to personal values, the motivational constructs which may be linked to social identity formation but are basically personal characteristics. They discovered that people that shared values also had similar music preferences. For example, people who were oriented towards understanding and tolerating others, enjoyed blues, jazz, classical, and world music.

Inspired by their study and bearing in mind the concepts of imagined communities, music scenes and the SIT, we decided to replicate the analysis on Romanian digital natives, using the full Schwartz Value Inventory for finding the personal values map, and adapting the questionnaire regarding music genres for the Romanian context. Part of our motivation for undergoing this research was fueled by the existing literature on the digital natives and Generation Y which portrays then in a rather undifferentiated light.

In a previously published research (Mitan, 2014), we have presented a comprehensive analysis of the values cherished by the Romanian youngsters. We discovered, using factor analysis, that there are two main values preferences profiles in this population, each comprising of about 30% of the respondents in our study. We named these profiles the Revolutionary and the Guardian. The Revolutionary is a domineering person, who aims to be free from all limitations. The Revolutionary is a doer, is curious and believes he is creative and competent. He works hard and has good self-esteem. Revolutionaries want to have success. They create and maintain positive public images for themselves. They are hedonists and equate power with money and with the ability to control others. They refuse tradition, do not follow religion, and seek thrilling experiences. They also need security and stability. The Guardians are at the opposite pole regarding tradition and community; they are drawn to religion and follow the rules of the communities they belong to. Guardians are moderated, devout, see the beauty in everything that surrounds them and are content with their lives. Self-disciplined and polite, Guardians want to become sages and respect the elder. Their desire to enhance the wellbeing of the people they care about; they are forgiving and honest and believe in true love, friendship and tolerance. They want to live in harmony with nature, they reject war and they believe in justice. Basically they are open-minded idealists motivated by security. We shall further discuss about the ways in which the Revolutionary and the Guardian sustain the premises already presented about music identity.

3. METHODOLOGY

The main objective we desired to achieve was to understand if there were correlations between the personal values profiles we presented above, and the preferred music genre, for the Romanian digital natives. We wanted to find if the music genre scheme can still be used to identify psychological differences between people from a younger generation, because North & Hargreaves

(2007a, 2007b, 2007c) still found significant correlations in more mature people. We also wanted to investigate what role music plays for the Romanian digital natives in identity shaping, and we addressed both personal and social identity.

The research was based upon a self-administered questionnaire comprising of three parts. The first part included the Schwartz Value Inventory (Schwartz, 1992, Schwartz, 2001), the second part included 16 items that helped us to understand the degree of identification that our respondents had with the values of the digital natives (see Tapscott, 2010), while the third part referred to the favorite music genre and to aspects related to personal and social identity construction (6 items). The personal dimension of identity construction was measured using four items: one of the items measured the affective identification ($\alpha=0.7$) and two reverse items measured the cognitive identification ($\alpha=0.7$). For this part we used the dimensions and the questions presented by Gardikiotis and Baltzis (2012). Another set of 8 items was used to gather the socio-demographic data of the respondents.

Our lot comprised of 457 respondents who were selected from four universities in Bucharest: SNSPA, the Academy of Economic Studies, the Politehnica University and the Christian University „Dimitrie Cantemir". Most of them were undergraduates, enrolled in the first year of study (n=351), while some were in the second year (n=11) and the third year (n=95). The lot is not representative for the chosen population (Romanian youngsters between 18 and 25). The respondents are aged 18 to 25 (M=20, SD=1.3), there were 279 women and 175 men.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

SIT showed that people can use their preferred music as glue for keeping together the members of their group and as criteria to prove their belonging to a group. Starting with the three types of music self-identification (social, affective and cognitive) we will further show how Romanian digital natives use music in relation to their own identity construction.

We calculated a score variable for cognitive self-identification and for the affective self-identification ($\alpha=0.6$ for all the three variables measuring self-identification). Table 1 shows that all of the three self-identification levels correlate, meaning that people basically tend to identify with their music preferences on all three levels, even though they may not identify equally strong on each level.

Regarding the music genres preferred by our respondents, we found that: 77 people preferred

rock music, 75 EDM, 72 dance music, 64 did not have a favorite music genre, 56 preferred rap music, 19 jazz, 8 manele (a Romanian genre similar to the Bulgarian chalga), 5 classical music, 5 Latino music, and the rest mentioned New Age music, folk, blues, reggae and Romanian traditional music. We observe that pop, dance and EDM music are some of the most visible music genres. These genres tend to have fuzzy limits between them on the Romanian music market. For example, in the Romanian Music Awards competition, there are artists who compete with the same song in two or even all of these categories. This leads us to believe that most of our respondents tend to have similar music preferences.

Table 1 Pearson correlations for the items measuring social, affective and cognitive self-identification with music preference

Correlations

		Social self-id.	Affective self-id.	Cognitive self-id.
Social self-id.	Pearson Correlation	1	,359[**]	,318[**]
	Sig. (2-tailed)		,000	,000
	N	455	451	453
Affective self-id.	Pearson Correlation	,359[**]	1	,288[**]
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,000		,000
	N	451	452	450
Cognitive self-id.	Pearson Correlation	,318[**]	,288[**]	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,000	,000	
	N	453	450	454

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

We found a few connections between music preferences and shared personal values. Revolutionaries, for example, do not like dance music. This is not surprising, as we know that dance music offers an „integrated" view of the world by discussing about love and friendship, about having fun and evading from an aggressive world. These themes do not fit with the values of the Revolutionary, who sees himself as a warrior who has to survive in a world dominated by conflict, and who does not truly believe in love and serenity. Guardians, by contrast, prefer music genres that reflect their interest in human emotion and connection, such as dance and jazz music. Both of these music genres speak about human emotion, and both can offer to listeners easy escapism routes. Dance music is easy to decode, so its message is easy to understand, while jazz music offers to its listeners a connection to tradition, to stability, to the Golden Age of the 30s (in Romania). As EDM is too linked to avant-garde, it is dismissed by the Guardians.

Unsurprisingly, due to their lack of interest in social interaction with people in a community, and their disbelief in emotions, Revolutionaries only identify with their favorite music on a cognitive level (see Table 2).

Table 2 Pearson correlations between the SVI factorial profiles of the Romanian digital natives and the items which measure self-identification

Correlations

		Social self-id.	Affective self-id.	Cognitive self-id.
R E V	Pearson Correlation	,021	,077	,163[**]
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,653	,102	,000
G U A	Pearson Correlation	,166[**]	,031	,243[**]
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,000	,510	,000
	N	455	452	454

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
REV – revolutionaries, GUA – guardians

By contrast, given their need to be part of a cocooning community, Guardians also identify with their prefered music on the social level. Revolutionaries see the world as a battlefield, they fight for power and do not expect help from others, nor do they try to feel they are a part of a group. For them, music is a means to express their identity on a cognitive level, but they are not interested in interacting with likeminded people. They seek power in order to feel secure, but they do not believe in sharing power. They might as well be lonely riders and dream of themselves as „the last ones standing".

Guardians seek security too, but they believe that security can only be achieved in the loving arms of family, lovers and friends, groups they feel they strongly belong to. They search for any means to help them get closer to the people in these groups, and music preference is a good tool for bringing people together. Their self-identification with music on the cognitive level helps them define themselves as part of their group and as different from people belonging to other groups.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Our study confirms that the music tends to lose its importance in youth identity shaping, but also

shows that many young people still identify with their favourite music, although some only on the cognitive level, while others also use it on the social level.

It is interesting to note that the affective level of self-identification with music preference is not relevant, at least consciously, for the youngsters. Unquestionably, both Revolutionaries and Guardians agree that their favourite music expresses some of their psychological features and that the music they like plays a role in their public image, but the public image related role of music is far more important for Guardians, as they use music to reinforce their position in their community.

As a significant number of our respondents said they do not have a favourite music genre, we might also assume that music genres tend to lose their role in separating fans into various categories. This confirms the assumptions of Hennion, who wrote about the blurring of the lines between music genres. This also shows that music might losen its role in the social context, because people who do not use music as a differentiator between them and other people they meet might be less inclined to use stereotypes and negative images of others based on extra-musical associations linked to music preference.

Future studies concerning the role of music preference in identity shaping could bring more light on the roles music plays for the digital natives, by addressing the role of the digital media into the process of superculture creation and music selection.

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