

Daniela Petrušić

The Cultural Impact of Music on Society with a Special Emphasis on Consumerism

Abstract

Today's society, defined as the consumer society, marks an intertwining of many different cultures influencing the entire population, mostly the young. Cultural studies explore all aspects of culture, including music, and their ultimate goal is to understand the changes occurring within the framework of contemporary culture. Music has its own cultural value and makes a major impact on consumer behavior, creating and shaping the interests, motivations, and desires. Nowadays, consumerism is the dominant form of a consumer society, and it was proven that music is used in a targeted way to increase consumption. In this paper, will attempt to point out the importance of educating young people about quality music and its benefits for the formation of their musical taste.

Keywords: music, culture, consumerism, cultural studies, teaching music

Introduction

Music is ever-present in the daily life of each individual making it is almost impossible to imagine life without it. Studies show a wide range of situations in which people listen to music: while learning, running, exercising, driving, when getting up and going to sleep, during working hours, etc. Music is a social phenomenon that is present everywhere and, as the medium by which we shape our environment, it makes a great impact on society. People use music as a symbol and a label of their own values, attitudes, and self-perceptions influenced by psychological functions of music such as expressing emotions, aesthetic enjoyment, entertainment, communication, physiological response to music, and symbolic representation (Hargreaves & North, 1997).

Choosing music for listening during the day creates a picture of our musical preferences that describe the extent to which we like a particular type of music. Many studies on musical preferences have shown the importance of knowing what kind of music people like and why, as this contributes to understanding the attributes that signify their belonging to certain social groups. In everyday interactions, people use implicit theories related to musical preferences that help them make judgments and shape impressions about the people they come in contact with. In this way, music itself influences adaptation to a particular situation and therefore has a direct impact on human behavior and on society as a whole.

About cultural studies

The beginning of the 20th century sees the domination of the contemporary media – newspapers, film, radio, and television, which separate high (elite) and popular cultures (Duda, 2002). A modern, consumer society based on mass

communication has imposed new obligations on culture. The demand of the public and users is increasingly moving towards a kind of combination of art and entertainment, towards the entertainment industry of the mass media, in which art has also been integrated.

Cultural studies emerged as a reaction to British positivist sociology and social circumstances (the emergence of popular, mass, global, consumerist culture, the society of the spectacle) and due to the lack of readiness of the then disciplines to deal with new problems. David Beard and Kenneth Gloag define cultural studies as “a generalization that encompasses all aspects of researching culture, including music” (Beard & Gloag, 2005, p. 45). Many theories that have so far been classified under cultural studies are extremely stimulating for rethinking social phenomena in a new way (Bezinović, 2004). Foucault criticizes the ruling discourse because he believes that it is necessary to deconstruct the existing knowledge to arrive at the basic assumptions on which there lies what we think we know. He believes a social intellectual should be redefined and able to reexamine not only other people's systems of thought but also her/his own ideas and attitudes. Cultural studies do not have a single discourse or a single study methodology making it very difficult to give a uniform definition that would cover a wide area of cultural studies practice (Foucault, 1994). A very important aspect of cultural studies is that they are often understood as an interdisciplinary field that explores culture, and are most often associated with popular culture and popular music. A permanent determinant of cultural studies is the effort to establish an active relationship with the times in which we live, i.e. the pursuit of the contemporary (Duda, 2002), and their ultimate intention is to understand the changes that occur within contemporary culture as a projection of the opposing models of representation and diverse lifestyles and the opposing communication strategies.

The cultural value of music

Observing music in today's society is inevitable if wanting to describe that society because music is a medium through which people form and express their identity and as such plays a major role in society as a central part of the social system. Music is a symbol of connecting people and their values based on shared experiences. It is an important component of society as a means by which certain groups of people define themselves and their relationship to the rest of the world (Frith, 1987).

Popular and art music represent two different musical cultures. Moreover, popular music is associated with the concept of subculture. Music serves to fundamentally establish the identity of certain subcultural groups since a particular form of popular music can be chosen as one of the elements in a series of core values with which a subcultural group identifies itself (Edgar & Sedgwick, 1999). Popular music certainly plays an important role in the development of popular culture and art and it found a wide application due to the new media, yet listening to music did not thereby gain a new value. With the advent of mass media and the increasingly diversified entertainment industry, mass culture is being created over time, and music loses its ideological background and meaning becoming just another in a series of commodity products of the entertainment industry that strive to unification, thus erasing the differences among different styles of music.

Nevertheless, popular music, as a foundation for the development of many music directions and styles, has become a medium which communicates and creates new cultural meanings and symbols (Krnić, 2006).

Art music occupies very little space in radio and television programs, which is probably one of the reasons for the absence of a critical attitude of young adults towards low-quality music and their being prone to media manipulation. Dobrota and Tomić-Ferić in their research on the sociocultural aspects of musical preferences start from the premise that the entire music, including art music, is a social construct, and it is therefore necessary to observe it from both social and cultural aspect. It is not reasonable to require the young to listen to exclusively art music, yet from the standpoint of music pedagogy, during education it is necessary to appeal for the familiarization of the young with valuable musical pieces which will help them develop their musical tastes. Only in this way it is possible to educate them as cultivated listeners with developed criteria for evaluating any music type and style (Dobrota & Tomić-Ferić, 2006).

The carriers of new cultural aspirations, inseparable from music, form a diffuse group from different civic strata and age groups in which young people still dominate and through music express intolerance towards the conventional civic way of life. What determines the culture of the young is a common experience that creates a common problem, but also finds common solutions (Juvančić, 1997).

The influence of music on consumerism

One of the main characteristics of today's society is consumerism, and consumption as a way of life is a symbol of success. Nowadays, consumerism has become the center of social life, consumption being the central preoccupation of culture. The most important principle of consumerism is found in an economic ideology that encourages and advocates the permanent acquisition of goods and services to the greatest extent possible (Boga, 2016).

Today, the function of music is much more than pure entertainment, because music, due to its far-reaching distribution possibilities, determines the sound environment and as such has a significant impact on an individual's psyche, behavior and way of thinking. Music in multimedia is a reliable and tested instrument which in many ways influences the perception. Its effects must be carefully considered because music creates emotions, attracts attention, conveys both implicit and explicit messages, and helps people keep information (Zander, 2006). It has been proven that music has a direct impact on consumerism, i.e. on the behavior of consumers when buying. Many studies have shown that musical preferences vary depending on age, and responses to music generally differ in terms of gender as well. Women prefer slower and quieter music, while men prefer faster and louder music, regardless of genre (Peretti & Swenson, 1974). A survey conducted by Yalch and Spangenberg found that customers made more unplanned purchases while music was playing in the background as opposed to when music was in the foreground. Genres such as classical music and jazz are generally considered more complex and valuable than popular music genres. Consumer response to a particular piece of music often depends on individual musical knowledge or personal memories that a particular song can generate (Yalch & Spangenberg, 2000).

Music has a cognitive reality related to the subjectivity of the listener's perception. Consumers within the service environment may show a tendency for familiar music they heard before. It has been shown that background and silent music have a greater impact on consumerism, making people slowly move in the markets following the slow music tempo, and quieter music creates a pleasant atmosphere which keeps people linger in the store and makes them spend more. Consumerism is the dominant pattern of consumer society, and culture has a great influence on consumer behavior because it creates and shapes interests, motives, and desires.

Conclusion

Music has become very popular and is available to everyone, thus young adults mostly develop their musical taste under the influence of media, which broadcast music of questionable quality. The omnipresence of music certainly has a positive effect on society, yet it inevitably has a negative one as well, due to the harmful impact of low-quality music broadcasted by the mass media. In preventing the consequences of such negative influences, a major role is played by the sociocultural and educational systems that ensure that music becomes a true cultural need of every listener (Dobrota, 2008). Popular music should be more represented in teaching as this in line with the goals of teaching music, and at the same time it is filling in the free time of young people. Therefore, the representation of popular music in teaching is very important because of the interdisciplinary approach that is certainly more interesting to students, moreover, the knowledge gained in this way is more lasting and of higher quality and this is the best way to teach the basic music significances (Dobrota, 2008). Popular music reaches a maximal level of liking much faster, mainly due to attractive lyrics, arrangements, and melodies, but after a short time it becomes uninteresting. Art music, on the other hand, is generally rejected during the first listening, but by cultivating active listening it is more comprehensively perceived and understood, which increases preferences for this type of music (Dobrota & Tomić-Ferić, 2006).

Today, music influences consumerism greatly, which mainly means the growth of attractiveness and consumption of goods and services. People generally associate purchasing with happiness and set their consumer targets in life according to the surrounding offers. These offers are greatly influenced by advertising in which music plays a significant role, as well as its presence in all service environments. I think that from the presented cultural studies on the different cultural aspects of music we can draw useful conclusions to be implemented in classes and gradually work on continuous education of young people about the importance of recognizing quality music and its impact both on individuals and the whole society.

References

- Beard, D. & Gloag, K. (2005): *Musicology: Key Concepts*. London: Routledge.
- Bezinović, I. (2004): Prema dijalogu sociologije i kulturalnih studija. *Diskrepancija*, 5(9), 55-64.

- Boga, I. (2016): Music and Consumerism: the Aesthetics of an Urban Capitalistic Society. *Bulletin of the Transilvania University of Braşov – Supplement Series VIII: Performing Arts*. Vol. 9 (58) No. 2, 41-48.
- Dobrota, S. & Tomić-Ferić, I. (2006): Sociokulturalni aspekti glazbenih preferencija studentica Studija za učitelje primarnog obrazovanja u Splitu. *Odgojne znanosti*, Vol. 8 No. 1(11), 263-278.
- Dobrota, S. (2008): *Popularna glazba, glazbena nastava i glazbeni ukus mladih*. Doktorska disertacija, Filozofski fakultet, Zagreb.
- Duda, D. (2002): *Kulturalni studiji: ishodišta i problemi*. Zagreb: AGM.
- Edgar, A. & Sedgwick, P. (Eds.) (1999): *Key Concepts in Cultural Theory*. New York: Routledge.
- Foucault, M. (1994): *Znanje i moć*. Zagreb: Globus.
- Frith, S. (1987): *Sociologija roka*. Beograd: IIC i CIDID.
- Hargreaves, D. J. & North, A. C. (1997): *The Social Psychology of Music*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Juvančić, H. (1997): *Rock, MTV i američki kulturni imperijalizam*. Zagreb: Meandar.
- Krnić, R. (2006): O kulturalnoj kritici popularne glazbe. *Društvo Istra*, Zagreb, 15(6), 1127-1149.
- Peretti, P. O. & Swenson, K. (1974): Effects of Music on Anxiety as Determined by Physiological Skin Responses. *Journal of Research in Music Education*, 22(4), 278-283.
- Yalch, R. & Spangenberg, E. (2000): The Effects of Music in a Retail Setting on Real and Perceived Shopping Times. *Journal of Business Research*, 49, 139-147.
- Zander, F. M. (2006): Musical Influences in Advertising: How Music Modifies First Impressions of Product Endorsers and Brands. *Psychology of Music*, 34(4), 465-480.

Assist. Prof. Daniela Petrušić, University of Split, Croatia