

An analysis of Personal Music Involvement and Social Music Identity Influence on Ambient Music Business Settings

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Abstract

Music is an important part of contemporary business venues, yet the mechanisms through which individual musical preferences and social identities translate into ambient music acceptance remain insufficiently understood. This study examines the relationship between two latent constructs — Personal Music Involvement (IMP) and Social Music Identity (ISM) — and their predictive power over Ambient Music Congruence (CMA), defined as the degree to which consumers perceive the music played in commercial spaces as congruent with their own preferences. Data was collected from a sample of N = 94 respondents through an online survey administered in the context of an academic research session targeting a predominantly Eastern European population. The hypothesized relationships were tested using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The measurement model demonstrated acceptable reliability and convergent validity for reflective constructs. However, neither Personal Music Involvement, nor Social Music Identity reached statistical significance, and the structural model explained only 7.6% of the variance in CMA. These findings suggest that ambient music acceptance in commercial settings is governed by situational and contextual factors rather than by individual musical profiles. Implications for retail music strategy and future research directions are discussed.

Keywords

Ambient music; music involvement; social music identity; PLS-SEM; business venues; consumer behavior; Eastern Europe

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Introduction

The relationship between music consumption and personality has attracted sustained scholarly attention across multiple disciplines. Early investigations in this domain focused primarily on established personality frameworks, particularly the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator and the Big Five model, to explore how listeners of different genres could be systematically differentiated along personality dimensions (Lewis and Schmidt, 1991; Robinson et al., 1996; Knobloch et al., 2000). These studies demonstrated that genre preference was a reliable indicator for the personality type, while other research emphasized the dominance of individual perception over subcultural membership. Bodner and Bensimon (2016) found that individuals respond differently to the same disliked music, suggesting that emotional reactions to music are shaped not only by musical characteristics but also by personal dispositions and subjective interpretations. Their findings support the view that individual differences may play an important role in determining how music is perceived and evaluated across contexts.. Similarly, Bonneville-Roussy and Rust (2018) found that social influences on music preference change substantially during the life, suggesting that the relationship between identity and musical taste is a dynamic one. Olsen et al. (2023)

focused his research to heavy metal listeners, highlighting that exposure to aggressive musical content carries both psychosocial risks and adaptive benefits depending on the listener's individual profile.

The present study contributes to the theory in the field by researching two theoretically distinct but related dimensions of the music–identity relationship. Personal Music Involvement (IMP) captures the degree to which an individual regards music as personally meaningful and self-definitional, while Social Music Identity (ISM) captures the extent to which musical affiliation is experienced as a form of social belonging and intergroup differentiation, reflecting community membership and the social judgements that accompany visible musical preferences (Knobloch et al., 2000; Olsen et al., 2023). These constructs are analyzed in relation to the Ambient music congruence construct, applied on various business sites.

1. Review of the scientific literature

A consistent finding across this literature is that the benefits of music in organizational contexts are not intrinsically tied to the musical content itself, but depend substantially on the listener's degree of autonomy and the fit between the music and their personality. Haake (2011) demonstrated in an exploratory UK-based survey that individual music listening in office environments was most positively experienced when employees exercised personal choice over their auditory environment, and that music of moderate energy was preferred during routine tasks while cognitively demanding work was typically associated with reduced or no music use. Keeler et al. (2025) extended this line of research by demonstrating that “music misfit” — a discrepancy between the music played and employee preferences — exerts measurable negative effects on affect and performance, reinforcing the centrality of person–environment fit in understanding music's organizational consequences. Bachrach and Jex (2000) demonstrated that mood can influence organizational citizenship behaviour, with positive affect associated with a greater willingness to engage in discretionary, organization-supportive actions. While the study did not examine music, its findings provide a theoretical basis for considering how workplace factors that influence mood, including music, may indirectly affect employee behaviour. Landay and Harms (2019) concluded that the effects of music in the workplace are highly context-dependent and cannot be considered universally beneficial or detrimental. Their review suggests that music is most likely to enhance performance when tasks are repetitive, monotonous, or require sustained attention, as it can improve mood, motivation, and arousal levels. In contrast, music may impair performance on complex cognitive tasks that demand concentration, memory, or verbal processing, particularly when it contains lyrics or is perceived as distracting. The authors also emphasize the importance of individual differences, noting that employees respond more positively when they are able to choose their own music. Overall, the relationship between workplace music and performance is influenced by task characteristics, listener preferences, and situational factors.

Ambient music in commercial environments — supermarkets, restaurants, fitness centres, hotels — has been recognised as a significant atmospheric variable since the foundational work of Kotler (1973) on store atmospherics. The concept of “music congruence” refers to the degree of alignment between the music played in a specific setting and the expectations, preferences, or identity of the consumer present in that space. While numerous research papers have examined the effects of musical tempo, volume, and genre on consumer behaviour outcomes such as dwell time, spending, and satisfaction (Milliman, 1982; Milliman, 1986; North et al., 1999) relatively few studies have examined whether stable individual-level characteristics — such as personal music involvement or social music identity — predict the subjective experience of congruence itself. The present study addresses this gap directly. The Ambient Music Congruence construct (CMA) was operationalised as a formative index comprising four indicators, each capturing the perceived acceptability of the respondent's preferred genre in a specific commercial venue (hypermarket, upscale restaurant, fitness centre, hotel). This formative specification reflects the theoretical assumption that congruence is constituted by — rather than merely reflected in — its component evaluations across contexts, consistent with the guidelines for formative measurement models advanced by Hair et al. (2019). The decision to treat IMP and ISM as reflective constructs, by contrast, rests on the theoretical interchangeability of their respective indicators and the expectation of shared variance among items measuring the same underlying disposition.

The literature reviewed above reveals several gaps that the present study aims to address. First, while the effects of ambient music on consumer behaviour have been extensively documented, the antecedents of perceived congruence at the individual level have received comparatively little attention. Second, most empirical work in this area has been conducted in Western European and North American contexts, leaving the Eastern European consumer population underrepresented. Third, the intersection of music identity constructs with commercial music acceptance has not been examined using the rigorous latent variable modelling afforded by PLS-SEM. As such, the present study contributes to this emerging body

of work by introducing musical identity as a potential — though, as the results indicate, empirically non-significant — dimension of the cultural self-concept that may bear on occupational preference.

2. Research Objectives and Methodology

The present study is based on the results of quantitative research with a cross-sectional design, all measures reflecting self-reported attitudes and perceptions, as literature shows that it is an appropriate method of exploratory testing structural relationships among latent constructs, particularly in contexts where population-level data collection is constrained by time and resource availability (Goodfellow, 2023).

The research has four interconnected objectives, derived from the theoretical framework outlined in the literature review, as it follows:

O1. To assess the degree of Personal Music Involvement (IMP) among Romanian consumers and examine how music functions as a self-definitional construct at the individual level.

O2. To measure the extent to which Social Music Identity (ISM) — understood as the experience of musical belonging and intergroup differentiation — is present and internally consistent within the sampled population.

O3. To evaluate whether Personal Music Involvement (IMP) and Social Music Identity (ISM) significantly predict Ambient Music Congruence (CMA), defined as the perceived acceptability of one's preferred genre across commercial environments. Associated to this objective, the following research hypotheses have been formulated:

- **H1:** Personal Music Involvement (IMP) is positively associated with Ambient Music Congruence (CMA).
- **H2:** Social Music Identity (ISM) is positively associated with Ambient Music Congruence (CMA).

Data was collected via a structured online survey administered to a convenience sample of 94 respondents. The questionnaire retained 12 items organised into 3 indicator blocks, corresponding to the 3 latent constructs in the model: Personal Music Involvement (IMP1–IMP4), Social Music Identity (ISM1–ISM3), and Ambient Music Congruence (CMA1–CMA4). Items measuring IMP and ISM were scored on Likert scales. Items measuring CMA were scored on binary scales (0/1), reflecting the presence or absence of perceived genre acceptability across four commercial venue types: hypermarket, upscale restaurant, fitness centres, and hotel.

Raw survey data were initially processed and cleaned in Microsoft Excel, where response coding, missing value treatment, and indicator recoding were performed prior to import.

For meeting O1 and O2 Spearman coefficients analysis and non-parametric Man-Whitney U test were performed in Minitab.

For O3, structural equation modelling was conducted in SmartPLS 4.1.1., using the Partial Least Squares algorithm. PLS-SEM was selected because : (1) the sample size of $N = 94$ falls below the threshold typically recommended for CB-SEM; (2) the model includes a formative construct (CMA), which is incompatible with the reflective assumptions of CB-SEM; and (3) the study's objective is predictive, rather than confirmatory. The analytical procedure followed the two-stage evaluation protocol recommended by Hair et al. (2019):

Stage 1 — Measurement model assessment examined outer loadings for reflective constructs (threshold: $\lambda > 0.40$; recommended: $\lambda > 0.70$), composite reliability ($CR > 0.70$), average variance extracted ($AVE > 0.50$), and outer weights and VIF values for the formative construct.

Stage 2 — Structural model assessment examined path coefficients (β) and their statistical significance, determined via bootstrapping with 5,000 subsamples, two-tailed testing, and a fixed random seed, as well as the coefficient of determination (R^2) for the endogenous construct.

3. Results and discussion

In respect to **O1**, the descriptive statistics indicate consistently high involvement, in terms of means. A Spearman correlation analysis confirmed that listening frequency and self-definitional involvement are positively and significantly associated ($r_s = 0.216$, $p = 0.036$, $N = 94$), indicating that more frequent

listeners are also more likely to regard music as personally meaningful. Moreover, perceived music importance was strongly correlated with concert and festival attendance ($r_s = 0.470$, $p < 0.001$), a behavioural indicator of active musical engagement. The predominance of solitary listening (80 out of 94 respondents preferring headphones or individual modes) further indicates that involvement is primarily introspective and identity focussed. The emotional regulation data offer additional support. Among respondents who listen to rock or metal when angry ($n = 39$ out of 94), 17 identified rock or metal as their favourite genre; among those who listen to rock or metal when happy ($n = 41$), 19 share the same genre preference. This pattern of listening to the preferred genre regardless of the emotional state — is noticed across multiple affect categories (happiness, sadness, motivated etc) and supports the conclusion that music involvement in this sample is habitual and identity-driven. Individuals appear to relate to what is familiar and self-associated rather than what is generically assumed to induce a given mood, consistent with Bodner and Bensimon's (2016) argument that musical affect is mediated by individual perception rather than by the objective properties of the stimulus.

Linked to the 2nd objective O2, a non-parametric comparison between genre groups revealed statistically significant differences in social music identity across the sample. Rock and metal listeners ($n = 24$) reported significantly higher levels of social judgement than pop listeners ($n = 16$): median ISM2 = 3.5 versus 2.5 (Mann–Whitney $U = 268$, $p = 0.033$). Rock and metal listeners also reported stronger feelings of community membership: median ISM1 = 4.0 versus 2.0 for pop ($U = 267$, $p = 0.035$). Additionally, rock and metal listeners scored higher on the self-definitional IMP3 item: median = 4.0 versus 3.0 for pop ($U = 270$, $p = 0.027$). These findings are consistent with the theoretical expectation that minority or subcultural genres are more likely to attract social evaluation and hence, strengthen genre identity importance (Olsen et al., 2023).

A further finding is linked to the relationship between personal and social dimensions of music identity. The Spearman correlation between IMP3 (“music defines me”) and ISM1 (community belonging) was $r_s = 0.473$ ($p < 0.001$), indicating that those who experience music as self-defining are also more likely to feel part of a musical community. By contrast, IMP3 and ISM2 (social judgement) were not significantly correlated ($r_s = 0.177$, $p = 0.087$), suggesting that being judged for one's taste is a relatively independent social experience that does not necessarily coincide with a stronger personal music identity.

Related to O3, we evaluated whether Personal Music Involvement (IMP) and Social Music Identity (ISM) significantly predict Ambient Music Congruence (CMA)., these latent constructs being operationalised as it follows:

Personal Music Involvement (IMP) was considered a reflective construct, its indicators — importance of music in personal life (IMP2), self-definition through music (IMP3), and felt connection to messages within songs (IMP4). IMP1 (listening frequency) was removed following initial model estimation due to its low outer loading ($\lambda = 0.284$).

Social Music Identity (ISM) was also considered a reflective construct, retaining only two indicators: perceived community membership (ISM1) and experience of social judgement based on musical preferences (ISM2), ISM3, a reverse-coded item, being removed due to a negative outer loading ($\lambda = -0.552$), consistent with the recommendation to eliminate items that suppress construct variance (Hair et al., 2019).

Ambient Music Congruence (CMA) was considered a formative construct, constituted by the sum of venue-specific evaluations on behalf of the respondents. Multicollinearity among formative indicators was assessed via the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF), all indicators being below the recommended threshold for evaluating multicollinearity (CMA1 Hypermarket – 1.259, CMA2 Elegant Restaurant – 1.243, MA3 Fitness – 1.191, CMA4 Hotel – 1.187).

The IMP construct demonstrated acceptable reliability and convergent validity in the PLS model ($CR = 0.863$, $AVE = 0.678$), confirming that the retained indicators — IMP2, IMP3, and IMP4 — share sufficient common variance to constitute a coherent reflective construct. IMP1($\lambda = 0.284$) was excluded from the final model, meaning that the amount of time spent listening to the music does not adequately reflect the level of personal involvement, which is better indexed by the meaning attached to music rather than its frequency of exposure (Landay and Harms, 2019).

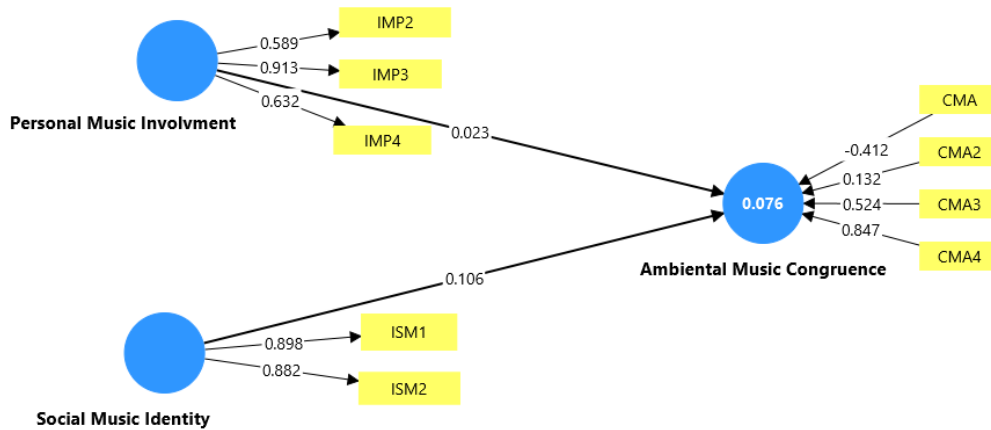


Figure.no.1. The relationship between Personal Music Involvement, Social Music and Ambient Music Congruence constructs

In testing the first research hypothesis, H1 Personal Music Involvement (IMP) is positively associated with Ambient Music Congruence (CMA), after bootstrapping, it resulted a path coefficient $\beta = 0.023$, $p = 0.764$. Also the tests upon H2 research hypothesis Social Music Identity (ISM) is positively associated with Ambient Music Congruence (CMA), after bootstrapping the resulted $\beta = 0.106$, $p = 0.131$ (Table 1 below)

Table no. 1. Path coefficients and the significance level for H1 and H2 research hypotheses

Hypothesis	β (path coef.)	p-value (bootstrap)*	CI 95% (estimated)	Conclusion
H1: IMP positively influences CMA	0.023	0.764	[-0.14; 0.18]	Not supported
H2: ISM positively influences CMA	0.106	0.131	[-0.03; 0.24]	Not supported

Note:*significance level 0.05

The value of $R^2 = 0.076$ indicates that the structural model explains only 7.6% of the variance in CMA, and neither of the two main predictors reached statistical significance, failing to reject H_0 – no influence of predictor on the CMA. These findings suggest that ambient music acceptance in various commercial settings is governed by other factors than personal involvement of respondents into listening to music and their social music identity. This means that knowing how much an individual listens and is involved in music, or how strongly he/she identifies with a musical community, does not help predict whether he/she will feel comfortable with the respective music playing in a certain commercial ambient. Consequently, ambient music decisions in various commercial settings should be based on understanding the requirements expected from the specific venues, and not necessarily on the genre preferences the music-loving customers prefer.

Conclusions

This study examined whether Personal Music Involvement (IMP) and Social Music Identity (ISM) predict Ambient Music Congruence (CMA) in commercial settings, among a predominantly Eastern European sample. Music emerges as a deeply personal and identity-defining element for respondents, who consistently turn to their favourite genres across different emotional states — confirming that musical involvement is driven by personal identity rather than mood management (O1). Also, music identity proves to be a meaningful and coherent dimension within the sample, more pronounced among listeners of subcultural genres (O2). Both constructs demonstrated strong internal validity, confirming that music functions as a meaningful dimension of personal and social identity for the respondents. However, neither

construct was found to significantly predict ambient music congruence, as neither alternative hypothesis could be supported at conventional significance levels. The results are important for the managers of various businesses, as it is suggested that the determinants of ambient music acceptance in commercial environments are governed by other factors than the personal musical identity and involvement in music of their consumers (O3). Supplementary analyses confirmed that listeners of subcultural genres experience stronger social judgement and community belonging than mainstream listeners, and that emotional music use across the sample is identity-driven rather than mood-regulatory. The results of the analysis are limited, as the use of a convenience sample restricts generalization of findings beyond the sampled population. Also, the binary operationalisation of CMA indicators, while pragmatically justified, reduces measurement sensitivity. Future research should address these limitations through larger probability sampling, a more diverse range of business types and genre coverage, as well as the inclusion of additional theoretically motivating predictors of ambient music acceptance linked to the venue-specific atmospheric norms and expectations.

Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) usage statement

AI was responsibly used for language improvement and text formatting. After this process, the authors reviewed and edited the content as needed and take full responsibility for the content of the present article.

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