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Attribute Accessibility, Normative Influence, and the Effect of Classical and Country Music on Willingness to Pay for Social Identity and Utilitarian Products

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Abstract

Previous studies indicate that background classical music is associated with customers in retail and leisure premises being prepared to pay more for various products and services. This online experiment tests whether these effects are due to music increasing the salience of valued product attributes (attribute accessibility hypothesis) or to a demand characteristic wherein music implies a norm to purchase expensive items (normative behaviour hypothesis). A 3 (type of music - classical, country, no music, between subjects) *x* 2 (type of product - social identity or utilitarian, within subjects) *x* 2 (high versus low incentive for accuracy, between subjects) mixed design was used in which participants stated the specific amount they would be prepared to pay for 30 products using free-choice format. Results showed a music *x* type of product interaction, such that preparedness to spend was higher in the classical music condition but only in the case of social identity products. This is more consistent with the attribute accessibility hypothesis than the normative behaviour hypothesis, and various commercial and practical consequences of these findings are discussed.

Running head: Attribute accessibility and normative influence of music

Keywords: consumerism, advertising, background music, everyday life, meaning

Attribute Accessibility, Normative Influence, and the Effect of Classical and Country Music on Willingness to Pay for Social Identity and Utilitarian Products

Previous laboratory and field research have demonstrated that music can influence various aspects of consumers' perception and behaviour, such as purchase intentions (North & Hargreaves, 1998), actual purchases (Areni & Kim, 1993), reactions to marketing material representing high and low psychological distance (Sunaga, 2018), the taste of food and drink (Reinoso-Carvalho, Dakduk, Wagemans, & Spence, 2019), memory for advertising (Guido, Peluso, & Mileti et al., 2016), shopping and waiting time (Milliman, 1982), and evaluations of commercial environments (North & Hargreaves, 1996), among several others. Several of these studies refer to 'musical fit', or how social understanding of what the music is communicating aligns with those products and services with which the music is juxtaposed. For example, Zellner, Geller, & Lyons et al. (2017) found that diners were influenced to select food with ethnic origins that matched those of the background music. Similarly, Jacob, Gueguen, Boulbry, & Sami (2009) showed that sales in a florist shop were higher when love songs and romantic music were played, rather than pop music or no music. As North, Hargreaves, and McKendrick (1999) among others describe it, hearing a certain genre of music primes related attitudes and beliefs, which in turn primes various associated consumer behaviours.

Several studies provide practical demonstrations of this effect, with a particular emphasis on classical music (relative to other genres) increasing the amount that consumers are prepared to pay. North, Shilcock, and Hargreaves (2003) are among several authors to have argued that diners' 'upmarket' stereotype of classical music

caused restaurant patrons to spend more when this rather than pop music was played. Areni and Kim (1993) found that classical music was associated with sales of more expensive wine than was top 40 music. North and Hargreaves (1998) played classical music, pop, easy listening, and no music in a student cafeteria and asked customers to state the maximum amount they would be prepared to spend on each of a number of generic products on sale: classical music was associated with customers being prepared to spend significantly more money, and responses to other questionnaire items suggested that this may be because the music caused the premises to be perceived as more upmarket. Given the potential commercial implications, a number of other studies have reported similar findings (Soars, 2009; Zander, 2006), but as this brief review indicates, the majority of research has focussed on field tests with relatively little emphasis on what may underlie the effects. The present research aims to address this gap in the literature.

Attribute accessibility

The present research tests two explanations for the effect of classical music on product perception and willingness to pay. One potential mechanism involves the activation of semantically congruent concepts in memory. Although Schubert, Hargreaves, and North (2014) outline this in specifically a musical context, they draw heavily on mainstream theory in cognitive psychology, which posits that the mind is composed of densely interconnected nodes, such that activation of one leads to activation of related nodes (e.g., Anderson, 1983). The amount of subsequent activation spreading to a related node is inversely proportional to the semantic distance between the two nodes.

Much of this work can be traced back to Anderson's (1983) seminal paper on spreading activation in memory, which has been cited on over 1000 occasions. Anderson argues that information is encoded into discrete units, the strength of which increases proportionately with their frequency of activation (and so decays over periods of time when the unit is not activated). The discrete units are interconnected proportionate to their degree of association with the source unit, so that the rate and probability of retrieval depends on the overall level of activation within the system of interconnected units in question. So, for example, the prompt 'smart phone' might activate 'iPhone', 'Apple' and 'Steve Jobs' if "iPhone" is the most frequently encountered (and activated) brand in the category, and those concepts are associated in a semantic network that includes 'smart phones'.

Anderson's own paper details the processes by which this theory can explain variations in reaction time to stimuli of varying familiarity (i.e., greater activation over time reduces reaction time); as well as the acquisition of classic paired associations between stimuli (in which learning is a process by which repeated activation of one cognitive unit strengthens the activation of other units) (i.e., an image of a cymbal will activate the concept 'drums' since the two tend to appear and are used together). Several contemporaries of Anderson proposed similar arguments, most notably Collins & Loftus (1975), and work within this approach has generated multiple insights in fields such as psycholinguistics (e.g., Heyman, Hutchinson, & Storms, 2016; Khalkhali, Wammes, & McRae, 2012; Sekulic, Erdelijac, & Kuzina, 2020).

Via this process, it could be argued that classical music leads to higher spending because it activates concepts such as 'expensive', 'sophisticated', 'formal', and

'educated', in contrast to other genres of music such as pop or country (Areni & Kim, 1993; Baker, Grewal, & Parasuraman, 1994; North et al., 2003). Although there has been surprisingly little research on this, North and Hargreaves (1999) have reported that fans of classical music are stereotyped (by western participants at least) as of higher social class, and more likely to have a university education, have a cerebral nature, be sophisticated, favour European over American culture, and have a traditional world view. While their research focussed upon the views of university students, corresponding effects were also identified among a separate sample of 10-11 year olds, suggesting that the upmarket cultural stereotype of classical music that appears to underlie its effects on spending may be pervasive. In a similar vein, Rentfrow and Gosling (2007, p.316) report that, "Classical fans are believed [i.e., perceived by others] to value comfort, beauty, wisdom, imagination, intellect and love", which contrasted with participants' stereotypes of fans of various other genres. By priming concepts such as sophistication or prestige, classical music increases their salience as attributes or dimensions by which various alternatives can be compared. For instance, the presence of classical music might cause consumers to compare two competing products according to how sophisticated and prestigious they are, and these comparisons then serve as bases for determining the best option. This process might be termed the 'attribute accessibility hypothesis', in which the music simply makes certain product attributes come to mind more easily.

In a direct attempt to test this, North, Sheridan, and Areni (2016) conducted a set of three experiments that showed that "music influences product choice via its ability to prime related concepts in memory. Once primed, these concepts influence product perception and guide choice to be congruent with the activated semantic network"

(pp. 90-91). Across three experiments, North et al. (2016) operationalised the congruency between music and products in terms of country of origin (experiment 1), or with the congruency between the utilitarian (experiment 2) or social identity (experiments 2 and 3) connotations of particular products. The congruence of the music was operationalised in terms of the genre that was played during initial exposure to products, with the results showing that this improved recall of related products (experiment 1), influenced choice of products in favour of those which were congruent with the music (experiment 1), and increased the amount that participants were prepared to pay for congruent products (experiments 2 and 3).

Normative behaviour

However, a second explanation for the effects of playing classical music is that it implies norms or guidelines for appropriate behavior. For example, playing classical music could allow a retailer to convey that it specialises in sophisticated or formal merchandise rather than basic, mundane items (Areni, 2003a, 2003b). Likewise, classical music could imply norms for appropriate behaviour, signaling to consumers concepts such as appropriate dress codes, acceptable forms of social interaction, and typical purchase patterns (Areni & Kim, 1993; Beverland, Lim, Morrison, & Terziovski, 2006). This can be termed the ‘normative behaviour hypothesis’, in which the (classical) music suggests a socially appropriate behaviour within a specific retail context (i.e., purchasing expensive items).

Although the influence of music on normative behavior has not been tested directly, several other contextual factors have been examined. For example, shoppers are

more likely to engage in impulse buying when they believe impulse purchases are appropriate in a given retailing context (Rook & Fisher, 1995). Likewise, the decision to smoke is often influenced by judgements as to whether this is appropriate to the retailing setting (Mead et al., 2014). Perceived behavioral norms with respect to eco-friendly consumption have even been shown to influence online shopping behavior (DeMarque et al., 2015).

Given its ability to activate specific concepts in memory, music could also suggest behavioral norms related to formality, intimacy, and sophistication, etc., as well as signaling whether specific actions (e.g., talking loudly, using expletives, asking for assistance, etc.) are appropriate. This would also explain why classical music provokes higher levels of spending; the association with prestige and sophistication may lead consumers to believe this is the ‘right’ thing to do.

Confirmation of the attribute accessibility and/or normative behaviour hypotheses would have a number of implications. First, such knowledge would better place research findings concerning musical fit into a theoretical context that would guide future hypotheses. For instance, the detailed mainstream research on spreading activation, which has continued since the 1970s, would then represent a means of further refining and optimising work on musical fit. Second, this enhanced understanding of the theoretical bases of the effects would allow much more precise and targeted uses of music in retail and leisure settings (with further implications for revenue).

The present research

Therefore, the present research investigated whether the attribute accessibility and normative behaviour hypotheses could explain musical fit effects on product evaluations. In particular, the present research considered consumers' judgements of the amount they would pay for different types of products via an experiment in which three variables were manipulated, namely the background music (classical, country, versus no music), type of products (utilitarian products versus social identity products), and incentive to estimate price accurately (high versus low). On the basis of previous findings, it was expected that participants would be willing to pay more in the classical music condition than in the country and no music conditions. However, in addition to this hypothesis drawn from previous research findings (which largely represents simply an attempt at replication), the 'type of product' and 'incentive' conditions allowed for a novel test of whether this effect is due to attribute accessibility or normative influence.

The two 'type of product' conditions provided a test of the effect of classical music in the case where sophistication and prestige are relevant decision criteria (i.e., social identity products) versus irrelevant (i.e., utilitarian products). Previous research has shown that the prestige or reputation of a store influences product evaluations for products related to social identity but not for more utilitarian products (Lee & Shavitt, 2006). The attribute accessibility hypothesis implies that the effect of classical music on willingness to pay should only occur when concepts like 'prestige' and 'sophistication' are relevant for making a choice (i.e., social identity products), but not when these activated concepts are irrelevant to the value of the product (i.e., utilitarian products). As such, the positive effect of classical music on willingness to pay should occur for social identity products but not utilitarian products On the other

hand, the normative behaviour hypothesis predicts that participants in the classical music condition should be prepared to pay more for the products than participants in the country music and no music conditions regardless of product type; the upmarket stereotype of classical music implies that paying more is a normative, appropriate response.

Although many tests of the effects of music have occurred in field settings, in a laboratory setting normative influences of music act as a kind of demand effect wherein the music cues participants as to how they are supposed to behave in an experiment (see North et al., 2016). Research shows that providing economic incentives for accuracy reduces or eliminates demand effects by making deviations from true preferences and judgments costly for participants (de Quidt, Vesterlund & Wilson, 2019). Hence, the two incentive conditions addressed whether the effect of music on willingness to pay is due to normative influence, which should only emerge when the incentive for accuracy is low. In the low incentive condition participants were simply told that they would all be entered into a randomly determined prize draw, whereas in the high incentive condition participants were told that the person who made the most accurate judgements of the cost of the products would receive a performance-based prize. The normative behaviour hypothesis suggests that the positive effect of classical music on willingness to pay should only occur when the incentive for accuracy is low (i.e., the randomly determined prize condition), so participants in this condition can simply conform to implied normative expectations. In contrast, when the incentive for accuracy is high (i.e., the performance-based prize condition), participants should ignore normative implications of the music and instead focus on making accurate estimates of the price of the products (and hence

the maximum amount they should be willing to pay). On the other hand, the attribute accessibility hypothesis predicts that the incentive for accuracy manipulation will have little or no influence on the effect of music on these judgments..

Additionally, after the focal judgment task participants provided open-ended responses explaining how they made their pricing judgments. The normative behaviour hypothesis implies at least some awareness of the music in order for participants to recognise that they are supposed to behave in certain ways. Consequently, this hypothesis implies that responses from participants might explicitly mention the influence of the music (e.g., “the classical music made me think I was supposed to propose a higher price”). The attribute accessibility hypothesis, in contrast, does not require awareness of the music so that participants would be less likely to explicitly mention the music as a basis for their judgments. In addition, the attribute accessibility hypothesis predicts that the classical music condition should increase the likelihood of participants mentioning the prestige or sophistication of the products (e.g., “you really should buy the best, it’s a reflection of who you are”), whereas the country music condition should induce participants to cite pragmatic concerns (e.g., “you really should buy something that works, and gets the job done”).

Method

Participants

Following power analysis, participants were recruited on a university campus via advertising including posted flyers, social media, and word of mouth leading to a sample of 123 individuals comprising 39 males (32%) and 84 females (68%), aged between 17 and 68 years (M = 31.8, SD = 13.8). Participants were recruited form the

host university department participant pool and received course credit as recompense.

Research Design

A 2 (type of product: either utilitarian or social identity) *x* 3 (type of music: either classical, country or no music) *x* 2 (incentive level: either high or low) mixed design was used. The music and incentives were between-subjects variables, while the product type was a within-subjects variable. The number of participants for each combination of music and incentive was no music / high incentive = 29, country / high incentive = 18, classical / high incentive = 20, no music / low incentive = 22, country music / low incentive = 20, classical music / low incentive = 14. On the basis of previous research we expected that classical music would give rise to higher price judgements than either the country or no music conditions. However, the attribute accessibility and normative behaviour hypotheses lead to more refined predictions. The attribute accessibility hypothesis predicts that classical music should lead to higher price judgements than should country or no music for social identity products but not for utilitarian products: the normative behaviour hypothesis predicts that classical music should lead to higher price judgements than country or no music for both social identity and utilitarian products. The normative behaviour hypothesis predicts that the positive effect of classical music on price judgements should occur only when incentive for accuracy is low but not when incentive for accuracy is high: the attribute accessibility hypothesis predicts that incentivising participants for accuracy will not influence their price judgements.

Products. The 30 products used in this study were classified as either 'utilitarian' or 'social identity'. Utilitarian products are those that are used for primarily pragmatic, mundane reasons with little or no emphasis on design or the social cache they might bestow upon the user (e.g., a roll of packing tape, a light bulb), whereas social identity products are those that have some functional utility but also contribute to the social identity of the user through factors such as their design and the prestige of the exemplar in question (e.g., a watch, a necktie). These products were identified via a pilot study, in which 15 participants were given a set of 100 cards of generic, label-free, unbranded product images sourced from Google Images, and were asked to sort them into the two categories of utilitarian and social identity. The 30 products (15 utilitarian, 15 social identity) employed in the main study were classified as such by all of the pilot study participants (e.g., a padlock was unanimously labelled as a utilitarian product). Note that an additional five products (considered 'ambiguous' on the basis of mixed classification in the pilot study) were included as dummies at the beginning of the survey to allow time to prime the participants in the music conditions. Each product (see list in Table 1) was displayed to the participants using a generic picture at a consistent size, accompanied by a written label for each product (e.g., "A padlock").

- Table 1 here -

Music. In prior research, classical music has been associated with upmarket connotations and stereotypes among student and other samples (e.g., North & Hargreaves, 1999; North & Hargreaves, 2007; North, Sheridan & Areni, 2016); and it has similarly been argued that country music is subject to connotations and

stereotypes of low socio-economic status (e.g., Fox, 2004; North & Hargreaves, 2007; North, Sheridan & Areni, 2016; Rentfrow & Gosling, 2007). A no music condition was included as a control condition. Specific pieces of classical and country music were selected using Classic FM's (2015) 'Hall of Fame Top 300 Classical Pieces' and Rolling Stone's (2014) '100 Greatest Country Songs of All Time' in order to ensure that all the music represented well-known exemplars of the genres in question. Eight pieces of music were randomly selected from those appearing in the top 20 of each respective list for use in the research. Two-minute excerpts from each piece were selected so that there was 16 minutes of music available for each genre and participants were exposed to the same number of exemplars of each genre. This ensured that the music would play in the background throughout the time required to complete the entire questionnaire. A full list of the music used is provided in Table 2.

- Table 2 here -

Accuracy Incentive. At the beginning of the experiment instructions, participants each received one of two versions of the instructions in order to test the effect of incentive on their preparedness to pay for each of the products in question. Participants assigned to the 'high incentive' condition were told, "Please indicate the amount you are prepared to pay for each of the items below. Please note that the participant with the most accurate answers will be awarded a $50 iTunes gift voucher". Participants assigned to the 'low incentive' condition were told, "Please indicate the amount you are prepared to pay for each of the items below. Please note that all participants who complete this questionnaire will be entered into a

random prize draw to win a $50 iTunes voucher". As such, participants in the high incentive condition had an explicit motivation to prioritise accuracy when providing price judgements, whereas participants in the low incentive condition had no such motivation.

Procedure and Measures

The research was approved by the host university's Human Research Ethics Committee. Participants accessed the online experiment (hosted by Qualtrics) via their personal computer using a direct web link. The online questionnaire consisted of three parts, namely background information (i.e., age, gender), the main price assignment task, and two open-ended questions.

Main price assignment task. Participants were randomly allocated between the conditions via the questionnaire software. If participants were allocated into one of the conditions with music, they were then asked to play an MP3 music file at a comfortable listening volume, which began playing either the classical or country track throughout the remainder of data collection (whereas participants in the no music condition received no such instruction and completed the task without any background music). Participants were then provided with directions regarding the price assignment task (with the incentive text dependent on whether they were assigned to the high/low condition). Specifically, they were asked to report the maximum amount of money (in Australian dollars and cents) they were prepared to pay for each of the items. The five 'ambiguous' items appeared first, followed by the social identity and utilitarian items presented in a random order.

Open-ended questions. Following the price assignment task, participants were asked to respond to two open-ended questions, namely “How did you decide how much to pay for each of the featured products?” and “What factors influenced your decisions the most?” For those in the music conditions, participants were asked once more at the end of the survey whether or not they could still hear the music, and all responded positively.

Results

Preparedness to pay. A 2 *x* 3 *x* 2 mixed ANOVA was used to test the effect of background music and incentive on participants’ preparedness to pay for both of the two types of products. As the assumption of sphericity was violated, the degrees of freedom were adjusted, so that the Huynh-Feldt Epsilon information is reported (Allen, Bennett, & Heritage, 2014).

The three-way interaction between music genre, product type and the incentive condition was non-significant, F (2, 117) = 0.53, p = .593, η_p^2 = .009. Additionally, the incentive *x* product type interaction was non-significant, (F (1, 117) = 0.16, p = .686, η_p^2 = .001) and the incentive *x* music interaction was non-significant (F (2, 117) = 0.62, p = .541, η_p^2 = .010). Importantly, however, although the associated effect size was small, the music *x* product interaction was statistically significant, F (2, 117) = 5.07, p = .008, η_p^2 = .080. Specifically, the means shown in Table 3 indicate that the mean price assigned for social identity products in the classical music condition was higher than the price assigned for the same products in both the no music and country music conditions, whereas the corresponding differences between the music conditions were far less pronounced in the case of utilitarian products.

- Table 3 here -

Factors influencing judgements. A thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was performed to analyse the open-ended responses concerning how participants decided how much to pay for each item and what influenced their decisions. An independent judge (blind to the study aims) was given instructions to group the answers given for both questions into the smallest number of discrete, meaningful themes and to label each. A second, independent judge (also blind to the study) then verified and refined the themes identified. Eleven themes were identified through this process, and the frequency of nomination by condition is shown in Table 4 (along with exemplar quotations). As Table 4 shows, the crucial aspect of the qualitative data for the present research was that participants did not cite the music as a factor in their decision-making. Moreover, needs versus wants reasons were more common in the country music condition than the classical music condition, while perceptions of worth were more common in the classical music condition than the country music condition.

-Table 4 here -

Discussion

This research investigated whether the positive effect of classical music on the amount that customers are prepared to spend could be explained better by the attribute accessibility or normative behaviour hypothesis. There was a music *x* product interaction, such that participants were prepared to pay more for products

related to social identity when classical music was played compared to when country or no music was played, but that classical music did not have the same effect on preparedness to pay for utilitarian products. While processes such as spreading activation can only be inferred rather than observed directly, these results are consistent with the attribute accessibility hypothesis (and earlier research on music stereotypes) by implying that classical music made concepts like ‘prestige’ and ‘sophistication’ more accessible, which gave participants a basis for evaluating the social identity products. However, these activated concepts were largely irrelevant for evaluating the utilitarian products.

In contrast, the results are not consistent with the normative behaviour hypothesis. Normative expections in the context of a laboratory experiment are essentially demand effects. Participants infer that the presence of classical music is intended to induce them to pay more for the featured products, irrespective of the type of product. There would be no obvious reason for participants to discriminate between utilitarian products versus those related to social identity, especially given that the two types of products were presented in a random order as a repeated factor. In other words, if normative behaviour explained the effects of classical music on preparedness to pay then the effect should have been found for both utilitarian and social identity products.

Further evidence suggesting the role of attribute accessibility over normative influence in explaining the effects of classical music is provided by the non-significant effects of the incentive condition. If normative influence explained the effect of classical music on greater preparedness to pay then the high incentive

condition should have mitigated the effect of the classical music (by directly incentivising participants to ignore normative influences in favour of attempting to estimate price accurately). Attribute accessibility, on the other hand, indicates that music should influence judgements concerning price regardless of any incentives for accuracy. Hence, the absence of an effect of incentive suggests that attribute accessibility rather than normative influence underlies the observed effect of classical music on willingness to pay.

The role of attribute accessibility over normative influence in explaining preparedness to pay is also supported by the qualitative data in which participants stated how they reached their price decisions. Music was not stated as a factor which implies a lack of conscious awareness, and hence the absence of normative influence. In contrast, the influence of attribute accessibility places less emphasis on conscious awareness of the connotations of classical music, implying that participants would be less likely to mention music as an influence. Moreover, classical music gave rise to more judgement processes concerning the worth or market value of the products, whereas country music gave rise to judgement processes with a greater focus upon wants versus needs. This again implies that the effects of music on preparedness to pay resulted from music making certain product attributes less or more accessible, rather than by normative influence. In mitigation against this interpretation of the qualitative data, however, it should be noted that it is possible participants were indeed aware of the music as a factor in their judgements but declined for any of a number of possible reasons to cite this in their responses. As such, the most appropriate inference to draw from the qualitative data is that

participants are perhaps unaware of the role of music or perhaps instead simply unwilling to acknowledge its influence to a third party.

Implications

As noted earlier, much of the existing research on musical fit, and in particular that concerning the effect of classical music on preparedness to pay for products and services, has been conducted in the field, and this has limited the opportunity of those concerned to select between the various possible explanations of the findings obtained. In contrast, the present experimental research provides evidence that attribute accessibility is a better explanation of musical fit than normative influence. This has a number of interesting practical implications. First, it suggests that the effects may extend far beyond only classical music. Following the logic of the attribute accessibility hypothesis, any music that raises the accessibility of a given attribute of a product or service could have a corresponding impact on responses to that product or service. The effect need not be limited to classical music and need not be limited to preparedness to pay. The findings cited earlier by North and Hargreaves (1999) and Rentfrow and Gosling (2007) have given some indication concerning the kind of attributes made more salient by various musical genres.

A second implication of the support here for the attribute accessibility hypothesis is that it is important for practitioners to have a detailed semiotic understanding of particular pieces, musicians, or genres. Attribute accessibility is in the mind of the beholder, and so retailers, advertisers and the like need a detailed understanding of which attributes become more accessible to the audience when a product or service is paired with a given piece of music. Since different people and sub-groups of the

population have different interpretations of a given piece of music, those concepts that become more accessible may be quite idiosyncratic. For instance, if Consumer A regards a well-known rock band such as The Beatles as anti-authoritarian this will increase the accessibility of similar attributes of the product, service, or location in question, whereas if Consumer B regards The Beatles as old-fashioned this will have very different consequences for perceptions of the product, service, or location with which their music is presented. Using the attribute accessibility hypothesis in commercial contexts should be most effective when cultural understanding of the messages inherent to the music is homogenous across an entire population.

It is important to note that the data here show that attribute accessibility is a more credible explanation of the effect of classical music on preparedness to spend, but do not rule out any role whatsoever for normative behaviour in describing the relationship between music and consumer behaviour. If a given piece of music (e.g., a national anthem) has clear implications for normative behaviour (e.g., standing up) this is likely to be expressed in terms of actual behaviour. Similarly, the possibility remains that the normative behaviour hypothesis is correct, but that these norms relate to particular classes of product or location. For example, if a restaurant were to play classical music in conjunction with soft lighting, well-dressed and polite staff, etc., patrons would likely be aware that tee-shirts and shorts are inappropriate attire, that loud, raucous conversation is not tolerated, and that romantic couples would be more welcome than an entire football team coming off the bus after a hard-fought victory. Clearly, in distinguishing between attribute accessibility and normative influence as explanations for the effect of music on judgement and behaviour, factors

like product category, retail context, customer profile and the specific response or activity in question must be considered carefully.

On a more pragmatic note, we should highlight here also that, since data were collected online, the possibility exists that some participants in the no music condition were exposed to other forms of background noise which may have impacted on their responses, and future research might also address this. We would also suggest that future research addresses the relationship between the cost per se of a product and amount of social status it bestows upon the purchaser: for some people at least, purchase price alone may indicate social status (i.e., the price of a car itself bestows social status on the purchaser), suggesting that there is more of a blurred boundary between utilitarian and social identity products than that implied by our research design. Similarly, given that cognitive processes such as spreading activation are notoriously difficult to observe directly, future research might adopt a triangulation approach that complements the data presented here by measuring the time taken to categorise products as utilitarian versus social identity when classical versus other music is played; or which manipulates the specific verbal descriptions of the products employed (e.g. “a gold chain” versus “a chain”) to explicitly highlight the social identity connotations of particular products.

In conclusion, several previous studies show that classical music is associated with customers prepared to pay more for products. Although the present research replicated this finding, the evidence presented here suggests that attribute accessibility is a better explanation than normative influence for the positive effect of classical music on willingness to pay for social identity products; and that willingness

to pay for utilitarian products may not be susceptible to the effect of classical music. However, while experimental research of the type reported here is able to tease apart competing explanations for the effect of music on judgement and behaviour, these theoretical accounts require replication in a field setting in order to demonstrate their commercial viability. The results of the present study contribute to the growing knowledge concerning the role of music in consumer behaviour by suggesting that attribute accessibility may underlie the effects of classical music on preparedness to spend.

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Table 1 – Products

Social Identity Products	Utilitarian Products
A smartphone	Two toilet rolls
Gold chain	Spanner
100ml bottle of cologne	Torch
A pair of sunglasses	Roll of packing tape
Watch	20 litre storage container
A pair of sneakers	Pack of four sponges
Classical-acoustic guitar	Padlock
Novel	Light bulb
Backpack	Ironing board
A pair of jeans	Hairbrush
A pair of cubic zirconia stud earrings	A 2 litre bottle of clothes-washing detergent
A wallet	Pack of two AA batteries
A digital music player	A pack of four razors
A digital camera	A plastic bucket
A tablet computer	A pair of scissors

Table 2 - Music

Classical	
The four seasons	Antonio Lucia Vivaldi
Piano concerto no. 5	Ludwig van Beethoven
Symphony no. 9	Ludwig van Beethoven
Venus	Gustav Theodore Holst
Clarinet concerto: II adagio	Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart
Enigma variations	Edward William Elgar
Piano concerto no. 2	Sergei Vasilievich Rachmaninov
The lark ascending	Ralph Vaughan Williams
Country	
Jolene	Dolly Parton
I’m so lonesome I could cry	Hank Williams
He stopped loving her	George Jones
I walk the line	Johnny Cash
Crazy	Patsy Cline
Stand by your man	Tammy Wynette
Standing on the corner	Jimmie Rodgers
Mama’s don’t let your babies grow up to be cowboys	Waylon Jennings

Table 3 – Estimated marginal means for the music *x* product interaction

				95% confidence interval	
Music	Product	Mean	SE	Lower bound	Upper bound
No music	Social identity	163.07	24.43	114.68	211.46
	Utilitarian	10.68	1.07	8.56	12.80
Classical	Social identity	271.58	29.49	213.17	329.99
	Utilitarian	13.06	1.29	10.51	15.62
Country	Social identity	168.88	27.49	114.42	223.34
	Utilitarian	9.65	1.20	7.27	12.04

Table 4 - Frequency of themes in open-ended responses by condition

Theme	Classical music, low incentive	Country music, low incentive	No music, low incentive	Classical music, high incentive	Country music, high incentive	No music, high incentive
Quality	3	7	5	1	7	7
Wants versus needs	4	5	4	1	10	7
Perceptions of worth	7	9	9	15	2	7
Aesthetics	2	0	5	0	3	8
Past experience	11	18	11	22	19	19
Money / financial	0	4	4	3	0	11
Knowledge	0	2	4	6	3	0
Price	0	0	0	0	0	3
Guessed	0	0	5	0	0	0
Don’t know	0	0	0	3	2	0
Randomly	0	1	0	0	0	0
Experimenter asked	0	0	0	0	1	0

Exemplars

Quality - Quality of the product (e.g., "the quality of the product pictured", "quality, build, function, style, durability", "the appearance of expensive textures such as leather and velvet further added to the apparent quality of the item"

Wants versus needs - Consideration for whether they actually needed the product or if it was just something they wanted.(e.g., "if they were wants or needs", "how much I wanted/needed the product", "depended on how much I wanted each item, and whether I would use it a lot or not", "my needs and the use I would make of them")

Perceptions of worth - Estimation/ perception for what a product was worth (e.g. “based on what I know they might be worth”, "based it on what I would assume these prices would cost, and

how much I could reasonably get them for at the lowest price", "what I felt the items were worth"

Aesthetics - The style/ design of the product (e.g. “by observing the look and design of the products", "the general appearance", "perceived luxury", "appearance")

Past experience - Based on personal experience (e.g., "based it on prices I've paid in the past", "previous purchase of similar items", "past prices I have paid for these items", "tried to remember how much I had paid in the past", "shopping experience")

Money / financial - Based on the participants financial situation (e.g. "current financial position", “my wage, income”, “the money I own”)

Knowledge - Prices based on what they knew about each product (e.g. “how much I knew about each product", "today's shop prices", "what I know about the products", "pricing")

Guessed - Guessed the price of products (e.g., "guessed", "I took an educated guess")

Don’t know - Participants indicated they were unaware why they assigned the price (e.g. “not sure”, "don't know")

Randomly - No particular reason (e.g., “Randomly)

Experimenter asked - A requirement of the research (e.g., "The fact you asked the question")