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Deposited in *Repositório ISCTE-IUL*:

2025-04-29

Deposited version:

Publisher Version

Peer-review status of attached file:

Peer-reviewed

Citation for published item:

Loureiro, S. M. C., Ganhão, M., Guerreiro, J. & Bilro, R.G. (2024). Music can be trendy and cool. In Roland T. Rust (Ed.), 2024 Global Fashion Management Conference at Milan. (pp. 372-374). Milão: Global Alliance of Marketing & Management Associations.

Further information on publisher's website:

10.15444/GFMC2024.04.07.02

Publisher's copyright statement:

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MUSIC CAN BE TRENDY AND COOL

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Within the music industry, the topic of fan-related behavior is barely researched, as literature on the music market has mainly focused on piracy (Borja et al., 2015), economic theories on superstars (Coelho & Mendes, 2019), and music information retrieval (Fricke et al., 2018), among others. Hence there is a big research gap related to what makes consumers consistently prefer certain music artists, to the detriment of others, and how the loyalty progressive dynamic works in this industry. What factors influence fan-related behavior in the music industry? Music tone and style can be trendy. Therefore, not only is there a noticeable research gap concerning the factors that make music consumers fans of their preferred artists and the general dynamics of this phenomenon in the industry, but it is also relevant to study the differences in predictors and dynamics between popular and not popular artists that now may attempt to retain music listeners through similar means. The main aim is to explore the factors that influence fan-related behavior toward music artists.

Grounded on the affective-cognitive consistency theory of Rosenberg we consider two factors affecting the attitude and fan-related behavior toward music artists: perceived quality and brand coolness. When it comes to music, quality is often associated with talent, which is insufficient to measure an artist's ability and it is not objective, meaning that there are no universally agreed metrics as to what defines and how to measure the general performance of a music artist (Meiseberg, 2012).

Early literature on the cool factor associated it with some music subcultures such as jazz, blues, and hip-hop (Belk et al., 2010; Loureiro et al., 2020). Later research framed brand coolness in the music industry as is the case of Jiménez-Barreto et al. (2022) who conceptualized service brand coolness and explored the niche-mass cool brand dichotomy, purposing live music (a music festival) as an example of a mass cool brand, finding, among other results, that services can also be *cool* and that coolness enhances brand loyalty in the case of services (Warren et al., 2019). Regarding the above considerations, we suggest:

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H1: Perceived quality (H1a) and artist coolness (H1b) influence attitude toward music.

Drawing on the social identity theory that regards customers knowingly joining groups that support their self-concept (Mills et al., 2022), we posit that the psychological sense of artist community and perceived social value can affect attitudes toward music. Listening to music serves different roles namely a social role as it is used to express identity and establish social relationships (Nuttall, 2009). Alongside regulating our mood, the music we listen to helps us to define ourselves and to relate with others (Schäfer et al., 2013) and our choices regarding music suffer from a social influence (García et al., 2022). North and Hargreaves (1999) demonstrated that for adolescents, music is fundamental for shaping and presenting their identities, and listening to certain types of music styles is associated with different social outcomes.

Adler (1985) to justify popularity as a determinant of the formation of superstars, explained that consumers mainly choose the most popular artists because others are doing the same, thus popular artists keep becoming even more popular because it is preferable and more enjoyable to listen to something others are listening (Datta et al., 2017; Hofmann et al., 2021). Taken all together, we propose:

H2: Psychological sense of artist community (H2a), and perceived social value (H2b) influence attitude toward music.

Attitudes represent evaluations toward a certain product or brand and influence the behavior of the fans (Watson et al., 2015), including entertainment industries such as sports (Mills et al., 2022). Therefore, we expect that positive attitudes toward certain music will affect positively the behavior of the fan:

H3: Attitude toward music influences fan-related behavior.

An online questionnaire was designed and conducted in the platform Qualtrics. First, the participants had to choose a music artist to be able to answer the rest of the questionnaire. The rest of the questions were answered with a specific artist that they liked in mind, to grant more accurate responses. A total of 500 individuals answered the questionnaire, of which 484 were valid answers. To ensure data validity and reduce potential bias, the survey guaranteed participants that their responses would remain confidential and completely anonymous. This precautionary step is crucial when collecting behavioral and attitudinal data through self-report questionnaires, as it contributes to mitigating the common method bias (Chang et al., 2010; Kock et al., 2021). The questionnaire was pre-tested to analyze content validity.

The scales used to measure the constructs analyzed in this study were retrieved and adapted from previous research. All the items were measured using a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). Artist coolness is based on Warren et al. (2019) and is regarded as a second-order formative construct. Perceived quality was assessed by Baek et al. (2010). It is important to note that the scales that referred to the product, were adapted to evaluate the music of the artists, which is the product in this case. Contrarily, when the items mentioned the expression “the brand”, it was replaced by “the artist”. The psychological sense of the artist community was measured and adapted from Bauer (2022). The attitude was measured based on Su and Tong (2015) and finally, fan-related behavior used the scale proposed by Häkkinen-Nyholm (2020).

Firstly, the more the fans perceive a certain artist to be cool, the more they will have a positive attitude toward him/her. This is consistent with prior relationship marketing studies (Warren et al., 2019), and a willingness to pay a premium for it (Guerreiro et al., 2023). We found a positive effect of a perceived sense of artists' community on attitudinal. Thus, feeling relational bonds with other fans that do not require any kind of interaction (Carlson et al., 2008) will make the individuals develop more positive feelings and preferences toward the artist (Obiegbu et al., 2019).

The value consumers retrieve from choosing a certain music artist-quality and popularity would be equivalent to functional/quality value and social value (Sweeney & Soutar, 2001; Hofmann et al., 2021; Goedegebure et al., 2022). The more music consumers perceive a certain artist, (popular or not) to be of high quality, the more they will have a positive attitude to him/her, affirming quality as an important factor to keep choosing a certain music artist. Assessing music's quality is not objective, once as a hedonic product, there are no strict and well-defined rules or tests that show us what is of excellence or not (Meiseberg, 2012; Madden & Jabusch, 2021). Therefore, although society tends to consider critical judgments immaculate, they are equally as valid as consumer quality judgments, which directly influence the need to reexperience music (Meiseberg, 2012).

The current study contributes to the customer experience field by combining two theories, identifying, and confirming four drivers of attitude and consequently fan-related behavior. Music artists or their managers should first acknowledge that they are brands and so they must apply branding concepts to the management of their career and artwork, acknowledging that similarly to what happens in the branding world, their fans develop connections. Thus, musicians, or their managers/ record labels, should acknowledge if they are promoting a sense of community among their fans and foster it. One way to do it may be through creating stories and narratives around the albums, and the concerts that make consumers feel that they belong and that others understand as well. For example, polls on social media regarding what was fans' favorite album may help to understand what is considered to have more quality.

Future research could explore cultural differences in fan-related behavior, differences between popular and non-popular music dynamics, and the possible mediator role of being a mass versus niche cool artist, especially in the interaction with artist popularity. Finally, the specific effect of each coolness subdimension in fan-related behavior was not tested.

References Available Upon Request