OH-MY-GOD, HOW IS THIS? OR WHAT MAKES A SONG POPULAR?

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ABSTRACT. The role of music in the history of mankind is indisputable, not only as a means of communication, but also as an added value that cannot be reproduced, because music, by its very nature, defines the present moment in an addictive way, depending on the events experienced. The diversity of musical styles and their chameleonic nature is also a major factor in the fragmentation of the consumption of musical products. However, in the music industry, there has recently been a growing trend towards intergenerational collaborations in order to reach a larger segment. One only has to think of the remix of Elton John and Dua Lipa's song *Cold heart*, which has achieved outstanding results worldwide³. The present study is based on the ValMar ft. Szikora Robi's song \hat{U} risten [Oh-My-God], in order to identify the criteria that determine the opinion of the target segment and consequently their expectations of a given song.

Keywords: music, consumer behaviour, attitude, positive aspects

JEL classification: M31

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³ Daw (2021), https://www.billboard.com/culture/pride/elton-john-lockdown-sessions-album-announcement-9623292/

Introduction and review of literature

Music, despite its diverse forms, is one of humanity's most universal means of expression and communication (Longfellow 1835, in Mehr et al., 2019). The universe of music is infinitely complex and can evoke an unlimited range of emotions, including complex emotions such as "wonder, transcendence, or nostalgia (among others)" (Vuilleumier & Trost, 2015, p. 219). Studies have also shown that music can have a positive effect not only on the quality of mental performance (Lesiuk, 2005, p. 188)⁴, but also on physical performance (Terry et al., 2020), and may also help to treat certain illnesses more effectively (White, 2001). Moreover, music has a well-defined role in business, because:

- (1) for fine dining restaurants, the role of music is significant in terms of brand personality and perception of décor (Magnini & Thelen, 2008),
- (2) in an ambiance that includes classical music, customers tend to buy more expensive wines (Areni & Kim, 1993),
- (3) "the music tempo variations can significantly affect the pace of in-store traffic flow and dollar sales volume" (Milliman, 1982, p. 86). In any case, it should be noted that music has the greatest impact on consumer spending when there is a high degree of congruency between the background music and the environment (Jacob, 2006)⁵,
- (4) music can be identified in commercials as a stimulating component (Hecker, 1984), as a significant background feature (Morris & Boone, 1998), as a peripheral persuasion cue (Park & Joung, 1986). Nevertheless, the choice of background music should take into account not only the product category of the advertisement (Allan, 2008), but also what the brand represents (Lavack et al., 2008). Moreover, the potential of music, as far as advertising is concerned, varies in terms of its intensity (Szabo, 2017) but also in terms of style and genre (Craton & Lantos, 2011; Graakjaer, 2014). For example, the inclusion of classical music in television commercials does not add value, "even for individuals whose sociodemographic backgrounds would indicate an increased preference for this music" (Kupfer, 2017, p. 44). However, it is certain that a well-chosen musical background has a significant effect on purchase intention (Ferreira, 2021), increasing the effectiveness of the company's marketing communication activities (Szabó, 2016).

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⁴ In cases where employees can decide whether or not to listen to music.

⁵ According to congruence theory, consumers will spend more if they perceive that the type of music is in line with the business environment.

Material and Method(s)

The main pillar of this study is the analysis of the song $\acute{U}risten^6$ [Oh-My-God], as the authors of the song:

- (a) Peti Marics and Milán Valkusz are the most successful and most sought-after young performers in Hungary (Tények Plusz, 2022; Dandó, 2022). Their success has not diminished over time (Tények Plusz, 2024), and they are also appearing in more and more shows (e.g. in addition, they have been featured in numerous TV programs (e.g. Asia Express 2022/contestants; Sztárban Sztár 2022/Marics Peti contestant; 2023/Marics Peti jury member, Milan Valkusz contestant; Zsákbamacska 2024/Marics Peti presenter; Megasztár 2024/Marics Peti jury member),
- (b) and Róbert Szikóra is the creator of a very distinctive style of music, i.e. the Hungarian *csiki-dam*.

In order to draw a well-defined picture of the musical product Uristen [Oh-My-God], the first step was to carry out a content analysis of the song and the video clip according to the following criteria:

- (1) use of color,
- (2) outfit of the performers,
- (3) physical evidence,
- (4) message of the song,
- (5) word choice.

The second phase was to analyze the reviews published on the song.

- 1. The research involved the analysis of all relevant comments⁷ received between 02 April 2022 and 09 November 2022 in the comment section of the song or video clip. A total of 6,203 comments were written on the music product analyzed, of which 5,990 comments were analyzed, as the communication between the people who expressed their opinions was not analyzed, as it did not contain any relevant information with regard to the research questions raised.
- 2. In order to facilitate transparency, the categorization of comments was more than necessary. The opinions are grouped according to a particular concept shown in the presentation of results section (directly) below Table 2.

The song Úristen [Oh-My-God] is the final product of the collaboration between ValMar (Peti Marics and Milán Valkusz) and Róbert Szikora. The music video of the song was released on April 2nd, 2022.

⁷ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HOF3PYjKxm0

- 3. The definition of the criteria that determined the analysis of the opinions is the result of a long preliminary work, as they were formulated and finalized after reading the comments. Consequently, the analysis of the opinions was carried out according to the following variables:
 - (a) emotions evoked by the song,
 - (b) positive and negative aspects of the song,
 - (c) attitude patterns,
 - (d) consumption of the song,
 - (e) image of the performers.

This present research aims to answer the following research questions:

- Q_1 : What is the final product of the song *Úristen* [Oh-My-God]?
- Q₂: What are the positive aspects of this musical product?
- Q₃: What constitutes the negative aspects of the song?
- Q₄: Which forms of attitude can be distinguished in the comments?
- Q₅: How often is the song consumed?
- Q₆: Which adjectives do viewers use to describe the performers?

Results and Discussions

Content analysis of the lyrics and video clip of the song Úristen [Oh-My-God]

Content analysis was based on the criteria that play a significant role in the reception of a given musical production.

- 1. The color scheme of the clip is retro, with brown, orange, beige, green, dominating the whole clip. Again, the blurred film frames reinforce the retro feel.
- 2. The characters in the video clip are representatives of the rockabilly style: the ladies' outfits are defined by the make-up, the polka-dot, narrow-waisted and flared skirts, use of belts and high heels. Men wear black leather jackets and sunglasses as accessories.
- 3. Physical evidence: the location of the video clip is a contemporary bistro. The furnishings imitate a retro atmosphere, with iconic elements such as: a disco ball, a telephone booth, a jukebox. The display of the Cadillac in the video clip was also intended to reinforce nostalgia.
- 4. Enjoying and embracing life is at the heart of the production's message.
- 5. The vocabulary of the song includes both slang used by young people (yeah, baby, baby, Oh-My-God) and concepts associated with retro feelings, such as the use of cologne.

The content analysis of the song and the video clip (including the storyline) suggests that the song promotes (1) the enjoyment of life, (2) the search for adventure, and (3) the feeling of being 'forever young'. If the message of the video clip is interpreted in the context of consumer behavior, it can be concluded that the music industry (also) plays a significant role in the phenomena that shape society at a given time, since trends such as hedonism, the pursuit of experiences and the desire for 'eternal youth' can be identified in the production.

Analysis of consumer feedback on the music product Úristen [Oh-My-God]

Consumers' behavior varies according to the crucial event that occurs in one's life (Keller & Kotler, 2006). However, in the music industry, such generalizations - regarding the relationship between the consumption of a particular musical work and a certain crucial event - cannot be made, as there are musical works that individuals can claim regardless of whether they are about birth or death (Kulcsár and Crenganeş, 2019). The best example of this in Romania is Gheorghe Zamfir's song *The Lonely Shepherd*, which can be associated with both weddings and passing away (Szabó, 2021): i.e. with joy and sorrow. In fact, the final product of a musical creation is primarily the emotions and feelings that a given song evokes (Kulcsár and Crenganeş, 2019). In the following (Table 1), the end products of the song *Úristen* [Oh-My-God] are categorized:

Table 1. The end products of the song *Úristen* [Oh-My-God]

High spirits	Nostalgia	Joy	Cheering up	Happiness
68	9	9	6	4
Addiction	Joy of life	Tranquility	Love	Youth
3	3	1	1	2
Energy	Serenity	Brings people together	Sets the mood	
1	1	1	1	

Source: Authors' compilation based on the comments made https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H0F3PyjKxm0

The song included in the analysis mainly evokes joy or nostalgia in the listeners. The results suggest that the song is popular not only among young people, but also among the older generation, since Róbert Szikora's presence, his participation and the way he appears reminds them of their youth: in fact, it

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⁸ Frequency of occurrence in comments.

brings generations together, bringing back those 'good old times'. Overall, the conclusion can be drawn that the end products of the song are positive and represent added value for the consumer, because it makes them to cheer up; provides happiness; encourages us to enjoy life; motivates to be more relaxed; gives love, energy, serenity, joy, high spirit and a positive basic mood. The categorization of the end products of the song based on emotions is presented in the following figure (Figure 1).

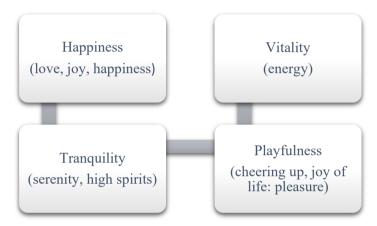


Figure 1. The end products of the song *Úristen* [Oh-My-God] Source: Authors' compilation based on the comments made https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HOF3PyjKxm0

As illustrated in the figure above (Figure 1) ValMar ft. Robi Szikora's song can be structured in terms of emotion into the following four groups: happiness (14), tranquility (7), playfulness (9), and vitality (1). However, the end products of a given song can be differentiated depending on what the consumer is experiencing. Whatever the interpretative and experiential mechanism, the elicitation of emotions can be understood as a basic requirement for a song, apart from the fact that the intensity and nature of emotions can vary greatly from one individual to another. The question arises, what makes a song popular? There are several factors that directly influence which songs will be popular. Consumer expectations are, in fact, a factor of the success of a particular piece of music. The following table (Table 2) shows the positive aspects of the song, grouped into different categories:

		1		•
Catchy character ¹	Rhythm ²	Atmosphere ³	Voice of the performers 4	Video clip itself ⁵
46	6	6	18	12
Directing the clip ⁶	Choreography ⁷	Insatiability ⁸	Style ⁹	Freshness
2	2	2	2	1
Orchestration ¹⁰	Lyrics ¹¹	Retro style ¹²	Harmony 13	Humor ¹⁴
1	6	14	3	1

Table 2. The positive aspects of the song *Úristen* [Oh-My-God]

Source: Authors' compilation based on the comments made https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H0F3PyjKxm0

¹very catchy, so catchy, crazy catchy ²has good rhythm, very good rhythm
³very good atmosphere, good atmosphere, fantastic atmosphere ⁴good voice, brutal voice, fantastic voice, beautiful voice, unique voice, hoarse voice ⁵super video clip, top video clip, cool video clip, brilliant video clip, good video clip ⁶good directing ²love choreography, good choreography ³impossible to get bored with ¹like its style, old style, cool style, good style ¹oexcellent orchestration ¹¹super cool lyrics ¹²good retro ¹³performers are in harmony with each other ¹⁴funny

According to consumers, the main positive aspect of the song is its catchy melody. It is this characteristic that helps to transform the consumer from being a mere consumer into a regular customer, especially in case of songs of this type. The second most important positive aspect is the voice of the performers. The particular tone of voice of the artist(s) can also play a significant role in the 'recognition' of a song, as it can be interpreted as a differentiator from the consumer's point of view. The retro character of the song is the third most frequently identified positive aspect: this feature adds value not only for older generations but also for younger people, as retro is a very popular genre nowadays.

The quality of the music video, and the nature of the song itself, can play an important role in the reception of a piece of music. Consequently, it is worth examining separately what consumers perceive as positive aspects of these two components. The positive characteristics and parameters of the song and the video clip (Table 3), as expressed in the comments, were the following:

Table 3. Categorization of the positive aspects of the song and video clip $\hat{U}risten$ [Oh-My-God]

	The song		The video clip
0	catchy characteristic,	0	atmosphere,
0	rhythm,	0	directing,
0	atmosphere,	0	choreography,
0	the voice of the performers,	0	style,
0	insatiability,	0	retro style,
0	lyrics,	0	harmony,
0	retro style,	0	humor.
0	humor,		
0	orchestration.		

Source: Authors' compilation based on the comments made https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H0F3PYjKxm0

The positive aspects that apply to both the song and the video clip are: atmosphere, retro character, humor. The consumer's attitude towards a particular service product typically influences his/her evaluation of it, his/her consumption of it, since attitude is a cognitive representation that (in a broad sense) summarizes the individual's evaluation of a person, group, item or possibly an action, i.e. it is a permanent attitude that includes appreciative behavior (Domokosi, 2007). The majority of the respondents expressing their opinion adore the analyzed song, as 115 comments contained the term 'adore', which is the primary evidence of an enthusiastic attitude (Table 4).

Table 4. The categorization of the attitudes towards the song *Úristen* [Oh-My-God]: positive domain

Adores	Likes	Loves	Favorite	Respects
115	7	7	14	1
Categorization				
Enthusiastic (115)	Positive (29)			

Source: Authors' compilation based on the comments made https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HOF3PYjKxm0

In services, including the music industry, how consumers perceive the service product as a whole is very important. In the table below (Table 5), we have categorized the positive attributes that can be interpreted as specific to the analyzed song.

Table 5. The evaluation of the song *Úristen* [Oh-My-God]

Brutal (1)	Good (20)	Super (11)	Hit of the year (20)	Unbelievable (4)
Best (32)	Summer hit (12)	So good (12)	Best song of the world (16)	Wonderful (3)
Cute (1)	Brutal good (9)	Amazing (4)	Very good (121)	Stunning (1)
Fantastic (8)	Bull's eye (1)	Favorite (2)	Phenomenal (1)	Powerful song (2)
So great (2)	Huge (10)	Rules (9)	Excellent (1)	Insatiable (3)
Cool (5)	Got great (8)	Great (3)	Premium (2)	Sensational (1)
Beautiful (2)	Genius (6)	Fresh (1)	Unforgettable (1)	

Source: Authors' compilation based on the comments made https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HOF3PYjKxm0

The respondents used a total of 34 different (positive) adjectives to rate the song: most of them rated the song as 'very good'. However, due to our human nature, there is no single product or service that can be uniformly liked by every single consumer. At the same time, stereotypes can play a significant role in the consumer's attitude towards something, since in this case the consumer tends to be a justifier of them (Kovács, 2004). The song being analyzed was described by the respondents as having the following negative connotations (Table 6):

Table 6. The categorization of the attitudes towards the song
Úristen [Oh-My-God]: negative domain

Negative aspects	Attitude			
Amateur	Negative (49)		Hostile (22)	
1				
Too simple lyrics	Bad	Cringe	Irritating	Infernal
8	42	1	8	1
Mass production	Not good	Poor	Annoying	Dreadful
1	2	1	6	1
Not good voice	Not the best		Terrible	Unworthy
5	2		3	1
Not good videoclip	Lousy		Nasty	Disgraceful
1	1		1	1

Source: Authors' compilation based on the comments made https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HOF3PYjKxm0

The simplicity of the song's lyrics has left some consumers feeling inadequate. At the same time, the music industry is not immune to the direct impact of all the changes that society has to confront in a given period of time. Consequently, changes in the macro-environment also shape the expectations and needs of a song. For example, in May 2022, the popular program *Csináljuk a fesztivált!* [Let's make a festival!] on *Duna* TV channel was won by the song *Lady M* performed by Peter Šrámek⁹, because the pandemic, the Ukraine-Russia war, has made people want to hear cheerful songs, not deeply sad ones. Of course, none of this detracts from the vocal qualities of the performer or the 'raison d'être' of songs of this kind. In all, 49 people expressed negative and 22 hostile attitudes towards the song.



Figure 2. Categorization of negative aspects of the song *Úristen* [Oh-My-God] Source: Authors' compilation based on the comments made https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HOF3PYjKxm0

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⁹ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z8Ebka02TWY

In order to get a more detailed picture, the negative comments were grouped according to whether they referred to the lyrics themselves, the video clip or to the artwork as a whole.

As the literature points out, the success of any business depends on satisfied customers, i.e. loyal consumers. The frequency with which a song is consumed depends on many factors, e.g. the age of the consumer, as young people tend to create their own playlists, while the older generation mostly listens to songs played by radio stations (*Tények Plusz*, 2024). It is important to note that the aggressive presence of a particular piece of music in everyday life (played on several media) also has a negative dimension, since this is when the 'it is all over the news' phenomenon occurs. Figure 3 illustrates the frequency of consumption of the song analyzed.



Figure 3. Consumption frequency of the song *Úristen* [Oh-My-God] Source: Authors' compilation based on the comments made https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HOF3PYjKxm0

The image that consumers have of the performers can also play a big role in the reception of a song. The table below (Table 7) categorizes consumer feedback on the image of Róbert Szikora and ValMar.

Róbert Szikora	ValMar
Humble (1)	'Cuties' (1)
Good (2)	'Big' (1)
So good (2)	The best (6)
Very good (11)	Super (2)
The best (2)	Very good (10)
'Cherry on cake' (1)	'Huge' (1)
Icon (1)	Geniuses (3)
Fits the music (2)	The most talented (4)
God (2)	Excellent (1)
Top (1)	'Sweet' (1)
Rules (2)	Rules (2)
Legend (5)	Smart (4)
Still: Good (2), 'Big' (1) Unbeatable (1)	They cannot deliver anything bad (3)

Table 7. The image of Róbert Szikora and ValMar

Róbert Szikora	ValMar
'Retro face' (1)	
Amazing (1)	
'Huge' (1)	
Forever young (1), Young (1)	
Professional (1)	

Source: own, based on the comments made https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H0F3PYjKxm0

The information presented in the table above, suggests that:

- (1) over the years, Róbert Szikora has managed to maintain all the personal characteristics that define him as a performer (humble, authentic, youthful). In fact, these personal characteristics, in addition to his talent, have enabled him to gain the recognition of both the profession and the public¹⁰.
- (2) ValMar, before the song \acute{U} risten [Oh-My-God], managed to create an identity that caught the attention of the younger generation, but their popularity grew after the release of the analyzed song. As Róbert Szikora noted, ValMar "let in some fresh air into the world of Hungarian Rock'n Roll" (Lendvai, 2022).

Conclusion

The success of the song $\acute{U}risten$ [Oh-My-God], according to the consumers' opinions, is due to:

- ✓ the use of multidimensional segmentation,
- ✓ generating end products that add value for consumers by triggering positive emotions,
- ✓ paying attention to trends,
- ✓ the harmony between the performers and the identity of the performers also ensures the authenticity of the musical production.

Popmeccs - Vocalist of the Year (1985), Popmeccs - Composer of the Year (1986, 1987), Popmeccs - Lyricist of the Year (1986), EMERTon Award (1988), Börze Award - Lifetime Achievement Award (2003), Knight's Cross of the Hungarian Order of Merit (2013), Jimmy Zámbó Award (2016), Budapest Prize (2019), Péter Máthé Award (2023).

Overall, it should be taken as a fact that (1) the problems that society is facing, (2) the trends that are emerging internationally are shaping consumer expectations of music products, and (3) the image of the artist can be an important factor in the reception of a song. At the same time, the consumer is a critical element in the music industry, since not only changes in the macroenvironment can influence consumer expectations, but also events in the microenvironment can shape consumer tastes, i.e. when, what kind of songs and what content they listen to. Consequently, music itself is a very complex service for which there will always be a demand from society, despite the fact that there are periods when there are demand troughs for some music and peaks for others.

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