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Why go to pop concerts? The motivations behind live music attendance

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Abstract

Recent technological innovations have facilitated widespread illegal downloading of recorded music. While this points towards a decreased willingness to pay for music, the increase in the popularity of live music suggests otherwise. This is especially so when taking into account the rising cost of concert tickets, likely the result of reduced recorded music revenues. In the present study, a consideration of the unique motivations of why music fans decide on whether or not to attend live concerts is of interest. Drawing from a sample of 249 participants (55.02% female) with a mean age of 26.49, an open-ended questionnaire was analysed thematically with four key themes defined: Experience, Engagement, Novelty and Practical. The results highlight that participants want to “be there”, to be a part of something unique and special, sharing the experience with likeminded others. Other social dimensions such as the use of live music events as a means to demonstrate fan worship were also found. The unknown, novel aspects of live music were key motivators, such as hearing new material and watching support bands. Notably, price was not a contributing factor when choosing to attend a concert, suggesting that live music offers fans something special that they are more than willing to pay for.

Keywords consumer behaviour, live music, music piracy, music preferences, thematic analysis

While legal sales of recorded music continue to diminish due to a combination of illegal music consumption and music streaming (see IFPI, 2015), the popularity of live music appears to be enjoying an unprecedented boom. In particular, festival popularity has been boosted with greater information available through the internet (Stone, 2008); the same technology also allows for illegal downloading of recorded music. The live music sector in the UK is a thriving industry, valued at around £3.8 billion (UK Music, 2014). The growth in music festival attendance has increased by over 10% each year since 2004 (UK Festival Awards, 2011), and industry analysis suggests that the decline in revenue from recorded sales has caused the industry to focus more on large volume live concerts (Britain for Events, 2010). In other words, the live music economy has emerged during the decline of the media economy (A. Holt, 2010). Williamson and Cloonan (2007) argue that it is one of the music industries which struggle to come to terms with the new business environment created by technological and communications advances.

In the present study, the motivations which drive concert attendance are of interest, particularly when taking into account their rising cost. Popular music events are of particular interest. Lending to observations on the decline in recorded music revenues, consumers clearly want music for free – this is what has led to the explosion of music subscription services which appear to appease engagement in music piracy, offering large volumes of music at a very low cost. Live music events are not free – they are increasingly more costly, yet their popularity demonstrates that they offer something that fans are willing to pay for. This study seeks to explore what motivates concert attendance at popular music events.

The rise in the popularity of live music

In the era of new media, conventional forms of content have lost economic value and the distribution channels and revenue streams have diversified (A. Holt, 2010). New business models are being tested in a hybrid media economy that relies predominantly on revenues from hardware and

telecommunication services (Consentino, 2006; Lessig, 2008). Changes in the distribution of recorded music are paralleled with an emerging diversity in music festivals. In recent years there have been relatively few large events, with an increase in the amount of mediumsized festivals and the majority being small-scale events with 1000–3000 attendees (Stone, 2008). These smaller festivals, Stone argues, are more likely to recapture the sense of fun and freedom often absent from large festivals with the drive behind smaller festivals' line-ups frequently prioritising artistic innovation and risk-taking. Festival No. 6, a recent addition to the British festival circuit, is one such example; hosted in Portmeirion, Wales, it boasts a significant array of new artists including local Welsh talent.

In addition to the festival circuit, there has also been an unprecedented economic growth in superstar touring, worldwide. The Rolling Stones, for example, made half a billion dollars on their Bigger Bang tour in 2005–7 (Waddell, 2007), a sum surpassed by U2 before their 360 degree tour was finished (Masson, 2011). There has also been an increase in recent years for bands to perform albums in their entirety, along with high-profile reunions of bands to perform live concerts. Such concerts inspire nostalgia, which would appear to be a strong motivator in live music attendance.

More directly inspired by technology, Mortimer and Nosko (2010) discovered an awareness of smaller artists as a result of piracy, where Connolly and Krueger (2006) note that the main source of income for artists is generally from live music – not recorded music. Furthermore, Gayer and Shy (2006) argue that demand for live performances is reduced when piracy is prevented. Put simply, greater access to recorded music (including pirated music) has generated increased interest in live music, with a subsequent impact on ticket sales.

Mortimer and Nosko (2010) note the decline in album sales is greater for large artists than for small artists, where it is believed that part of the decline in profit from traditional sources may be counterbalanced by increased demand for complementary products, such as merchandise. Oberholzer-Gee and Strumpf (2010) explain that concert sales have increased more than music sales have fallen, suggesting a substitution effect which goes beyond conventional comparisons of music piracy by not taking into consideration live music. English singer songwriter Ed Sheeran, recently revealed as the most pirated act in the UK (Lee, 2012), remarks: "I'm still selling albums, but I'm selling tickets at the same time. My gig tickets are like £18, and my albums £8, so ... it's all relative". Not all musicians share this optimistic outlook.

A. Holt (2010) argues that artists consider recordings less a revenue stream than a publicity tool for touring. Radiohead's honesty-box distribution of "In Rainbows" in 2007 (see Harbi, Grolleau, & Bekir, 2014) is considered to have some historical significance. With approximately one third of fans choosing to pay nothing and the remaining two thirds paying an average of £4, the net revenue to the band thus came in at around £2.67 on average – far more than the band's share would have been under their normal business agreement (Green, 2008). More importantly, Chesbrough (2010) argues that whatever revenue Radiohead may have lost through the initial download experiment on "In Rainbows" was more than compensated for by the far greater publicity the band received, attributed as accounting for the surge in commercial sales and benefiting ticket sales for their subsequent world tour.

Houghton (2012) finds that ticket prices have risen by some 39% on average between 2001 and 2010. This is well beyond the rate of inflation. The fact that ticket prices have risen in recent years is indicative of a continued willingness to pay for live concerts – even beyond the retail price. Black, Fox, and Kochanowski (2007) explain that the "true" cost of a ticket has risen due to the emerging market of ticket scalping, which has been largely facilitated due to technological advancements. An entire secondary industry thrives on music fans' willingness to pay to see their favourite artists. Radiohead's 2012 tour incorporated a system where names printed on the tickets did not allow for them to be re-sold, indicative of the effort many artists are now taking to ensure their tickets are not only sold for the price set, but that others do not profiteer from their live performances in a way which exploits their fans. With the popularity of live music now contextualised as partially stemming

from the digital revolution, this article now turns to the core question of why music fans choose to attend live concerts.

Why go to live concerts?

Minor, Tillmann, Brewerton, and Hausman (2004, cited in Black et al., 2007) examined a total of 18 factors that determined audience satisfaction with live concerts. Sound quality and volume were ranked highest in terms of importance, which are likely to vary dramatically across different venues. This illustrates the speculative risk involved in purchasing concert tickets, where as an “experience good” (Regner & Barria, 2009), music must be enjoyed before it can be evaluated.

Exploring who attends live music, Dilmeri, King, and Dennis (2011) identified that live music attendance peaks among 15–30 year olds, and more females were discovered to attend live concerts than males. More recently, Montoro-Pons, Cuadrado-Garcia, and Casaus-Estelles (2013) observed that males were more likely to attend concerts. Specifically exploring music festival attendance, Packer and Ballantyne (2011) defined four unique facets which were observed from a focus group discussion of young adults attending a musical festival, and confirmed from a follow-up questionnaire. Music experience, the festival experience, the social experience and the separation experience were the distinct facets where: “The music experience was seen to provide the common ground upon which the other experiences were built” (p. 178). Elsewhere, research (Bowen & Daniels, 2005; Henderson & Wood, 2009) has shown that a significant volume of festivalgoers express little interest in the music itself. Accordingly, festival attendance motivation should be considered independent of live music more generally.

Pitts (2014) similarly developed a typology of consumers, in her research into the Australia Council for the Arts, defining: “the lovers” (38%), who are highly engaged; “the flirts” (26%), whose attendance is influenced by friends; “the unattached” (19%), who have limited experience in participation; and “the outsiders” (17%), who believe that the arts (the emphasis of the research was not on popular music, but musical genres with declining audiences) are elitist and do not get involved in them. This breakdown is revealing for its inclusion of criteria which involves peer-influence, and her research from a series of studies employing varied methodology, considering different forms of live music, finds that people are largely surrounded by similar others at live concerts. In a now dated paper by Earl in 2001, relative “pros” and “cons” of live music more generally are put forward. Earl utilises Simon’s travel theorem in relation to the live music market and using subjective personal introspection he identifies the characteristics of live music performances which recorded music cannot offer. The theorem postulates that: “Anything that can be learned by a normal American adult on a trip to a foreign country (of less than one year’s duration) can be learned more quickly, cheaply and easily by visiting San Diego Public Library” (Simon, 1991, p. 306).

Earl (2001) notes that with increased technology people do not have to attend live music in order to listen to high quality recordings of their favourite songs, suggesting an inherently social motivation to attend live concerts, over that of recorded music. Applying the travel theorem, Earl goes on to suggest that as many negative components to live music exist as positive ones, with an emphasis on the social functions of live music in the latter group. Though the relevance of the theory to live music is dubious, it highlights that concert attendance involves uncertainty – this is of interest in the current research, given the increasing cost of concert tickets. Pitts (2014), for instance, explains that: “Being an audience member is an emotional risk, as well as a financial one: a performance may be disappointing in relation to a well-loved recording, the acoustics of the hall may be poor, and the seats may be uncomfortable or the view blocked by a tall or wriggling fellow listener” (p. 28). Drawing heavily on this model, Black et al. (2007) also describe pros and cons of live concert attendance. A positive feature, they note, is that concerts allow audiences to enjoy unreleased songs, rarely performed songs, and variations from recorded works in a live setting. Montoro-Pons and Cuadrado-Garcia (2011), finding some support for Earl’s (2001) arguments, observed a “P2P-exposition effect” where exposure to recorded music motivated concert attendance.

Black et al. (2007) state that: “experiencing a live performance (and the related proximity to the artists) gives fans a different type of satisfaction than simply listening to a recording by the same artist, as well as creating a unique bond between fan and artist” (p. 155). Having explored sales data from the top 100 tours in North America between 1997 and 2005, the authors found that ticket purchases were not influenced only by ticket prices, but changes in fans’ incomes (among other factors such as the price of substitute entertainment). Further analysis demonstrates that the top 10 tours in any year throughout the period examined always had higher average ticket prices; this is intuitive, and suggestive of demand for concerts from superstar artists in large venues, a trend which has risen to prominence in recent years with the likes of Madonna and U2.

In the rapid period of technological change which has occurred since the publication of Earl’s (2001) paper, the internet has drastically changed live music. Webcasts are now commonplace, along with “official bootlegs” of concert performances which are authorised and sold (see Farrugia & Gobatto, 2010). Regardless of technological developments and mass consumption of digital music, A. Holt (2010) explains that being at a live concert remains a unique experience, measurable in the atmosphere, performance and social interaction.

Study overview and research questions

Given music fans are willing to pay increasing sums for live pop concerts, but reluctant to pay for recorded music, an investigation into what inspires concert attendance is of interest. Research in this area is limited when compared to that of recorded music purchasing and especially music piracy. Additionally, live music is under-researched in the field of digital piracy. Dilmeri et al. (2011) argue that as live music is the only paid-for music which is rising, it warrants investigation. Exploratory in nature, this study aims to investigate the motivation behind live music attendance. In doing so, findings will shed light on consumer trends not only in the context of the live music sector, but in the broader landscape of music-listening, which has been evolving as a result of the wide-reaching digital revolution. To this end, the extent to which live music attendance is influenced by new practices for listening to recorded music is of interest.

Method

Participants and sampling

Convenience sampling was employed, with a final sample of 249 participants used for analysis. 112 males and 137 female took part, with a mean age of 26.49 and an age range of 16–69. The sample was principally UK-based, with some 62% of participants residing within the UK – the remainder of the sample was from North America, Europe, Australasia and Asia. Participants were recruited using online research websites, such as [onlinepsychresearch](#) and [socialpsychology](#).

Design and procedure

An open-ended qualitative research design was utilised (see Van del Tol & Edwards, 2013), modelled on Lonsdale and North (2011), with participants completing an open-ended questionnaire online, hosted on Survey Gizmo. A brief background to the study itself was first provided on a page outlining the nature of participants’ involvement in accordance with the ethical stipulations of the research, approved at departmental level. Participants were given the instruction: “List three main reasons why you go to live concerts”. Three separate boxes were given to encourage different reasons, and they were sufficient in size to allow for lengthy responses. The methodology used is not without its limitations, and these are discussed elsewhere. Importantly, the approach empowered participants, allowing them to take complete control over their responses, free from any bias in an interview or focus group setting. Free responses are critical when studying strong musical experiences (Gabrielsson, Whaley, & Sloboda, 2016). Additionally, the methodology allowed for a large volume of data to be generated. This was considered critical, given the expected variety in responses.

A total of 733 valid open-ended responses (97.97%) were collapsed into categorical variables for subsequent thematic analysis (see below). This analytical approach was chosen given its flexibility and given that the output produced is readable for various audiences and suitable for informing policy development (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Three stages of coding took place, with the first author responsible for this. First, anything considered important was coded. Recurring codes were clustered together in the second stage where the aim was to capture meaning in the dataset. Lastly, pattern coding moved towards more interpretative coding, guided by personal experiences from both authors' memories of live music events. Though this aided analysis, literature (present below) was sought out to help finalise the themes; initially the first two themes were coded as one broader theme ("being there"). Accordingly, literature on recorded music purchases (including music piracy) assisted with the creation of the final theme, discussed below.

The epistemology for the research is interpretivism, with the aim of exploring the varying motives and reasons for attending live concerts. Thematic analysis was used to identify patterns and themes present in the considerations participants indicated as being taken into account when deciding on buying live concert tickets. Adopting an inductive approach, the analysis was carried out without any of indication of a likely pattern of responses. While relevant literature was sought out prior to data collection, it offers a minimal overview of why music fans choose to pay to see their favourite band live. This relative lack of research, though ultimately driving the study, also ensured there were no prior assumptions on what sort of motivations participants may have reported. As a qualitative study, the possibility for bias must be acknowledged. In particular, the responses are lacking in the richness characterised by qualitative analysis such as Trocchia, Apps, and McNish (2002), as a result of the relative brevity of responses due to the data collection method. The approach used is, however, justified as an exploratory study where the findings will ultimately inform future research.

Results

Themes were identified further to examination of participants' responses, in accordance with the "phases of thematic analysis" proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006), reviewing common patterns in the dataset. Subsequently, four broad themes were identified as motivating purchases of live concert tickets: the experience; engagement; novelty; practical. Despite analysis conforming to qualitative traditions, the relative volume of responses concerning the pattern of results is considered. As with Lamont's (2011) research, using the same methodology, the percentages of different responses are presented – see Figure 1, below. Direct quotations from participants are provided for each theme.

The experience

The most prominent theme among participants' various motivations for attending live concerts was the concert experience (46.2%). Many participants cited multiple motivations across this theme. Such observations suggest that the concert experience is one of the most readily recalled reasons for live concert attendance, where various responses help unpack what, in particular, makes individual concerts a distinct "experience".

Many participants indicated their awareness of concerts being unique, one-off experiences. The short and frequent responses of "the experience" and "the atmosphere" are, predictable, given the data collection method. Some participants however, offered more illuminating insights into their understanding of what makes a given concert special. The excerpts below are especially novel as they demonstrate an awareness of the context of shows both as they are experienced and in a broader timeline:

Experience music as it's played in real time. (F, 29)

Making you feel you took part in a historical event for the band. (F, 17)

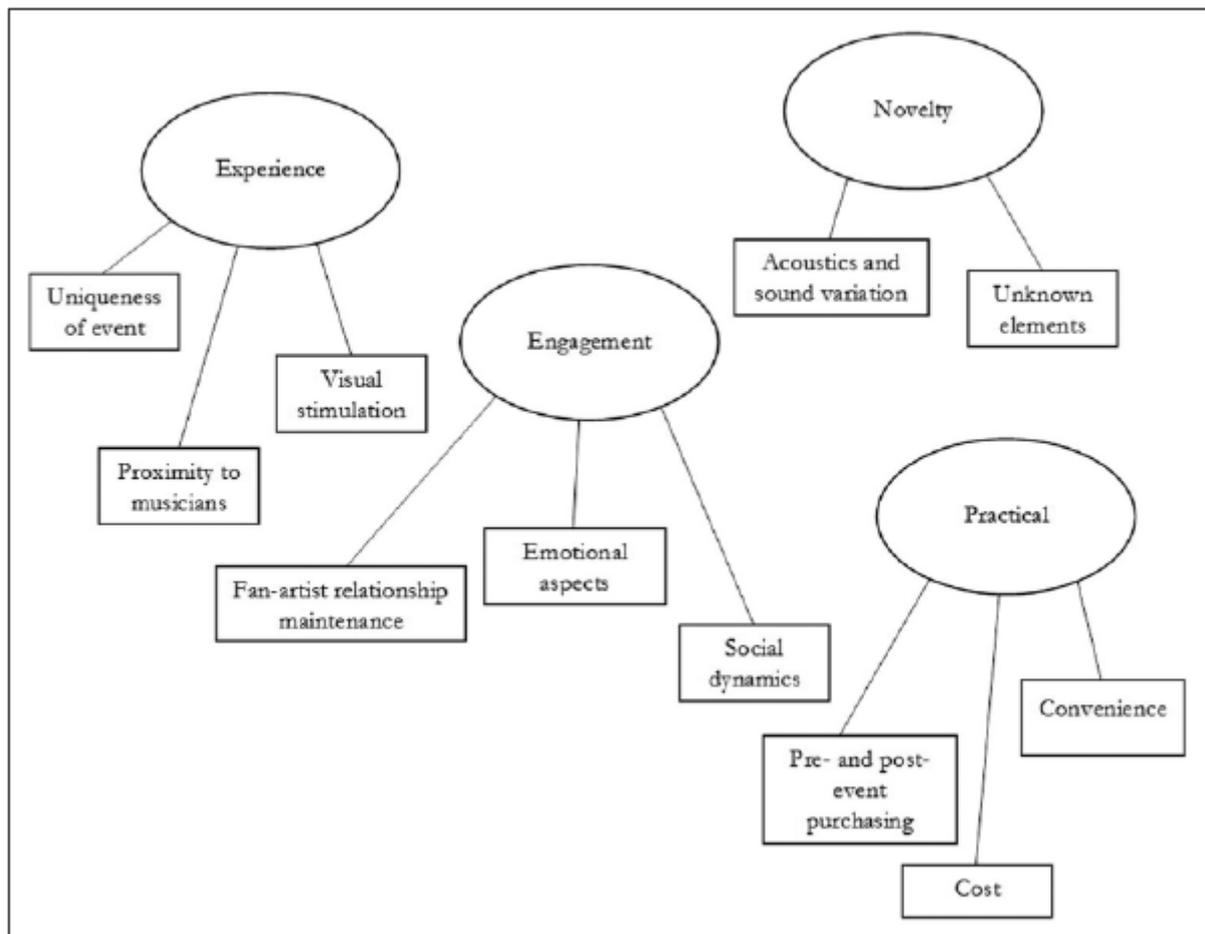


Figure 1. Thematic map of four main reasons which motivate pop concert attendance.

Concert attendance also appeared to be motivated by the desire to physically see their favourite artists “in the flesh”. This appeared often to be influenced by the desire to merely improve the likelihood of getting the chance to “possibly meet the band” and “shake hands”. Several participants also commented on the “window of opportunity” in seeing a band while you have the chance, again demonstrating an awareness of the broader timeline in which a show takes place. Most participants expressed an interest in being able to observe the artists’ musicianship in close proximity, with other research also highlighting the importance of seeing musicians at concerts (Burland & Pitts, 2010, 2012; Pitts & Burland, 2013; Radbourne, Johanson, & Glow, 2014). This was interpreted by the researchers as indicative of a fan–artist relationship which is likely to last longer and inspire future concert attendance, as it is built around a desire to see the artists perform songs and as such, when new songs are written, they are also likely to be sought after in a live context.

As a musician myself, I like to see others play. (M, 24)

To see talented musicians playing and observe how they interact with each other and with the crowd. (F, 27)

The visual component of live music as a motivator of concert attendance was also notable. Such an observation suggests an awareness of the volume of people involved in creating a live show along with the implication that there is also a demand and willingness to pay for the visual elements of live concerts, which are likely to add to the cost of a concert ticket.

To see the band's stage performance. (F, 21)

See the stage show. (F, 36)

Engagement

The second most prominent theme among participants' various motivations for attending live concerts was their desire to engage with live music (28.4%). The social dimension of live concert attendance was expressed through this theme. This is intuitive, as the atmosphere at concerts is largely determined through the "social interaction" of being able to "listen to music I love with like-minded people". This is compelling in relation to Pitts' (2014) findings that music audiences are broadly homogeneous, even when participants themselves reject this notion. The excerpts below demonstrate the overlap with the first theme. This was understood by the researchers not necessarily as a weakness in the thematic coding, but rather an illuminating insight into the multi-dimensionality of the social aspects of music-listening. For instance, one of the principal factors of a valued live music experience is sharing the experience with others (Radbourne et al., 2014). Accordingly, the idea of "being there" is inevitably tied up with being there with other people. The social context of live music, an engaging activity, is ultimately experiential as audiences vary at different live concerts.

I love the atmosphere of being connected with others through music. (F, 22)

For the whole "experience" of a live performance – the dynamics between musicians, fan interaction, visual effects, etc. (F, 26)

The social functionality of concert attendance as a means "to socialise" was also evident, with participants showing awareness of the longer-term benefits of having been to a concert. Once again, the much larger timeline in which a live concert takes place emerged. Live music attendance was also noted as a means with which fans can reliably demonstrate fan worship. As R. Bennett (2015) explains, the live concert is: "An unrepeatable, exclusive event, grounded in time and space, envelops fan identity in a local and tangible community, of which performers on stage are a part" (p. 14). This suggests that some fans may feel an obligation to attend live concerts, perhaps as a means to prolonging engagement in group membership based around appreciation of music and particular artists. As such, the social aspects of music listening in a live context are evident:

To say I've seen them live. (F, 26)

Showing appreciation to a band I've been listening to for years. (M, 21)

Relatively few participants indicated any emotional motivations for concert attendance. This is compelling, given the mood-enhancing benefits of recorded music-listening (see, e.g. Lonsdale & North, 2011). It may be that the volume of variables which are beyond the control of concert attendees, such as those proposed by Earl (2001), influenced this outcome. It may also be that the emotional aspects of listening to music live are specific to that moment and are not as readily recalled. Control is surrendered when listening to music live and so it may not serve as an efficient mood regulator, when compared to recorded music. The emotional motivations proposed by participants were typically brief, with considerable variation:

To relax. (F, 25)

Makes me happy. (F, 17)

Novelty

The third most prominent theme was novelty-seeking (13.9%). The unknown aspects of live performances were of interest, underscoring how individual concerts are unique one-off experiences. A large volume of participants proposed particular interest in seeing artists perform live in the interests of hearing their favourite music differently than on recorded versions. That “live music sounds different than recorded music” allowing participants to hear music “without all the production that occurs on studio tracks” emerges as a major driver in concert attendance. This was considered distinct from the “experience” theme motivations of seeing artists perform live in the flesh, for the reasons explained.

Classical music has a different sound to it live and I find watching as well as listening more interesting. (F, 27)

Live performances are so much different from studio recordings. Recorded music seems lifeless compared to the drive and atmosphere you feel at a gig. (F, 20)

The discussion of classical music by one participant highlights once more the visual element of a concert. Importantly, the overt mention of this specific musical style shows that some participants reflected on non-popular music events – such concerts were not central to the research questions in this study (see Discussion). It has been shown, for instance, that classical music events are perceived as “perfect” (Dobson, 2010), contradicting the trend among the current sample who favoured novel aspects of live events. Participants reported an interest in the opportunity for discovery at live concerts, both in terms of seeking out new music including “supporting acts” and elements of the live performance which are new. Such an observation illustrates the optimism behind the speculative risk involved with purchasing a concert ticket, with participants showing an interest in those aspects which remain unknown until experienced:

To enjoy any covers or new songs the band play live. (F, 17)

Artists often improvise or modify their music when played live, which is interesting and hard to capture fully in a recording. (F, 34)

Related to the above, specific motivations concerning acoustics and sound quality were common among the sample. Anecdotally, audio quality is frequently cited when evaluating the overall success of a concert experience and which venue an artist chooses to perform in may steer fans with a particular interest in acoustics away from attending. Despite the relative unpredictability of sound quality at concerts (at least over recorded music) participants indicated that “hearing a band live sounds better than recorded” and that it is furthermore a “better auditory experience”:

Hear familiar material over big speakers. (F, 30)

To witness the varying dynamics a sound system can handle. (M, 22)

Practical

The least prominent theme was thematically coded as practical reasons (11.6%). Here, participants presented a variety of different factors which play a role in determining whether or not to commit to

attending a concert, which demonstrate a clear decision-making strategy among some participants rather than an impulse purchase. Findings echo Pitts and Burland's (2013) research into jazz audiences, also identifying practical barriers to concert attendance, including price. One of the clearest reasons for concert attendance was convenience. A variety of responses fall across this broad category, where curiously, only one participant mentioned the price of concert tickets. This is of interest, particularly given the continued rise in the cost of concert tickets. One participant did however state that "more money is saved from listening to recorded music therefore more can be spent on live events", suggesting a substitution for paid-for recorded music with paid-for live music. Several practical reasons emerged which act as a barrier to concert attendance, highlighting the limitations of live music over recorded music:

Live too far away from the venues. (M, 69)

Concert is at a weekend/during time-off from work. (M, 25)

A substantial number of participants reported specific motivations to have access to "buy merchandise". Such an observation identifies a small segment of participants who have a particular interest in purchasing merchandise ahead of attending the concert – not merely on impulse. The practicality of being able to purchase merchandise at the same time as seeing an act live may be influenced by the desire to maintain a particular musical identity or simply support an artist, including financially:

To buy merchandise directly from bands I like. (M, 22)

To have easy access to T-Shirts and other merchandise. (M, 22)

Discussion

Adopting a thematic analysis of self-reported motivations for attending live pop music events, four themes were identified: Experience, Engagement, Novelty and Practical. Each is briefly explored below, elaborating on the results.

The concert Experience was observed as the principal motivator of live concert attendance, corroborating the findings of Packer and Ballantyne (2011). Participants were particularly aware of how an individual concert fits in with a wider timeline for particular artists, where being a part of that overall chapter appears to be especially valuable. This notion of a concert being a chapter in the career of an artist appears to be strongly motivated by what several participants called a "window of opportunity". With knowledge of a particular artist not planning on touring again, such as with one-off reunion shows, fans may feel obligated to attend concerts. The opportunity to see their favourite artists in the flesh again simply might not happen. Notably, this desire may also account for fans willingness to pay increasing sums of money for concert tickets. Additionally, unlike recorded music, only a finite volume of tickets are available for a particular concert.

The theme of Experience revealed the importance of the visual elements of live performance as motivators in concert attendance. This aspect, which appears to be given more weight by superstars in recent years, may be one way that fans (or indeed artists) can justify the increasing cost of live concerts. Dance acts, for example, often comprise of a few band members largely out of sight and with minimal crowd interaction. In this respect, it is likely that many fans of such music are actively seeking out dazzling visual aspects in what would still be expected to be a predominantly auditory experience.

Closely linked to the theme of experience was that of Engagement. The social aspects of live music attendance emerged through this theme, including the social functionality of demonstrating fan worship. In Frith's (2007) words, live music is: "A public celebration of musical commitment, a deeply

pleasurable event at which our understanding of ourselves through music is socially recognised" (p. 14). In this light, the benefits of live music in terms of health and wellbeing become pronounced. Exploring the significance of music among adolescents, North, Hargreaves, and O'Neill (2000) show the particular importance of music as a means to help formulate identities and meet certain emotional needs. Given live music attendance peaks among 15–30 year olds (Dilmeri et al., 2011) and with a wealth of research demonstrating the "critical period" of musical affinity among this age group, perhaps live music attendance is motivated not by needs, not wants.

The third theme identified was Novelty, where participants demonstrated an awareness of the differing sound of a concert (both in terms of acoustics and in contrast with recorded music). Many participants believed that the sound at concerts is better than with recorded music, in contrast with Earl (2001), who cites poor sound quality and excess volume as negative qualities of live music. In practical terms, the acoustics of a particular concert are largely dependent on the venue and vary considerably with outdoor events including festivals. Importantly, Minor et al. (2004, cited in Black et al., 2007) demonstrated that sound quality and volume were the most important determinants of audience satisfaction at live concerts.

The Novelty theme also revealed that participants desired the unknown aspects of live concert attendance. In L. Bennett's (2012) words: "Anticipation is mainly focused on what songs will be performed, with specific excitement surrounding the possibility of new or rare tracks being included in the set" (p. 7). Indeed, in the present study, cover songs and improvisation were found to be key motivators, along with support acts. This is of particular interest as "undesired support acts" features in Earl's (2001) list of "live music as a negative", further highlighting the questionable applicability of Earl's theory in the context of live music.

Cover songs and improvisation are a hallmark of American rockers Pearl Jam, who have released so-called "official bootlegs" of (almost) every show since 2000. Selling out to large venues across the world, the band have a devoted following who return to see them perform live night after night. This mystery element of a concert is likely to be a strong motivator in concert attendance, where fans enjoy being part of something unique. Discussed by Brown (2012), concert "spoilers" are an emerging phenomenon, and in particular, fan-shot YouTube videos. Despite pure intentions, these can lead to a reduced enjoyment of a concert as the mystery element of a concert performance is greatly reduced. A source of some debate, New York indie rock outfit Yeah Yeah Yeahs requested fans did not record their concerts: "as a courtesy to the person behind you" (Spin, 2013). Mallinder (2015) notes how the ubiquity of mobile technology has changed the live concert experience for both musicians and fans.

Some Practical aspects of live music attendance were also found, where notably, an interest in purchasing merchandise was evident. Beyond the implications of revenue to be gained from live music, this suggests such purchases are not impulsive but planned, forming part of the concert event. Linking back to live music as fulfilling social functions and needs, merchandise such as t-shirts confirm and maintain group membership. Concerts facilitate identity formation by demonstrating your affinity for a particular artist to likeminded others. They form part of the ritualistic dimension of live music, which has existed long before the recent boom of interest in concerts.

With comparatively little gained from the Practical theme, it is notable that one participant expressed how money was saved from listening to recorded music and as such, more money could be spent on live events. This corroborates Pitts and Spencer's (2008) argument that the practicalities of concert attendance are weighed up against musical, social and personal rewards. As such, it can be said that the decision to attend a music event is a utilitarian one. It remains unknown exactly what was implied above, with money "saved", but many music fans rationalise music piracy due to what Nutall et al. (2011) call an antipathy towards the music industry. This, in addition to increased awareness of artists earning more money from live performances than from recorded music, offers an insight into how individuals engaging in music piracy are able to justify their behaviour in a principled way.

If it is believed that purchasing concert tickets is a “better” way of funding your favourite artist, then it may be that music piracy can be rationalised with continued concert attendance; this is plausible given that fans are willing to pay for live concerts, even as the cost increases. Furthermore, it could be inferred that the increased cost of concert tickets aims to counterbalance lost revenue for hard copies and so effectively encourage live music attendance almost as a substitute. Crucially, what business practices work best for one artist do not necessarily apply to another, with newer artists facing greater challenges than established ones more generally; this extends to touring. Notably, Page (2013) finds an increase in illegal music consumption immediately after music festivals, suggesting that promotion via live performances does not necessarily translate into increased sales from recorded works.

Speculation on future trends

While pop artists are able to make huge profits from touring, recorded music now effectively sells live music. As such, recorded music is necessary in the first instance to inform audiences of their music and motivate the desire to see it performed live. This is not likely to apply to some musical styles, such as classical music or jazz music. Given that the music industry has undergone major changes in recent years (notably the rise in popularity of digital streaming services), few constants remain in order to make informed speculation on future trends. One key constant is that music must be paid for. As self-distribution success stories continue to surface on a regular basis, the true future guise of the music industry will present itself; new approaches using innovation will ultimately inform how best to cater for changing consumer preferences.

Discussing recorded music practices, Wikström (2012) explains that the music industry is moving away from ownership models to context models, where he explains that context models allow for the audience to “do things”. In this respect, live music is unrivalled in its ability to allow fans to interact not only with artists, but each other. It is an active form of music listening. With the now instant and endless availability of recorded music, from both legitimate and illegitimate means, live music offers something more valuable – a unique experience. Recorded music is unable to satisfy such desires. This contrast ought to be taken into consideration when reviewing the rise of the live music sector in tandem with the decline of the recorded music sector.

Limitations and suggestions for future research

The research is unable to delineate between concert attendance and actual purchasing behaviours due to the question posed to participants. That is, the participants may have been reflecting on events they attended, paid for by others. As such, the findings perhaps better reflect research into peak experiences into music (see Gabrielsson et al., 2016) rather than consumer purchasing behaviours. Future research would benefit from a more focused consideration of live music events, with the open methodology used in this study inviting participants to reflect on a broad range of live music events. Accordingly, and given the mean age of the sample, it is likely that popular music events are best represented in the data. More information on sample characteristics would also enhance the study, with level of education an important predictor of concert attendance, for instance (Neuhoff, 2007). More information on the nature and style of concerts under discussion (the one-size-fits-all consideration of “live music” in the current study might not be applicable to some musical styles), how often participants attend live music events and other related information, would allow for more sophisticated analysis of the resulting data. An improved sampling strategy would also aid data collection.

Future research would benefit from incorporating mixed-methodology, such as L. Bennett’s (2014) exploration of fans who engage in live texting and tweeting at concerts (see also Auslander, 2008, on changing notions of “liveness”). Employing both an online survey as well as follow-up interviews, Bennett found that a conflict exists in trying to both enjoy a concert experience and serve other

(non-attending) fans. Ethnographic data collected at concerts may prove particularly beneficial, minimising the potential for recall biases as well as allowing for observation of social aspects of live music attendance. Qualitative analysis of one-on-one interviews and focus groups, using purposive sampling, may help unpack the social dimensions of music purchasing behaviours among young people. In doing so, particular attention could be paid to the extent to which technology (including music subscription services) has influenced live concert sales as little insight was gained into this in the present study, due to the limited data collected. Brennan (2015) explains that: “Live music is no longer enjoying the economic boom period it experienced during the 2000s” (p. 220) and so future research ought to consider the complex factors surrounding concert attendance more broadly, particularly given most musicians in the popular music sphere sustain a career from concert performances.

Recommendations for industry

This research has highlighted that exposure to recorded music may be a core ingredient in motivating live concert attendance, and indeed vice versa. That this is likely the case is evidenced by the common trend for musicians to give away some music for free as a means to stimulate interest in live performances, with Wikström (2011) noting that artists receive approximately 85% of the profits as compared to around 10% for recorded music; for many artists, the real sum is likely to be far less, but still significantly more than with recorded music. This observation of course invites speculation on the economics of music subscription services and demands empirical quantitative analysis of whether or not Spotify and Deezer, etc. encourage live concert attendance.

More firmly rooted in the results, participants expressed a strong interest in meeting a band in the flesh which, taking into account the lack of concern for the price of concert tickets, invites a potential revenue source to incorporate meet-and-greet opportunities into pricier concert tickets. This is relatively commonplace among older artists on farewell tours or reunion shows. However, it could also be extended to established acts early on in their musical careers. Other drivers observed, such as the desire to experience songs differently from their recorded counterparts, also suggests that variations in sets (such as cover songs, or extended instrumental passages) will stimulate interest in live shows and perhaps even purchasing tickets to multiple shows on the same tour; this appears to work in favour of Pearl Jam, as noted above. It is interesting to note that hip-hop star and entrepreneur Jay Z recently announced a free concert for subscribers to music subscription service Tidal (see Denham, 2015) with the set list focused around rarely performed tracks, including so-called “b-sides”. Tidal subscribers can win tickets by submitting playlists on the service (Jay Z is a major shareholder). As noted by Hargreaves, MacDonald, and Miell (2016), what it means to be a “musician” is constantly evolving.

Concluding remarks

The popularity and prominence of live music help crystallise the importance that music has in our everyday lives, with live music offering fans an opportunity to see their favourite artist in the flesh. This study presents some of the reasons why music fans choose to go to live concerts, with particular themes identified. Given its interest in how recorded music and live music practices converge (where the so-called “music industry” ought to be considered as separate recorded and live music industries, with music publishing emerging as increasingly more lucrative), the findings invite further study into the influence of music listening on live music attendance. Montoro-Pons et al. (2013) pose a profile of the live music consumer, as: “a male, young, educated consumer with time availability and actively engaged in the media consumption of recorded music, both by purchasing and by copying and downloading music files and full albums” (p. 51).

A core question raised then, and one which demands further research, is the extent to which increased interest in live music has been inspired by changing preferences for recorded music –

including music piracy. Jones (2015) argues that: “As we discover more ways to consume music digitally, music consumers seem to be craving music in the live form” (p. 29). Indeed, experimental research finds that exposure to liked music increased desire to see it performed live (Kawase & Obata, 2016). Yet, Aguiar and Waldfogel (2015) find that Spotify, a so-called music discovery platform, offsets both legal and illegal music consumption, with the overall effect “revenue-neutral”. New features on such services (such as links to concert tickets) clearly emphasise this assumed relationship between recorded music listening and live concert attendance, but the mechanics of such a relationship remain largely unknown.

The findings from the present research highlight some of the core drivers in choosing when to attend a concert. Notably, the apparent lack of concern over cost, and the emphasis on novel, unknown aspects of a performance, suggests that the perceived benefits of concert attendance far outweigh any potential risks.

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