

MUSIC, MARKETS AND CONSUMPTION



Part III
Consumption
Perspectives

7 Music Consumption

Introduction

‘The world is not for beholding. It is for hearing. It is not legible, but audible.’

(Attali 1977/1985: 3)

Music can be heard everywhere, infiltrating our everyday existence. Not only does one choose to listen to music across a range of situations, times and spaces; one is also exposed to music in innumerable day-to-day situations – on public transport, from a passing car, through advertisements. Even prior to the technological advances which have revolutionized the way music is acquired, purchased and used (Elberse 2010; Simun 2009), Merriam noted that ‘the importance of music, as judged by the sheer ubiquity of its presence, is enormous...There is probably no other human cultural activity which is so all-pervasive and which reaches into, shapes and often controls so much of human behaviour’ (1964: 218). Technological, social and cultural trends have only served to deepen and diversify the ways in which one listens to, or engages with, music.

The marketing and consumer behaviour perspective on music engagement has focused primarily on experiential aspects. Interest in the consumption of music arose on the back of the experiential turn in consumer research, and the associated interest in aesthetic products (e.g. Holbrook and Hirschman 1982). Music is a rich and complex symbolic, social and political product (Larsen *et al.*, 2010), the experience of which can be distinguished from the consumption of

other kinds of products. For example, music is the only product which is primarily auditory (Larsen and Lawson, 2010); consumption does not alter its recorded form and it can be consumed actively or passively, with or without ownership, in private and in public (Lacher and Mizerski, 1994). As a result, most of our knowledge about the consumption of music has concentrated on the emotional and aesthetic reasons for listening to music (e.g. Cherian and Jones, 1991; Kellaris and Kent, 1993; Lacher and Mizerski, 1994; North and Hargreaves, 1997; Chien *et al.*, 2007; Lonsdale and North, 2011); the relationship between music and identity, particularly the use of music as a 'badge of identity' (e.g. Holbrook, 1986; DeNora, 1999; North and Hargreaves, 1999; Shankar, 2000; Goulding *et al.*, 2002; Negus and Velazquez, 2002; Nuttall, 2009) and the symbolic function of music (Hogg and Banister, 2000; Larsen *et al.*, 2009, 2010).

There is a broader question, underlying this body of knowledge, which remains unexamined. That is: What does it mean to frame music engagement as consumption and music listeners as consumers, and what are the consequences of doing so for our understanding of music consumption? As conceptualized by Holbrook and Anand (1990) and Lacher and Mizerski (1994), music consumption is the act of listening to a piece of music. Listening to music is, without a doubt, one of the most significant aspects of the act of consuming music; however, it does not entirely capture all that is involved. For example, talking and reading about music are also important activities in consuming music (Larsen *et al.*, 2009). If, in addition, one also acknowledges that the music product can be an artist, venue and associated paraphernalia (see Chapter 3), then the consumption of the music product must necessarily go beyond listening. Finally, this conceptualization does not help us to identify or understand how the experience of engaging with music differs if one does it as an audience member, as a fan, or as a consumer. Thus, a clearer understanding is needed of what one means by consumption in the context of music.