



Psychological ownership and music streaming consumption



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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 16 March 2016

Received in revised form 6 September 2016

Accepted 7 October 2016

Available online xxx

Keywords:

Psychological ownership

Impression management

Control

Place

Music streaming

ABSTRACT

Streaming is becoming the most common format from which people access, share and listen to music and it is suggested that such practices are indicative of a shift towards a 'post-ownership' economy. In the case of music, consumers may place greater value (emotional and monetary) on the physical product because of the lack of legal ownership and/or absence of perceived ownership associated with streaming. This article examines how experiences of ownership are articulated through music streaming formats via qualitative interviews and an online themed discussion group. Drawing from psychological ownership theory we identify motivations (place, identity and control), antecedents (investing the self, coming to intimately know the target, pride and controlling the target) and outcomes (loyalty, empowerment and social rewards) of psychological ownership that are evident in the consumers' experiences of music streaming. This has theoretical and managerial implications for our understanding of how consumers engage with the post-ownership economy.

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1. Introduction

The shift in consumer use from physical forms of music consumption (i.e. vinyl, cassette tapes and CDs) to digital spaces (legal – e.g. iTunes, Spotify and illegal – e.g. piracy), has attracted attention from researchers, questioning the impact this de-materialisation has on how we experience music in everyday life and use it to manage relationships, mood and our sense of self (Bull, 2006; Belk, 2013). Although the idea that music is becoming increasingly de-materialised has been challenged (Magaudda, 2011), there is still a sense that something may have been diminished with the digitalisation of music; that consuming music digitally leads to a loss in the perceived sense of ownership and relationship we have with the music product (see Bartmanski & Woodward, 2015). This potential diminishment of 'ownership' has been amplified further through the increasing use of streaming platforms (e.g. Spotify, YouTube, Apple Music) for music consumption, a business model that is based on shared access to music content. According to IFPI (2015), worldwide music streaming subscription services revenues grew by 39% in 2014 to \$1.57 billion with an estimated 41 million people paying for the premium versions of these services, a number that is increasing every year. This growth in streaming is in stark contrast to a global decline in digital downloads (–8%) and physical product sales (–8.1%).

It is only a relatively short period of time, since the invention of the phonograph, that music could be 'owned' in the same way we 'own'

possessions. While music as a means of consumption has been streamed since the invention of radio, contemporary subscription services offer unprecedented levels of choice and control over our music consumption, including when and where it is accessed. Premium versions of such applications allow the consumer access to an unlimited amount of music (ad-free) with the option to download their favourite albums to their devices. However, payment is not conducive (in a legal sense) to any form of ownership as streaming differs from the 'personal ownership model employed by other digital services, such as the iTunes store' (Richardson, 2014: 22). This approach to accessing music is similar in business structure to what is seen as an outdated media consumption model of renting movies or borrowing books from a library albeit without the added tangibility of the actual book or video (see Dixon, 2013).

It is this emphasis on de-materialisation in a digitalised world and the increasing dominance of streaming in other forms of media consumption (e.g. Netflix) as well as collaborative models in other industries (e.g. Uber) that has led to the insistence from some commentators (e.g. Belk, 2014: 1599) that we are entering a 'post-ownership economy'. Consequently, this study seeks to understand the experience of the consumer in this context using the theoretical framework of psychological ownership (Pierce, Kostova, & Dirks, 2003) with music streaming as a focus. As there have been calls for further empirical research 'to address the emergence of psychological ownership in particular types of situation and contexts or for particular types of ownership targets' (Pierce et al., 2003:103), and requests to consider the marketing outcomes of psychological ownership (Jussila, Tarkiainen, Sarstedt, & Hair, 2015), this study seeks to attend to these issues.

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Utilising a two-stage qualitative approach we find that the participants experience motivations (identity, place, efficacy and effectance) and antecedents (investment of the self, coming to intimately know the target, pride and controlling the target) of psychological ownership through contemporary music streaming practices. Participants use such platforms to organise their music consumption, manage and project their identity and establish a sense of control in their everyday routine. We present evidence that participants develop a sense of loyalty to particular streaming applications, experience feelings of empowerment and can attain social rewards through consumption. We argue that such findings illustrate many similarities to the use of traditional music formats. The key difference in a music streaming context is the element of control that such practices afford in relation to: the presentation of self and management of mood. Managerial and theoretical implications are discussed.

2. Literature review: psychological ownership

Pierce et al. (2003) argue that we can cultivate strong feelings of ownership for both material and immaterial possessions and that ownership is not necessarily tantamount to legality. Consequently, from a music consumption context psychological ownership can be used to examine our relationships with a variety of material products (e.g. CDs, vinyl), immaterial services (digital downloading, music streaming) and even particular artists, genres or abstract ideas. This sense of perceived ownership has been explored in psychology (developmental and social) sociology, anthropology, animal behaviour, geography and in consumer behaviour. For instance, Belk (1988) has played a crucial role in developing explanations of the relationships we have with possessions, how we project our identity through ownership of objects and expand our sense of self through consumption. This area of literature is sometimes referred to as psychological ownership, defined by Pierce et al. (2003: 86) as ‘the state in which individuals feel as though the target of ownership or a piece of that target is “theirs” (i.e., “it is mine!”). Drawing from over a hundred years of research Pierce and colleagues have developed a comprehensive conceptual model that considers the motivations of psychological ownership (efficacy and effectance, enhancing self-identity and having a place to dwell) and the antecedents (controlling the ownership target, investing the self in the target, coming to intimately know the target and pride [see Kirk, Swain, & Gaskin, 2015]). Pierce and colleagues argue that the motivations of psychological ownership can be experienced simultaneously and that the routes to psychological ownership can be both complimentary and additive. Importantly, they also identify potential outcomes of psychological ownership which are discussed below. This framework is used as a lens to explore the consumption of music streaming.

2.1. Efficacy and effectance: controlling the ownership target

Dittmar (1992) argues that one of the main motivations driving psychological ownership is gaining control over one’s environment and achieving desired outcomes through possession. Possession grants an individual a sense of power and drives the need for effectance. ‘Exploration of, and the ability to control, one’s environment gives rise to feelings of efficacy and pleasure, which stem from “being the cause” and having altered the environment through one’s control-actions.’ (Pierce et al., 2003: 89). This sense of control over an ownership target is an antecedent to increased feelings of psychological ownership. Bull has demonstrated how the introduction of the iPod has allowed for music users to control and integrate music strategically into their everyday lives, ‘fine tuning the relationship between mood, volition, music and the environment in ways that previous generations of mobile sound technologies were unable to do’ (Bull, 2006: 136). This raises questions about how consumers have incorporated more recent technological advances (i.e. streaming services) into their music consumption practices where the level of choice and control is even greater; increasing the

likelihood of efficacy to effectance. Kirk et al. (2015) have proposed that consumers who use new technologies that encourage discovery and provide opportunities for control and individualisation are likely to experience enhanced feelings of psychological ownership.

2.2. Identity: investing the self in the target

Interacting with and perceptions of controlling the target of psychological ownership affords a sense of pride (Kirk et al., 2015) and relates to the motivation of enhancing self-identity through psychological ownership. Consumer research has been at the forefront of identity research demonstrating the role that material goods play in developing and understanding the self (McCracken, 1986), expressing identity to others through the symbols of material objects (Levy, 1959) and ensuring a continuity of the self (Price, Arnould, & Folkman Curasi, 2000). Music is often used as an example of a consumer ‘good’ that is crucial to our sense of identity. For example, Bartmanski and Woodward discuss the importance of vinyl records as an expression of the self, even in the context of the digital age where such possession is not a requirement to access music. The material aspects of products such as vinyl allows users to signify their cultural consumption to others and ‘affords the crystallization of sense of self with a history stretching back in time.’ (Bartmanski & Woodward, 2015: 107). The symbolic significance of music as cultural artefact provides the motivation for psychological ownership.

Furthermore, the route to perceived ownership of music, in this case the physical music product, is enhanced because of the investment of the self (Belk, 1988) and the psychic energy that goes into collecting, accessing, listening to and sharing music. Potentially there is a loss of relationship with music as a consequence of moving from physical products to digital consumption where the material aspects of psychological ownership are not as prominent (Bartmanski & Woodward, 2015). How do we invest our sense of self in contemporary music consumption practices such as streaming? Does this de-materialisation of the music ‘product’ lessen the symbolic power of music to our sense of self? Belk (2013) argues that digital, sharing and access modes of consumption can provide valuable resources for constructing identity if not greater opportunities in which identity can be controlled and communicated to a greater number of people. However, he is still inclined to frame CDs and vinyl etc. as a more authentic way of listening to music and more important to our extended self than their digital counterparts.

2.3. Place: coming to intimately know the target

Pierce et al. (2003) also suggest that individuals who find a strong sense of identification and develop a considerable emotional connection with particular possessions come to see them as a safe place or a home. This is another key motivation for psychological ownership. Citing Porteous (1976), they argue that such possessions can be ‘thought of from the perspective of a fixed point of reference around which the individual structures a significant portion of his or her reality’ (2003: 91). In this way the physical music product allows for control over space as well as the assertion of identity. However, the digitalisation of music and the now increased emphasis on access-based consumption formats raises questions about how and where consumers structure their music consumption and what the significance is of place in contemporary consumption.

A key antecedent that can influence the perceived sense of ownership is the psychic energy that goes into ‘coming to intimately know the target’ (Pierce et al., 2003: 92). This is observed in record collectors who despite owning vinyl, cassettes or CDs that were mass produced came to know the unique scratches or idiosyncrasies of their individual copies. As Bolin writes: ‘It is not any version of a certain song or album, but the specific copy of a specific record (the vinyl copy with the original cover) that is the trigger of memories and emotional states’. (2015: 7). Without a physical copy questions regarding the influence that the

digitalisation of music has on the sense of place are raised. Is it possible to come to intimately know the target of ownership if the target is a music streaming application?

2.4. Outcomes of psychological ownership

Why is psychological ownership important? A key development of the work of Pierce and colleagues is the addition of the outcomes and effects of psychological ownership, both positive (e.g. citizenship and personal sacrifice) and negative (e.g. distress and deviant behaviour). From a marketing perspective an enhanced sense of psychological ownership will lead to long-term loyalty, greater word-of-mouth, customer empowerment, feelings of satisfaction, and the increased likelihood of engaging in behaviours that protect and improve the 'object' of ownership (Jussila et al., 2015). There is, however, a lack of empirical consumer research which demonstrates the potential outcomes of psychological ownership. The extent to which this applies in a music streaming context is unknown. Similarly if, as suggested by these authors, psychological ownership can lead to a greater willingness to pay, the findings of this research will be advantageous to those in an increasingly competitive music streaming market.

3. Method

The aim of this study is to explore how motivations and antecedents of psychological ownership, associated with physical music products, are understood in the context of contemporary digital formats of music, particularly music streaming. Music streaming is a relatively new consumption practice and has not as of yet been fully explored in marketing and consumer academic research. Consequently, the exploratory nature of the context deemed a qualitative interpretative approach as most suitable to reveal the insights and depth required to meet the research question. This is also because research on digital music consumption has tended mostly to be quantitative in nature; placing emphasis on measuring music piracy and identifying key factors that can be causally related to such practices (e.g. Coyle, Gould, Gupta, & Gupta, 2009; Shanahan and Hyman, 2010; Yang, Wang, & Mourali, 2015). This approach extends previous research regarding experiences of ownership in consumer culture contexts (e.g. Belk, 1988; Beverland, Farrelly, & Ai Ching Lim, 2008).

Data was collected using a two-stage approach: firstly via an online themed discussion forum with nineteen participants (Phase 1) and secondly through in-depth interviews with a further sixteen participants (Phase 2). The main criteria for recruiting participants was that they had previously used music streaming services. It became apparent following analysis of both sample groups that all participants had at one point owned CDs or downloaded music legally or illegally and that there was an evident transition from physical to digital consumption and from legal ownership (both physical and digital) to streaming. Although on occasion some of the participants still consumed music via CDs, vinyl or digital downloads the majority of the sample predominantly used streaming services such as Spotify as the main format for consuming music. Further details of the sample can be found in Table 1. Participants of the online themed discussion were recruited by a specialist market research company who identified participants that differentially used music streaming platforms (i.e. premium or free version). There was a relatively equal gender split of participants in the discussion forum that were located in a variety of cities across the United Kingdom. Respondents in the discussion forum were previously unknown to one another and posted comments under pseudonyms to ensure anonymity.

Using a mixture of purposive (Merriam, 2009) and snowball sampling techniques (Bryman, 2015) we recruited interviewees from the Republic of Ireland and Scotland. Initial participants were recruited on the basis that they had previously or currently use music streaming

Table 1
Participant sample.

Participant	Age	Gender	Pay for streaming	Phase
Zeek17	25–34	Female	Yes	Discussion forum
Blue 6	25–	Male	Yes	Discussion forum
Byebye1	18–	Male	Yes	Discussion forum
Dano	18–24	Male	Yes	Discussion forum
BicBerdy	25–34	Male	Yes	Discussion forum
Pauoil18	18–24	Female	Yes	Discussion forum
Sheepcm	25–34	Female	Yes	Discussion forum
Maeve314	25–34	Female	Yes	Discussion forum
Kithi	25–34	Female	Yes	Discussion forum
Rachycake	25–34	Female	No	Discussion forum
Wnand	25–34	Male	No	Discussion forum
Ryey	25–34	Male	No	Discussion forum
Blackdoor88	25–34	Female	No	Discussion forum
Brd85	25–34	Female	No	Discussion forum
ColeEH	25–34	Female	No	Discussion forum
Catcall	18–24	Female	No	Discussion forum
Hello71	18–24	Female	No	Discussion forum
Blue_lagoon	25–34	Male	No	Discussion forum
Downthedog	25–34	Male	No	Discussion forum
Gina	22	Female	Yes	Interview
Dermot	27	Male	Yes	Interview
Clara	28	Female	No	Interview
Niall	28	Male	Yes	Interview
John	27	Male	Yes	Interview
Ryan	27	Male	Yes	Interview
Elaine	30	Female	Yes	Interview
Greg	29	Male	No	Interview
Peter	30	Male	Yes	Interview
Jose	32	Male	No	Interview
Chris	19	Male	No	Interview
Eoin	29	Male	Yes	Interview
Ella	19	Female	Yes	Interview
Scott	20	Male	Yes	Interview
Jay	28	Female	Yes	Interview
Dora	25	Male	Yes	Interview

services. A small number of interview participants were asked to recommend others for this study who also used streaming services that would allow for the demographics of the sample to be broadened. For example, there was initial trouble in finding females older than 25 for the study so suggestions were sought from interview participants. Those taking part were asked not to reveal the purpose of the study to other participants or discuss the content of their interviews. Members of the discussion group were equally divided between those who paid for subscription services and those who only accessed the freemium version, to develop a broad understanding of the different ways in which consumers' stream music. The interviewees mostly paid for music streaming subscription services with Spotify being the most popular application used. Discussion group participants were paid £20 in Amazon vouchers for their time and the interviewees were paid £10 in Amazon vouchers which reflected the demands placed on the participants. The names of the participants have been changed to protect their anonymity.

3.1. Phase 1

The online themed discussion forum was facilitated by the authors and took place over the course of a week. On each day two particular themes would be discussed with the participants. These themes included for example music and mood, music and community, artist compensation and sharing. Each theme would start with an initial question from one of the facilitators to generate responses and interaction between all of those taking part. Although the discussion was relatively unstructured and informal, the role of the researcher was to guide the conversation and to encourage participants to elaborate on some of their answers. There was also the option of using private messaging if further explanation was required on a particular topic without disturbing the flow of the discussion. Respondents were asked to raise any issues in relation to their contemporary music consumption experiences that they

considered to have been overlooked. Overall, including private messages, there were over 400 posts.

The transcripts of the discussion group were reviewed by both authors and data was coded into a number of key themes: identity management, ownership, emotional relationship with music, empowerment and sense of place. These were used to develop a topic guide for the in-depth interviews. Key issues could be discussed in greater detail in the interviews than was possible in the online discussion forum and participants were encouraged to share their experiences of contemporary music consumption in a way that allowed for the exploration of any emergent themes.

3.2. Phase 2

The interviews were structured into three parts. The first focused on comparing and contrasting particular formats that participants used to listen to music, exploring topics such as quality, quantity, tangibility and how they source new music. The second part of the interview focused on aspects of ownership and identity, examining topics such as how the participants create and share music. The final part of the interview explored the participants' emotional and communal experiences of contemporary forms of music. Half of the interviews were conducted via Skype, an increasingly common method of data collection (see Hanna, 2012) with the other half conducted in person at the convenience of the individual respondent. The interviews averaged 51 min in length. Following the interviews, all of the data (including the online discussion group) underwent a second process of analysis where additional sub-themes were identified. Coding was based on the framework of psychological ownership (e.g. investing the self in the target) as well as inductively (Spiggle, 1994) through the identification of key themes and patterns in the data (e.g. materiality, outcomes of perceived ownership).

4. Findings

Drawing from psychological ownership theory (Pierce et al., 2003) we structure the findings and discussion of motivations and antecedents around the outcomes of loyalty, empowerment and social rewards identified in the context of music streaming consumption. Although we focus on how the relationship between specific motivations (e.g. to find a place) and antecedents (e.g. coming to intimately know the target) that can lead to increased psychological ownership as well as specific outcomes such as loyalty it is important to note that no one single motivation or antecedent leads to psychological ownership or one particular outcome. The antecedents are complimentary and additive and the participants do not necessarily have to undertake all of the routes identified by Pierce and colleagues to experience psychological ownership. Before we explore the motivations and antecedents in detail, we introduce the target of ownership (music streaming applications) and discuss the role of materiality in distinguishing the different formats the participants use for music consumption and how this shapes their perceptions of ownership.

4.1. Materiality and the target of ownership

The participants predominantly use digital formats to listen to music and in particular the streaming application Spotify. They cite the practical advantages of less clutter, more choice, easier access, better mobility and greater reliability when comparing streaming to physical and other digital formats (e.g. iTunes) that they have now mostly disregarded. Previous research on contemporary music consumption often laments the lack of tangibility and sense of psychological ownership that has been lost with the shift in emphasis towards digital consumption (e.g. Fox, 2004; Bartmanski & Woodward, 2015). Despite the respondents' preference for digital formats many of them reminisce about their use

of CDs and vinyl, identifying the very tangible qualities that have almost made them defunct in the modern age:

To me a CD/tape or vinyl is more personal to own as you can actually feel it and have it in the house. Also the artwork on some of the vinyl, CDs and tapes can be quite special which gives it its own uniqueness compared to downloading or streaming music.

[(Ryey, male, 25–34).]

The space that the physical product takes up and the personal nature of an individual's record or CD collection are motivations for psychological ownership that are very much linked to the materiality of the physical product. However, similarly to Magaudda (2011: 15) we find that the digitalisation of music does not necessarily translate to 'less materiality in the actual practice of the listener.' Material possessions (e.g. speakers, earphones, laptops, phones) still play a crucial role in the music consumption process:

It is very important for me to have a decent laptop, tablet and smartphone to move music between devices, and a decent download speed to make it as smooth and speedy as possible.

[(Maeve314, female, 25–34).]

Additionally, the only discernible differences in sound quality of music streaming applications compared to physical music recordings are attributed by the participants to the quality of the objects (e.g. earphones, speakers) that are used to listen to music in streaming formats:

I don't really [notice a difference between CD and Spotify]. But then I don't think I listen to music in the best quality. I guess if I'm listening to my Sony headphones which are better quality than the in-ear ones, they're crap, you might notice a little bit of restriction, a little bit of bandwidth restriction... It depends what you're listening through. I mean, we haven't got very good speakers in our office so you can hear restrictions on good speakers, I think. But it just depends, people listen to music on their things now because they've got those headphones. Not the Beats, they're crap, but other big headphones.

[(Elaine, 30).]

This reaffirms the importance of material possessions in facilitating the tangibility of immaterial consumption. These experiences may address issues of quality and convenience that have been raised regarding contemporary mediums of consumption but it does not distinguish consumption via digital downloads (legal and illegal) and music streaming from the perspective of psychological ownership. Additionally it does not create a clear picture of how such new consumption practices are understood and experienced in everyday life. The following sections will look more closely at music streaming practices.

4.2. Loyalty: motivations and antecedents

One of the marketing outcomes of increased psychological ownership identified by Jussila et al. (2015) is loyalty. For some participants, the separation from their CD and vinyl collections was easy because of the advantages of digital music (Mc Court, 2005; Kibby, 2009). For others the psychological attachment to their collections and investment of the self with particular genres or artists means they feel a sense of duty or loyalty to maintain a collection they invested (emotionally and financially) in and to support a genre and/or artist, despite admitting they are unlikely to ever actually listen to the physical music product:

There are bands that I would classify as my favourite bands that I would probably buy their record to support them. I'd see myself maybe downloading it illegally and probably buying it at the same time... I own all the CDs of a Scottish band called Idlewild, they're one of my favourite bands...you like them, obviously, their music, but you've kind

of maybe had an association with them for a while, I wouldn't do it with anyone new.

[(Peter, 30).]

Such possessions are very much a part of the self and are a source of authentic pride, or pride attributed to effort (Kirk et al., 2015) which can lead to loyalty for some:

You know the CD collection took pride of place on my wall.

[(Niall, 28).]

These experiences of consuming physical music products are evidence of the close connections participants have with material possessions and are used as examples in which to diminish the value of music consumption via digital formats. This is especially true of music streaming where there is no legal ownership of the music that is accessed. Furthermore, the fragmentation of music consumption practices and the increasing movement away from record collections and the physical space they occupy raises questions about how music consumers establish a sense of place and control over their music consumption. Many of the participants had previously downloaded music illegally from a variety of different websites and applications and could never really organise their legal downloads in one space that was convenient to them from both an access and financial perspective. However it is evident that the participants were attracted to applications such as Spotify because of the motivation to establish a sense of place (Kron, 1983), a fixed point from which to structure their music consumption. In establishing this sense of place they come to intimately know the target:

I like how organised everything is on Spotify, I don't have to spend much time looking for something, I know where everything is or at least where to find it. I like everything to look good and the cover art to be in the right sections. If I download from YouTube Convertor, it doesn't do that, it's a mess, I don't have the time and iTunes has always driven me mad, not very user friendly and why would I bother paying for individual songs now when I can stream them?

[(Dora, female, 25).]

Consequently, participants such as Dora have established a place in which to structure their music consumption. This can lead to loyalty of particular streaming platforms because of utilitarian factors that Dora identifies such as the reduction in time spent searching for music, having everything in the one place and the user friendliness of streaming platforms, as well as aesthetic and emotional factors such as cover art and the sense of place it provides for her music consumption. There was reluctance amongst the participants to switch providers even when potentially superior alternatives were offered because of the time spent coming to know the target and the investment of the self in such applications. This is a key antecedent of psychological ownership (Pierce et al., 2003). Consumers become familiar with the user interface and the navigation system, connecting with friends who use similar platforms and establishing a social media presence through them. Again, the importance of material products such as phones and laptops in supporting the interface and consequently facilitating this sense of place is stressed:

P (Peter, 30): I think I've been that invested in Spotify for so long that I like the setup, I know how it works. I (interviewer): You say invested, what do you mean by invested? P: Just the amount of time, obviously you've learned how it works from playing about with it for four or five years, you've learned you can do this with tracks, like crossfade tracks, and you can make your playlists quite easily, you know how to do this and you can make stuff available offline. It's available multiplatform so I know if I've my laptop I can sync all that up and if I'm on my phone it will sync right across on my phone, so I can do that. I just couldn't be bothered doing it all again, I think, with a new platform.

The time and effort that is invested in personalising such streaming apps is important. In particular, many of the participants spend much

time poring over particular songs and developing specialised playlists. Much of this activity is driven by the streaming applications which use consumer data to generate personalised suggestions which enhances user experience and encourages further engagement with such applications:

Through Spotify, if you go onto one of your favourite artists, you will see some other artist suggested that they sound like, and then you can read into their background and you click that artist, click a song, go in, see who sounds like them, select a couple of their most played songs, see if I like it. And if I list out ten artists, an hour later you discover a couple of albums and artists and maybe I discover a couple of songs that I like [and] they then go onto my playlist.

[(Niall, 28).]

The psychic or mental energy that goes into organising music consumption is indicative of how participants can generate strong and ultimately loyal relationships with particular streaming platforms. Furthermore, in the following sections we will explore how specific use of the features of streaming applications, focusing on particular aspects of consumer control and creativity, can further increase the sense of psychological ownership and lead to feelings of empowerment and social rewards.

4.3. Empowerment: motivations and antecedents

Pierce et al. (2003) identify efficacy and effectance as motivation for psychological ownership. Dittmar (1992) suggests that we experience a perception of ownership over an object when it is used to gain an element of control over our environment. The data indicates that participants are listening to music more often than they did previously (for some 6 or 7 h a day), because of the greater volume of music available to them on streaming platforms. Consequently, a large proportion of their music consumption is integrated into their everyday routine and is used to manage and maintain their mood throughout the day. For example, participants frequently cited how they could navigate the daily commute and work tasks through the use of carefully constructed playlists:

... a day for me is a working day anyway, so I'll start off by commuting, and I would be listening to music as soon as I got onto the Luas [tram] so basically I'd start listening to it then and there and then start work and listen to it less, and very boringly start listening to it again as soon as I got on the tram for commuting back that night.

[(Eoin, 29).]

Music consumption has almost always been a feature of such everyday activities, used to shape everyday environment, through workers making their own music to help them through the day, to the advent of devices such as the radio in kitchens, offices and factory floors and more recently through the use of personal mobilised devices such as the Walkman and the iPod (Bull, 2006). However, it is the greater level of choice and convenience that respondents report concerning their use of contemporary streaming formats that distinguishes it from other mobile formats of music consumption. This leads to both greater control and integration of music into the everyday routine:

I (interviewer): You said about your mood, what sort of mood would you be in if you were listening to the acoustic playlist? N (Niall, 28): Most likely I would be at work with important things to do. Where I can have that as a background and it won't necessarily interrupt what it is I'm trying to achieve. I can focus on the tasks I have to do while listening to that music.

Niall also uses his music consumption to navigate other daily routines such as exercise. Here the choice of music reflects the need for him to take on the ideal mood that will help him achieve tasks that

need more energy. The development of specific playlists for work and particularly exercise was common amongst the participants. Music was also used to navigate other everyday routine tasks such as domestic chores:

...ironing or hoovering, two different things, different moods, the calm playlist for ironing, party playlist for hoovering.... If I am doing other things I find it quite hard to just sit and listen to music. I have to be doing something else. Studying, cleaning and if I am like running or at the gym, any sort of like fitness or cleaning or boring things like admin, bits and pieces then I will listen to music.

[(Gina, 22).]

The participants also explained how they accessed playlists created by others or even sourced playlists developed by the streaming applications:

I have a fast rock playlist that I listen to when I am pissed off or want to vent or whatever – I have always leant back to that sort of music even before streaming or whatever you want to call it. I used to get sick of them [his iPod playlists] though and was never arsed downloading or putting new stuff on, easier now I suppose. What I do like is that thing they have where you can type in a mood and they will recommend songs and playlists. Some of them are cheesy like 'Monday pick me up' or whatever but sometimes you find good lists for stress or what not and I have found it to be scarily good in getting me into that headspace I need....

[(John, 27)]

This is demonstrative of how the use of such music technologies can have a civilising impact (Elias, 2008) on individuals as they draw from evolving marketplace practices to establish a more controlled self. This control over mood and to an extent the spaces in which they work and exercise can facilitate strong feelings of psychological ownership for music streaming applications that were perhaps deemed to be diminished in the digital age of music consumption:

Honestly, I would be lost without my Spotify it helps me get through the working day and I don't know how I survived without all my playlists and the access to that level of choice.

[(Dora, 25).]

Another feature of the participants' consumption is the amount of creative effort that is put into the production of music content, in particular playlists. Pierce et al. (2003) argue that we are likely to feel empowered and develop a sense of ownership over that which we have created or made some sort of contribution to through our labour. This investment of the self through organisation of music consumption and creativity and control in production of content like playlists is not anything that is particularly new (e.g. mixed tapes). However, streaming technologies have made such practices easier to share, more convenient and widespread and hence allow for greater potential in managing and communicating identity through music.

Despite the key role that music streaming formats evidently play in their everyday lives, the lack of tangibility and the access-based nature of streaming does not lend itself to the same sense of security in psychological ownership as the physical music product. The following excerpt is in direct response to the question of whether participants feel a sense of psychological ownership when streaming music:

When I download digital music and save it to a drive I do feel like I own it, but when it is streamed I feel like I only have it for the duration of the song. Purchasing music on CD, tape or vinyl does give you a more tangible feeling of owning music.

[(Maeve, 314, 25–34)]

Maeve understands the dichotomy of control in relation to the content accessed and created. This is because there is a constant threat of

uncertainty regarding access to the music the consumers demand. This uncertainty relates to the ever-changing licensing agreements with artists and a streaming market that is in constant flux (see Watkins, Denegri-Knott, & Molesworth, 2016). Consequently, downloads and playlists that have been created and the psychic energy that has been invested in such applications are at risk. Greater knowledge of this reality can potentially lead to lower levels of psychological ownership but more information concerning consumer knowledge and opinions on such an issue is needed to explore this point further.

Regardless, it is still evident that the participants have experienced a sense of empowerment through music streaming applications because of the space in which it allows them to create and share content and the perception of control they have over their consumption in their everyday routine. In the next section we will explore the relationship between identity and psychological ownership, drawing further from the theme of control.

4.4. Social rewards: motivations and antecedents

The symbolic power of physical ownership is crucial to our identities and collections of CDs and vinyl continue to play a role in signifying our identity to others, acting 'as a tangible presentation of one's taste in music' (Brown & Sellen, 2006: 45) that can be presented to others:

In a way people who have lots of CDs and vinyl are proper music fans as they will have a main genre of things. My dad has 100 s of CDs, all of them jazz, nothing else. It shows like a passion I think. A real interest in a particular thing I think.

[(Gina, 22)]

Bartmanski and Woodward (2015) have commented on the cultural capital (Hall, 1996) that can be attained from consuming music via physical formats such as vinyl, perhaps explaining its recent renaissance. The time taken to source music in the physical format and the social and ritualistic aspects of this consumption practice are somewhat lost when one streams music. Jose considers both the investment of the self in his record collection and time he spent coming to intimately know the target, in this case the CD:

I miss it because in this way it was a hobby. Now it's not a hobby. It's just listening to music. Then it was many smaller things, interesting things. Now you have everything on hand. Again something I don't like with downloading [and streaming] all this amount of music, for example I can download [via streaming platforms] a whole discography from ACDC, fifty albums, I don't know how many. But I won't enjoy listening to all of this stuff because there are so many, I have to search to find the good ones. Previously if you bought a CD you would examine very thoroughly.

[(Jose, 32).]

The difficulty in locating music outside the mainstream has been somewhat absolved by digital and in particular streaming formats. The participants are attracted to digital music because of the level of choice and ease of access it provides. However, for some it negates the time and emotional investment that distinguishes them as music fans:

Back in the day it was harder to find exactly what you wanted, but more rewarding. Nowadays if you stumble across a hot new track or even hot new artist you won't be alone. It'll be an experience you share with dozens, maybe hundreds or thousands of other [people].

[(Blue_Lagoon, male, 25–34).]

The effort that goes into sourcing and organising music is identity work which allows an individual to manage and project an identity that is synonymous with knowledge and passion regarding music. Again, the materiality of the physical music product is used as a symbol in which to construct and project this image for potential social rewards.

However, digital spaces such as Spotify can be also used effectively for identity management purposes where music taste is not dependent on tangible possessions but the visibility of activity via streaming platforms:

G: You can see what they are listening to on Facebook, on their Spotify, like trying to prove a point to people... what I will do is on Twitter, I would post links up, like YouTube links that I have found, I quite enjoy live lounge so like covers of things and I think other people will enjoy it. Some of them are so good and I don't think people will have heard them. And on Facebook, mainly on people's walls, I will send it directly to people and say you will really love this or watch this video. I wouldn't put the Beatles up, I think people know them already haha, kind of a big deal.

[(Gina, 22).]

The visibility of activity and social media features of streaming applications allow for greater identity signalling and management through music consumption than other digital formats (e.g. downloading):

Another thing about Spotify, it can be annoying sometimes alright, but it is good you can share stuff much easier with the lads and you can see what they are listening to and throw some tunes into a shared playlist for a party or whatever. That is something that iTunes never caught on to or nobody ever knew how to use anyway.

[(Scott, 20).]

The ability to interact across social media platforms, post links to songs and playlists and allow other users to follow the activity of your own personal streaming platform presents a number of valuable resources in which music fans can present their ideal self through music. This supports [Belk's \(2013: 486\)](#) assertion that sharing and other collaborative consumption practices in digital spaces enhance 'the sense of imagined community and aggregate extended self in a digital age'. Again, such aspects of identity management have always existed in music consumption; they have just been managed and displayed in different formats. What is significant about the use of these contemporary formats is the control that users have over how their identity is communicated. For some, they would prefer for their listening practices to remain private or at most they would selectively share or allow their followers a brief glimpse of their listening habits:

I (Interviewer): Would that bother you if, say, someone knew what you were listening to? Would it maybe influence what you were listening to yourself?E (Ella, 19): I would be [bothered]. I have such a random taste. Even when I was listening to Britney Spears the other day, but just for a laugh, and then people might think "oh, she loves that." Do you know what I mean? ... So mine is on private because I don't want anyone to see what I listen to.

However, many of the participants who allow other users to view their music listening activity on Spotify by turning the 'private session' setting off claim they do so as they are not concerned by what others think of their listening habits (guilty pleasures or otherwise). For others it presents an opportunity to showcase their taste to both friends and their wider social networks. In particular, the participants place an emphasis on drawing their peers' attention to music outside the mainstream, seemingly in an altruistic manner identifying potential artists that their friends may like but also at the same time developing an impression of themselves as taste makers, perhaps signifying what [Kirk et al. \(2015\)](#) refer to as hubristic pride. This also leads to a sense of empowerment:

It would have to be something extremely rare ... to make me feel I would actually want to share. Or otherwise there would have to be someone that I know so many of my friends are into and might not know about.

[(Ryan, 27).]

For Ryan, such feelings of pride augment feelings of psychological ownership ([Kirk et al., 2015](#)) and he reflects on the social rewards (i.e.

gaining a sense of self, praise and reinforcement) that can be attained from the content he creates:

I know I have followers, but if people are actively listening to it [the playlist], it might give me more of an incentive to keep it up to date. There'd be some sort of weird satisfaction in the fact that people enjoyed listening to your collection.

[(Ryan, 27).]

Pride, both authentic and hubristic, are also evident in the consumption of physical formats as it has already been discussed. The pride that is displayed in streaming consumption practices however has the potential to be more public in nature in comparison to the private physical product collection which is likely to strengthen the sense of pride and consequently the sense of psychological ownership ([Kirk et al., 2015](#)).

5. Discussion

This paper explored perceptions of ownership in a post-ownership/sharing economy using music streaming consumption as a focus. To the best of our knowledge only [Weijters, Goedertier, and Verstreken \(2014\)](#) and [Sinclair and Green \(2016\)](#) have investigated this context from a marketing or consumer research perspective and these studies mostly focused on streaming in the context of music piracy. The findings contribute to our understanding of how and in what ways the experience of streaming music impacts on consumer perceptions of ownership and more importantly offers insight into the outcomes of such experiences. This has implications for our understanding of how consumers engage with the post-ownership/sharing economy from both theoretical and managerial perspectives.

This empirical study of an emerging context contributes to our understanding of psychological ownership and its subsequent marketing outcomes. Previous psychological ownership studies in marketing contexts have tended to place focus on measuring the impact of specific factors on perceived ownership such as touch (e.g. [Peck & Shu, 2009](#)). [Watkins et al. \(2016\)](#) have warned against the tendency in post-ownership research to dichotomise ownership and access-based consumption and that 'recognition of an array of fragmented ownership configurations is required in order to understand new models and market systems' (2016: 45). This study takes a more in-depth approach that allows us to unpack the relationships between motivations, antecedents and outcomes in greater detail than an experimental study would permit. This has also allowed us to identify important features of the target of ownership such as the control, choice, mobility and manipulability of music streaming applications that have facilitated a sense of psychological ownership. Furthermore, we have placed particular focus on the material dimension of targets of ownership. The de-materialisation of music consumption, a point we challenge, has been cited as a potential key factor in diminishing the value in perceptions of music ownership. Additionally, the advent of access-based streaming platforms where participants have no legal ownership would seem to support such arguments. However, the identification of such psychological motivations and the evidence of key antecedents to psychological ownership (investment of the self, coming to intimately know the target, controlling the target and pride) suggest that the participants are experiencing psychological ownership. However, we have not explored how target factors such as materiality, choice and control are likely to influence different types of individuals. Future research should consider different behavioural and demographic patterns that are likely to shape perceptions of ownership. Additionally, such studies need to take a broader socio-historical emphasis to inform the individualised perspectives that such psychological theories prioritise.

The use of the theoretical framework of psychological ownership has allowed us to identify loyalty, empowerment and social rewards as outcomes of psychological ownership, addressing [Jussila et al. \(2015\)](#) call for empirical research that considers the marketing outcomes of

psychological ownership. The findings indicate that the participants come to intimately know the target (the interface) as they use music streaming applications to structure their music consumption which can also affect the psychological ownership of distal targets such as music (see He & Pierce, 2015). This added to the investment of the self in the target (the streaming application) leads to the participants developing a sense of loyalty to particular streaming applications. This was evidenced by the reluctance of participants to switch providers even when hypothetical changes to utilitarian factors such as price were put to them. While further investigation regarding the loyalty of consumers needs to be measured with a bigger sample and possibly through an experimental design, the indications of and insights into loyalty presented here should be of interest to this industry at a time of intense competition. Established organisations/brands such as Apple are taking position in an increasingly competitive marketplace where early entrants such as Spotify have already developed loyal relationships with many consumers. Consequently, for these applications it is not just about attracting the best artists or offering the most competitive prices, it is also important that they develop a user space that is easy to use and encourages consumers to spend time on it and come to know the target well. In other words, they must see it is a familiar space in which they can structure their music consumption and take ownership of it.

Another key outcome identified is the sense of empowerment that the participants experience as a consequence of being able to control the target of ownership (both the music and the streaming application) to create content, project their music identity, control mood and manage their daily routine. Aspects of control in identity and mood have always been a feature of music consumption but it is the level of choice and availability in access-based streaming formats that is particularly illuminating. However, this sense of empowerment is something that is also at risk when perceptions of ownership are low. The access-based nature of music streaming has been identified as an example of how consumers have been emancipated from the weight of ownership in the post-ownership economy (see Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012; Belk, 2014). However, Watkins et al. (2016) argue that aspects of this empowerment have been overstated as consumers may not be able to control or exploit the product of their own labour through using such services because of the lack of rights that consumers ultimately have when it comes to such content. Consequently, increasing perceptions of control that consumers have over the content they create on streaming profiles could be crucial. How to create such perceptions of control though is a difficult question. The answer seems to rest in empowering consumers even further through providing spaces in which they can create and share content but further research is needed. In addition, in other post-ownership/sharing economy contexts it is recommended that some level of assurance and security is provided regarding the content that consumers produce to enhance the sense of perceived ownership.

The sharing of content and the projection of identity on social media is seen as crucial to entice networks of consumers and is linked to Spotify's initial success (Dewan & Ramaprasad, 2014). The participants used social media to share music with others in the pursuit of social rewards (i.e. recognition, status, sense of self), or possibly as a consequence of citizenship, an outcome of psychological ownership identified by Pierce et al. (2003). A feature of such activities was the perceived level of control that participants had over who could see their music consumption activity and what exactly they could see. This also speaks to the potential empowering features of such consumption practices as well as facilitating a space in which social rewards could potentially be attained. However, the ultimate importance that participants place on the social networking features of particular music streaming applications is still unknown and further research which explores the sociable aspects of contemporary music formats, focusing in particular on how different networks develop and interact, would be of great value. This is of particular interest given the problems platforms such

as Apple Music have had with music-based social networks such as Ping and Connect (Leswing, 2016). Developing a greater sense of psychological ownership in the consumer where they feel motivated to create and share content and interact with others around the target of ownership is perhaps key to building such social networks.

Acknowledgment

The authors would like to acknowledge that this research was funded by the British Academy/Leverhulme Trust (SG142059).

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