

## **Why do we seek to discover new music? An investigation of individuals' motivations**

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**Abstract:** Addressing the gap in knowledge regarding motivations for variety-seeking in music consumption, this research aims to understand why consumers seek to discover new music. Through 11 long semi-structured interviews among regular music consumers, four major drivers have been identified: the need for stimulation; the desire of collection; the desire to connect with others and emotion management. As such, this paper contributes to the literature on music consumption as well as the literature on variety-seeking. Managerially speaking, the results of this study have several contributions for different actors of the music industry, especially for artists and their managers, as well as streaming platforms.

**Keywords:** music; discovery; motivations; variety-seeking

**Possible tracks:** Consumer behavior and marketing research; Work in progress

## 1. Introduction

Numerous studies have delved into music consumption (e.g., Anderson et al., 2021; Bansal et al., 2021; Greb et al., 2018; Schäfer & Eerola, 2020; Verboord, 2021). However, the predominant focus of these investigations lies in scrutinizing consumers' purchasing habits and musical preferences. Consequently, there exists a notable void in our comprehension of the musical discovery process, defined herein as the initial encounter with a music piece, artist, or genre, followed by an inclination to re-engage with this musical element. Additionally, while several studies have explored individuals' diversification of consumption patterns (e.g., Mcalister & Pessemier, 1982; Mead et al., 2019), minimal research has delved into the context of cultural product consumption. Consequently, our paper endeavors to fill these gaps by scrutinizing consumers' motivations for discovering new music. Specifically, our study addresses the following research question: Why do consumers engage in the discovery of new music?

To address this research question, we conducted eleven long semi-structured interviews with a diverse panel of music consumers to gain a deeper understanding of their patterns of musical discovery. The analysis of these interviews revealed four major motivations for discovering new music: the need for stimulation, the desire to collect, the desire to connect with others, and the regulation of emotions.

Our research extends the literature on music consumption, bridging the realms of psychology and marketing. Additionally, we contribute to the literature on variety-seeking by incorporating the context of cultural product consumption, specifically within the realm of music. Furthermore, our findings offer valuable insights for various stakeholders in the music industry. For instance, our study provides artists and managers with a deeper understanding of why consumers engage in music discovery. Moreover, streaming platforms can benefit from our findings as we highlight several avenues for improvement in addressing users' needs more effectively.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. *The influence of situational factors upon music consumption*

Researchers have identified three main motivations for listening to music: stimulation and regulation of the mood, the self-awareness and social connection (Schäfer et al. 2013; Schäfer & Eerola, 2020). However, these elements are not enough to predict music consumption because motivation is not a fixed variable but rather an element that can vary depending on the context. According to North et al. (2004), the activity performed at the time of listening impacts content selection and consumption. According to the same study, listening to music is usually combined with some other activity (e.g., party; driving; working; etc.). Similarly, Airoidi et al. (2016) discuss how music may be accessed as a functional or situational consumption (e.g., intimate dinner; lullaby; etc.). Besides, situations in which users listen to music result in different levels of engagement (Krause et al., 2015; Cunningham et al., 2007). For instance, consumers' listening behavior depends on who they are with while listening to music. According to North et al. (2004), the consumers particularly enjoy the music they listen to when they are alone because they have more control over what to listen to. Also, the state in which the user is or wishes to be influences greatly the user's music consumption. Indeed, according to Schäfer et al. (2013), stimulation and regulation of mood is

the main motivation for listening to music. Listeners will therefore choose to listen to different types of music depending on their motivations (North, 2004). The literature on music consumption has identified many factors that influence listening habits, both personal and situational. However, few studies have examined the impact of these factors on music discovery. Our research aims to understand whether these factors also affect music discovery and attempts to explain the processes at stake.

## *2.2. Variety-seeking in music consumption*

The search for variety is the propensity of a consumer to seek novelty and to introduce change in his consumption (Kahn, 1995). Literature on the need for variety emerges from research on the need for stimulation introduced by Leuba in 1955, suggesting that when a consumer's level of stimulation is under a certain threshold, he is bored and seeks new stimulation, encouraging the diversification of his consumption. According to the literature, the main motivation to seek diversity in music is social. Indeed, music is an element of sharing, which helps to forge common interests and, therefore, to create and strengthen social ties (Tepper & Hargittai, 2009). A person with a broad cultural background appears interesting, curious and creative to others (Ratner & Kahn, 2002). In music, this cultural richness is often associated with traits such as open-mindedness and conviviality (Bansal et al., 2021). In addition, music allows individuals to communicate their personality and, by extension, to express their belonging to social groups (North & Hargreaves, 1999), in line with the theory of social identity (Stets & Burke 2000) and the idea that music plays an important role in defining one's social identity (Lopez-Sintas et al., 2014; Tekman & Hortaçsu, 2002; Shepherd & Sigg, 2015). Berger & Heath (2007) explain that consumers tend to diversify their choices in consumption to ensure that they fully communicate on all the dimensions of their identity. Another reason for seeking diversity is the need for singularity which encourages individuals to consume unique products (Tian et al. 2001) and to diversify their consumption when they feel too similar to others (Snyder & Fromkin, 1980). For instance, Berger and Heath (2007) illustrate this by studying the behavior of hipsters: consuming the same products allows them to establish their membership in the group, however, individuals will also seek to introduce small variations in their consumption to feel unique even within their community.

On a different note, Tang and Jhang (2020) have identified individuals' "preference diversity" and "preference openness" as key factors explaining individuals' patterns of music access: preference diversity refers to the degree of diversity in musical tastes while preference openness refers to the extent to which a person is responsive to recommendations and stimulation. Individuals scoring high on both preference diversity and openness are likely to be more attentive to the different music stimuli present in their environment and to experience greater pleasure from discovering new and diversified music.

Finally, another motivation for the search for musical diversity would be related to the regulation of satiety. In their study, Ratner et al. (1999) show that some listeners will listen to songs they enjoy less to avoid getting tired of their favorite songs. In this case, the search for variety is part of a long-term optimization strategy, rather than the need for immediate stimulation.

To summarize, many authors have studied the consumption of music as such but very few have specifically investigated the process of discovering music. To the authors' best

knowledge, scant research has used the framework of variety-seeking in the context of cultural product consumption, notably to study music consumption. This study aims to establish a basis for research on the discovery of music by providing a typology of consumers' motivations, to guide future research in the field of music and other contexts of cultural consumption.

### **3. Methodology**

To respond to the exploratory nature of this study, we chose to conduct individual interviews. This method is well suited for exploratory research because it allows individuals to explain in their own words how they experience the world (Knot et al. 2022). Through these interviews, participants can share their personal experiences and perception on a given topic, allowing the researcher to better understand them (Turner, 2010). To facilitate discussion and encourage sharing, we opted for semi structured interviews according to the method defined by McCracken (1998). Regarding the recruitment of participants, we tried to interview individuals with different levels of commitment to music, in order to get a varied insight. Eleven participants were interviewed, including 4 women and 7 men. Each of them had a different relationship to music: whether it was the genre they listened to, their way of consuming or their level of commitment to music.

### **4. Results**

During the interviews, four elements motivated the participants to discover music: the need for stimulation, the desire to collect, the desire to connect with others and the regulation of emotions. It should be noted that these motivations are not mutually exclusive.

#### *4.1. The need for stimulation*

The need for stimulation is undoubtedly one of the most frequently mentioned motivations. One participant even explicitly mentioned the principle of satiety: by listening to the same song, the pleasure decreases, thus encouraging the search for new music. Besides, participants described their consumption of music by periods of time as if their need for stimulation was cyclical. For some, these periods are marked by important events in their lives, such as the transition to adulthood or a trip with friends.

Curiosity and risk taking are also key drivers of the need for stimulation. Some participants explained that they were attracted to musical genres different from those they usually listened to, either out of curiosity or risk. Rachel, for example, told with a hint of excitement in her voice how she discovered metal: having grown up in a Catholic family, this music had a provocative and forbidden side. She listened to metal music in secret, which reinforced her curiosity and therefore her desire to discover new bands.

This need for stimulation can sometimes lead to extreme behaviors. Some participants admitted that they constantly needed stimulation, as if it were a type of musical gluttony. Eager for sensations and pleasure, they are constantly looking for new musical stimulation even if their current music library already satisfies them. This leads to obsessive behaviors, such as passing all the tracks on a playlist until you find something interesting or listening to a song over and over until you get bored.

#### 4.2. *The desire to collect*

Another reason for the discovery is the desire to expand one's collection. The motivations of collectors differ from those of enthusiasts. If music lovers are looking for new music for pleasure and a thirst for knowledge, collectors are only looking to capitalize on their collection and take pride in it. A tangible factor is added to the equation: the satisfaction of contemplating the amount of music accumulated. Daniel, for example, has always been a great music collector. He still remembers his childhood dreams: he wanted to have a piece of furniture to store his vinyl records and another for his CDs. Today, he proudly exhibits his collection in his living room and he continues to add new albums regularly to enrich it. However, collectors are also sometimes subject to musical greed, which can lead them to excessive behavior such as overconsumption. This greed can result in a desire to own a collection of music more important than those of others or by the purchase of discs that they do not necessarily want or need.

#### 4.3. *The desire to connect with others*

Music is also a great way to discover new musical horizons while creating social connections. Some participants mentioned social motivations for discovering music: making connections, expressing one's personality, or appearing interesting. Many participants explained that they were looking for new music to feel fashionable, either by standing out or on the contrary to feel accepted. This confirms the idea advanced by Ratner and Kahn (2002) that the search for diversity is associated with a positive image.

Music also helps to better connect with others while expressing one's personality and strengthening one's sense of belonging (Tepper & Hargittai, 2009). Clément explains that music is one of the main topics he tackles when he makes a new encounter. This gives him the opportunity to find a common point with this person or, at least, to get to know her and discover new music.

Music is also a medium for the expression of personality. First, exposure to a variety of styles makes it possible to better understand one's musical preferences. Listening to different kinds of music can enrich the hearing experience and thus broaden musical horizons. On the other hand, the need to stand out and feel unique can also push consumers to introduce variety into their consumption (Berger & Heath, 2007; Tian et al. 2001; Snyder & Fromkin, 1980).

Finally, music helps to affirm its belonging to a group (North & Hargreaves, 1999) in line with the idea that music plays a role in defining one's social identity (Lopez-Sintas et al., 2014; Tekman & Hortaçsu, 2002; Shepherd & Sigg, 2015). Indeed, some participants pointed out that they had started listening to a certain type of music to get integrated or because this music was part of the culture that surrounded them. In addition, belonging to a group that shares the same interest(s) facilitates the discovery process, because music sharing is more common between individuals with close ties.

#### 4.4. *The regulation of emotions*

Finally, the last reason that can motivate to discover new music is the regulation of emotions. The state of mind of the moment in which one finds oneself also affects the propensity to make discoveries. For Lucas, who generally prefers to listen to his own music

rather than take risks, the search for music is linked to a particular mood, where you feel open. Moreover, Jordan emphasizes that when he feels strong emotions, whether it is joy or sadness, he feels inspired and more open to making new discoveries. In other words, the emotional state would have a significant influence on the behavior of music discovery since it would influence our degree of openness and our propensity to take risks. The regulation of emotions is an essential motivation for music consumption, as Schäfer et al. (2020) have pointed out. Music can accompany or stimulate emotions, allowing to express sadness by listening to melancholic music or to overcome it by listening to joyful music. Emotions can also be the source of musical discoveries, prompting listeners to get out of their habits.

## **5. Discussion**

### *5.1. Theoretical contributions*

This study makes a significant contribution to the literature on variety-seeking research in the context of music consumption. First, we reveal new motivations for variety-seeking, in addition to those already identified in the literature, such as the need for stimulation or the desire to appear interesting (Ratner & Kahn, 2002; Peterson & Kern, 1996). Indeed, appearing interesting is not the only social motivation behind the search for variety. Consumers will sometimes vary their consumption to ensure that they communicate their personality effectively and, by extension, affirm their belonging to a group. On the other hand, literature omits the desire to collect as a key motivation for the search for musical variety. Finally, our data indicates that emotions also have an impact on the need for stimulation, the degree of openness and the intention of discovery. Moreover, our research provides a new perspective on variety-seeking by focusing on a specific cultural product: music.

### *5.2. Managerial contributions*

The results of this study have important implications for the music industry in terms of management, marketing and promotion of artists. This study reveals the diversity of motivations behind music discovery, highlighting the crucial importance of understanding the audience to develop targeted and effective strategies. This is of particular importance as understanding the processes of music discovery should help to foster healthy artforms and systems of cultural production (Chambers, 2023). Moreover, our findings can serve as a basis for several improvements for streaming platforms. To improve the relevance of recommendations, platforms might consider more information about the user's profile, including their motivations, intent to discover, and degree of openness. To encourage interaction between music fans, it would be relevant to add social features, such as discussion groups or suggested profiles based on musical affinities, to allow fans of the same genre or artist to exchange recommendations and share their passion, in line with the desire to connect with others as a major motivation for music discovery.

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