



# How to be social

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Some music theories don't see the social context as important eg:

- music is seen as an idea, a product of the human mind, separate from society
- the meaning of music is seen as wholly contained within the music itself

But other theories see the social context as key:

- music as a badge of identity
- music as a way of building identity
- music as a reminder of past selves<sup>i</sup>

We all juggle a series of identities – some are central but others become important or unimportant depending on the situation: our ideal identity (whether this is achievable or not) against our achieved identity, or actual identity against the identities we have adopted in the past.<sup>i</sup> This explains why we might enjoy Bach one night and heavy metal the next.

“If you are slightly lost as to kind of who you are or where you are, it's [music that is] sometimes a good starting point.”<sup>ii</sup>

We make these identities believable to ourselves and other people through consumption – including the music we listen to. People's choices of music at a particular moment are chosen from a wider set of long-term and evolving musical tastes.<sup>i</sup>

Some people use music, along with clothing and vocabulary etc., as a way of showing that they are different to everyone else.<sup>i</sup>

Rejecting some music is just as important as listening to other kinds of music in creating and maintaining these identities.<sup>i</sup> For example, some kinds of music are symbolic of the kind of person we don't want to be seen as, or closely identified with a past self.

**“If the music's good and the company's good...”**

Social groups are often formed around musical tastes<sup>iii</sup>. One way of managing social relationships is to go together to concerts. Simply attending together adds value to the relationships between members of the group.<sup>ii</sup> An important part of our audiences' enjoyment is being part of a group of people focused as one on the music.<sup>iv</sup>

But the decision about what the group might go and see is complex. The factors involved are:

- how they see the people they are with, particularly if they are unfamiliar
- their relationship with the people they are with
- their role in the group
- how the group wants to be seen.
- the others' familiarity with the music
- the others' musical tastes
- how the others see the music
- the role of music in the group

So, people's choice of what to attend is affected by the knowledge that they are going to share the experience with family, friends and acquaintances. This is particularly important because people rarely choose music they do not normally listen to or don't normally like.<sup>i</sup> But audiences tell us that we don't give them enough information about a gig or concert to persuade other people to give it a go:

“As a single person, that's the problem with getting other people to come with me. I don't know what it's like so they say let's go to the cinema.”<sup>iv</sup>

There is a clear difference between those who influence members of a social group and those who are influenced by them. The influencers can persuade as long as the others feel they can trust their musical tastes.

These researchers found that consumers of music fell into six groups or ‘tribes’. The groups most likely to be interested in exploring new kinds of music are the Preachers, the Techys and the Revolutionists.

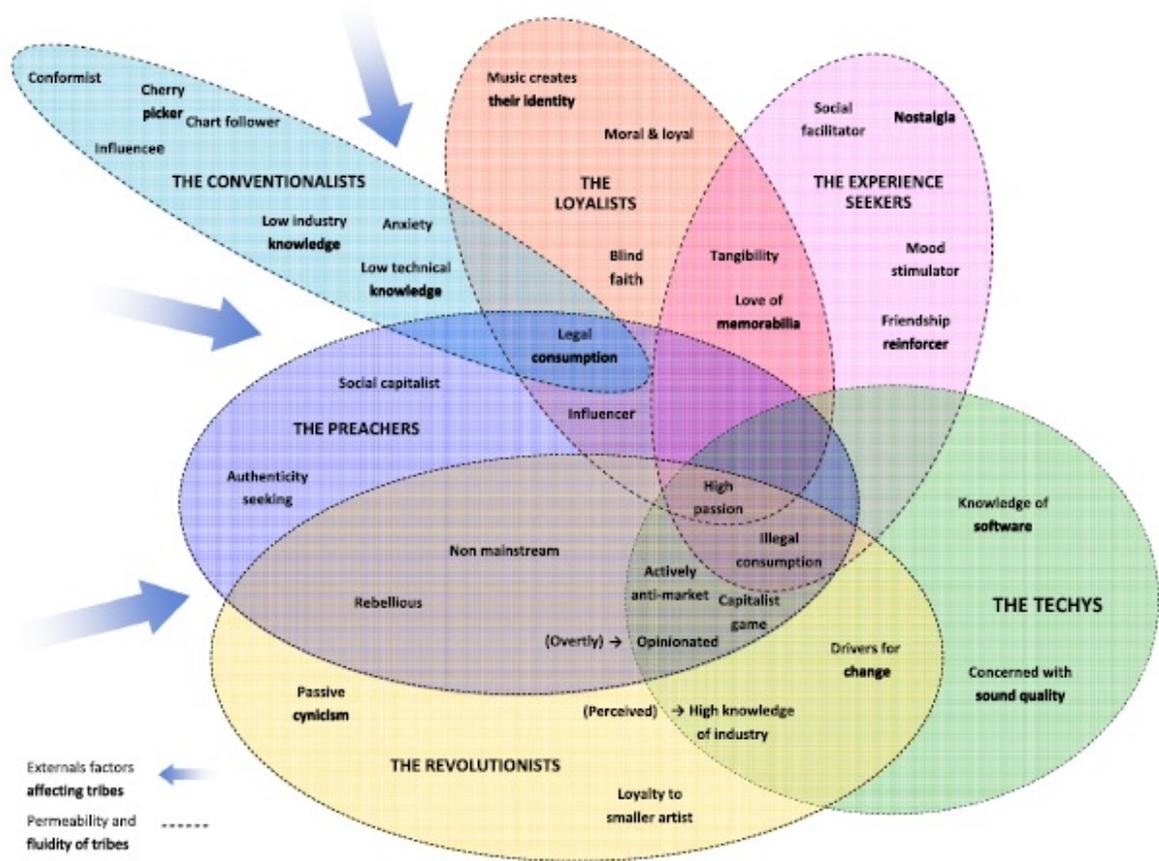


Fig. 2. Tribalisation of the teenage music market.

The factor that distinguishes the Preachers are that they are keen to share their enthusiasms, using new discoveries in music as a way of having power within their social groups. These are the influencers we need to cultivate.<sup>ii</sup>

### Influencers

Research in the US found that one in five people who had been to an arts event in the past year identified themselves as influencers (what the researchers called Initiators) and more than half identified themselves as Responders – people who tend to wait for a friend or family member to invite them before they will attend an arts event.

The research found that some Initiators get meaning and satisfaction from creating cultural experiences for their friends to enjoy.

Initiators going to classical music attend the arts more often than Responders and are twice as likely to say that the arts play a major role in their lives. They are almost four times more likely to scan the media for things to do and are more likely to say they are interested in finding out more about classical music.

We need to create social opportunities around our concerts or gigs.

We can then help Initiators influence their friends and families. The research report recommends:

- giving them the flexibility to interact with you how they want
- build a relationship based on trust
- Initiators have lots of friends just waiting to be asked – so help them do the asking<sup>v</sup>
- Give them the information they need to persuade their friends that they will enjoy the concert.

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□ Larsen, G., Lawson, R. and Todd, S., 'The consumption of music as self-representation in social interaction', [Australasian Marketing Journal](#), 2009, 17, 1, pp. 16–26

ii

□ Nuttall, P., Arnold, S., Carless, L., Crockford, L., Finnamore, K, Frazier, R. and Hill, A., 'Understanding music consumption through a tribal lens', *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services* 18 (2011) pp. 152–159

iii

□ Levitin, D.J. (2007), 'Life Soundtracks: the uses of music in everyday life' consulted at [levitin.mcgill.ca/pdf/LifeSoundtracks.pdf](http://levitin.mcgill.ca/pdf/LifeSoundtracks.pdf) 24/3/2009

iv

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v

□ Brown, A., *Initiators and Responders: A New Way to View Orchestra Audiences*, 2004, John S. and James L. Knight Foundation