

Salomé Cilliers is a master's student at the Odeion School of Music, University of the Free State. In 2018 she obtained her BMus qualification *cum laude*, with specialisation in Musicology. Her current research focuses on the persuasive potential of worship music styles in a multimedia context. At present Salomé is employed by the University of the Free State as an academic literacy facilitator.

Email address: salo.cilliers@gmail.com



**PERSUASION IN
CONTEMPORARY WORSHIP MUSIC STYLES:
OBSERVATIONS FROM
A SOUTH AFRICAN PERSPECTIVE**

SALOMÉ CILLIERS

ABSTRACT

The concept of persuasion is rarely associated with contemporary Christian worship music. In this article, however, established persuasion models by Brown (2006), as well as Jowett and O'Donnell (2012), are employed to analyse the beliefs and experiences of selected South African worship musicians, in order to determine whether persuasion forms part of contemporary, local worship music practices. The data, collected through the method known as polyphonic interviewing, confirm that persuasion forms part of worship music practices within the contexts documented, and moreover that it is consciously employed in these environments.

OPSOMMING

Oorreding in eietydse aanbiddingsmusiekstyle: Waarnemings vanuit 'n Suid-Afrikaanse perspektief

Oorreding word selde met kontemporêre Christelike aanbiddingsmusiek geassosieer, maar in hierdie artikel word die eksplisiete oortuigingskrag van kerkmusiek nagevors. Modelle van oorreding soos geformuleer deur Brown (2006), en Jowett en O'Donnell (2012) word gebruik om die persoonlike

oortuigings en ervaringe van geselekteerde Suid-Afrikaanse kerkmusici te ontleed. Deur die gebruik van die metode bekend as polifoniese onderhoudvoering bevestig die ingesamelde data dat oorreding wél 'n aansienlike rol speel in die kontekste wat ondersoek is, en dat dit bewustelik geskied.

Key Terms

Persuasion, worship music, South Africa, beliefs of worship musicians, entertainment in worship music, behavioural control in worship music

1. The persuasive potential of music

Indicative of the enormous persuasive potential that music holds in daily life is the way it is employed to accompany every manner of everyday experience. From music forming the continuous background of media encounters to idiosyncratic playlists facilitating leisure, music serves as an enhancement of social discourse (Brown, 2006:1). The overarching impression to be gained from the perusal of recent musicological literature is the immense persuasive potential of music: political events unfold to stirring tunes (Ricard, 2004); film protagonists are identified through rhetorical devices (Goldmark, 2014); and identities are construed by way of specific soundscapes and sound conceptualisation (Buhler, 2014). Religious experience is similarly reinforced through the musical and lyrical content of worship music (cf. Miller & Pinn, 2014:140).

In *Music and Manipulation: On the Social Uses and Social Control of Music*, Stephen Brown writes that “Music is a major tool for propagating group ideologies and identities, and as such serves as an important device for reinforcing collective actions and for delineating the lines of inclusion for social groups” (Brown, 2006:1-2). Music in the church is no exception; indeed, Paul Wohlgenuth (1981:6) claims that worship music may “amuse, control moods, arouse tears, and incite action. It can debauch or delight, kill or cure, bring darkness or light”. The theme has been addressed in hymnological studies for some decades; among the earlier voices, Rushing (1978:29) points out that

Organised religion has long been aware of the special power of music to prepare its adherents for worship or conversion by engaging the senses to set the proper mood, or to form a bond among participants in a service by causing them to identify with a common attitude or goal. Music can create a mood which facilitates the reception of the lyrics, wedded to the music, and the sermon of the minister.

The instantaneous way in which sentiments and associations may be wordlessly conveyed by means of music (cf. Cook, 1998:16), may be seen to endow the worship musician with a profound responsibility not to abuse the power of music (Wohlgenuth, 1981:8). Furthermore, Jowett and O'Donnell (2012:39) point out that persuasion may become manipulative when intimate knowledge of the inner resonance of a specific group of people is identified and played upon. If the interaction is seen as transactional, that is, if both parties benefit from the desired result of the discourse, it may be seen as *persuasion*.

If, on the other hand, the exhorting party conceals a hidden agenda in order to benefit from the action resulting from the discourse, it is classified as *propaganda* (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2012:1, 32, 39). Thus, "Propaganda employs persuasive strategies, but it differs from persuasion in purpose" (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2012:2). During the course of this study, I applied models of persuasion, rather than examining worship music in the context of manipulation, which is seen as a more "crude" model of communication, often associated with the commercialised contexts of persuasion.

According to Jowett and O'Donnell, the act of persuasion may elicit one of three forms of response, namely *response shaping*, *response reinforcing*, and *response changing* (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2012:33-34). In the data analysis section of this article, it will be shown that each of these forms of response may be found in the worship environments sketched by my respondents; a brief explanation of each is therefore called for here.

Response shaping is a form of persuasion in which the roles of persuader and persuadee may be compared to that of teacher and learner respectively. "The audience has a need for positive reinforcement filled, and the persuader has a need for a desired response from the audience filled" (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2012:33). In the worship environment, response shaping might, for instance, take the form of theological instruction through song lyrics.

Response reinforcing, on the other hand, is when an already existing view on the part of the persuadee is nurtured to reach a greater degree of conviction. The persuadee is often encouraged to indicate his or her adherence to certain attitudes by conforming to "specified forms of behaviour" (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2012:34).

Response changing represents the most complex type of persuasion. It is difficult to persuade others to digress from personal, established views because such persuasion involves the disruption of opinions that have been established over time and that are resistant to change and adaption (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2012:34).

Establishing *resonance* with an individual or an audience is of imperative importance during the process of persuasion. A number of strategies may be used by persuaders to establish points of resonance with the persuadee. These points of resonance, which Jowett and O'Donnell (2012:38) call "anchors", include the following:

- The active consideration of *beliefs* that people hold. These may be built upon in order to facilitate the incorporation of stronger or more comprehensive beliefs.
- The *values* that are subscribed to. Values are usually strong beliefs that hold regulative positions in human behavioural patterns.
- *Attitudes*, defined as "readiness to respond to an idea, an object, or a course of action [...], an internal state of feeling toward, or an evaluative response to, an idea, person, or object" (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2012:36).
- *Behaviour*, which normally comprises predictable patterns of response and action within both individual and collective scenarios.
- *Group norms*, which are group-established behavioural patterns, beliefs, attitudes and values (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2012:34-38).

Jowett and O'Donnell's (2012:38) belief that "[t]he persuader is a voice from without, speaking the language of the audience members' voices within" is corroborated by Brown's (2006) ideas. For Brown, music is a form of communication that has the power to psycho-biologically signify emotion, mood and affect; thus it connotes social meaning through linkage with structure, encompassing an array of potential associative possibilities. It is therefore "ideally utilizable as a tool for persuasion and manipulation" (Brown, 2006:1).

Brown (2006:3, 21) therefore emphasises the fact that music has the capacity to modify behaviour. In this regard he argues that "persuasion is used principally for the purposes of behavioural control" (Brown, 2006:21). To substantiate this far-reaching statement, he identifies the following six important aspects of the role of music that "implicates behavioural control as a major mechanism of its action" (Brown, 2006:4):

- Music is instrumental in "bringing about behavioural *conformity* and in stimulating *compliance* with social norms" (Brown, 2006:4; original emphasis).
- With regard to the aspect of music's persuasive potential and manipulative capability, music is a "knowledge-bearing function" (Brown, 2006:4) and thus a potential vehicle for ideology.
- Music is powerful in establishing social identity, influential in the "enculturation" process of human society, and helps in establishing borders between the self and the other.
- Music is instrumental in the segregation of society into groups, and may represent a criterion in the process of admittance to certain social groups.
- Music may be extremely powerful in the establishment of coordination and cooperation in within-group dynamics. It may also serve as the symbol of a minority grouping in a larger society.
- Music is instrumental in effecting "*emotional expression, conflict resolution, and social play*" (Brown, 2006:4-5).

According to this model, communicative messages are transmitted via two parallel routes, namely the *central* (tending to be the linguistic content of a message, complete with persuasive content) and the *peripheral* (tending to be non-linguistic cues in communication) routes of processing (Brown, 2006:23). I argue that worship music contains within itself both central and peripheral routes of communication, and that Brown's (2006:23) concept of peripheral cues within music, namely its ability to "engage attention; enhance mood or emotion; act as an object's identity-marker, thereby enhancing message memorability; non-verbally comment on or describe narrative features; enhance message credibility; and provide unity and continuity" may be productively applied to the typical worship music situation. The data presented later on in this article will serve to confirm this thesis.

2. Research question and objectives of the article

Having expounded on the theoretical frame of reference from which I depart in this article, the central question underpinning my research is formulated as follows:

Can worship music, according to the subjective experiences and beliefs of some South African worship musicians, persuade congregants to conform to specific patterns of behaviour, and how would it, in their opinions, encourage such cooperation?

During the study, I conducted semi-structured individual, face-to-face interviews with ten South African worship musicians in order to obtain data,¹ which was consequently analysed through the lens of models of persuasion introduced above. The method used will be explained in the next subsection.

3. Research design and methodology

3.1 Polyphonic interviewing

With regard to the survey study documented in this article, the method of data collection was the postmodern technique known as polyphonic interviewing. This technique was selected to allow the true (and multiple) voices of research respondents to emerge. Owing to the minimal (if not eliminated) interference of the researcher during the editing phase of the research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000:657), all responses were represented as accurately and authentically as possible.²

Fundamental to the polyphonic interview philosophy, is the thought that contradictory opinions and beliefs and multiple perspectives should be allowed to argue their case, instead of their simply being “glossed over” in favour of the researcher’s hypotheses (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000:657).³

3.2 The questions

The questions put to the respondents focused on the following topics: Contemporary Christian worship music practices; the persuasive potential of music; the role of tradition and liturgy; and the instantaneous communication of certain sentiments through music. In addition, questions probed respondents’ views on the subjects of hype and entertainment in the context of worship.⁴ All respondents were given the same questions.

¹ Readers interested in reading the full interview transcripts are invited to contact the author at salo.cilliers@gmail.com. Respondent confidentiality is protected by the use of numbers representing each interviewee as well as through the omission of place names to avoid deductive disclosure.

² The survey was conducted in as sensitive a manner as possible. Respondents were assured of anonymity and confidentiality both with regard to the data analysis and reporting processes. Belief here is understood to mean “something that is accepted, considered to be true or held as an opinion: something believed” (<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/belief>)

³ Belief here is understood to mean “something that is accepted, considered to be true or held as an opinion: something believed” (<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/belief>)

⁴ See Appendix I for the list of questions utilised in the study.

3.3 The sample

Purposive sampling was used in this study. The data discussion in this article includes the responses of seven worship musicians, chosen on grounds of them actively engaging with questions of a doctrinal nature. Several of the respondents were known personally to the researcher, and the remaining respondents were individuals identified through worship-team networking and small-scale snowball sampling (cf. Creswell, 2013).

While the study does not lay claim to any form of generalisation, the responses do embody a certain 'representativeness' in that they give voice to worship music practitioners from different denominational contexts, representing also different race, age and gender groups. The geographical location of the participants is protected to avoid deductive disclosure of respondent identity (cf. Kaiser, 2010:1).

Table 1 provides an exposition of respondent demographics. In the ensuing layout and discussion, the anonymity of each individual respondent is protected by assigning them numbers (Creswell, 2013:174).

	Gender & Race	Age group	Language	Christian Church Denomination	Past affiliated denominations	Instrument
Respondent 1	Female White	37-46	Afrikaans	Reformed Baptist	Dutch Reformed Church, Charismatic Congregation, Traditional Reformed	Piano
Respondent 2	Male White	37-46	Afrikaans	Reformed Baptist	Charismatic contexts	Lead singer, guitar, drums
Respondent 3	Male White	57-66	Afrikaans	Catholic Church	Dutch Reformed Church, Anglican Church	Organ
Respondent 4	Female White	17-26	Afrikaans/ English	Unaffiliated church	Baptist Church	Piano
Respondent 5	Male Black	27-36	Xhosa	Unaffiliated church	Black Revival Tent Crusades, Baptist Megachurch Congregation	Lead singer, drums
Respondent 6	Female White	37-46	Afrikaans	Baptist church	Dutch Reformed Church, Christian Revival Church	Piano, singer
Respondent 7	Male White	37-46	Afrikaans	Dutch Reformed Church	Different Dutch Reformed Church congregations	Lead singer, guitar

Table 1: Demographic and religious background information

4. Data discussion

Key concepts as put forward in the persuasion model by Jowett and O'Donnell (2012), and the model on behavioural control model by Brown (2006), are now utilised to structure the main data collected during this study. Where relevant, these are contextualised by way of an 'interaction' with the applicable literature.

4.1. Key themes of Brown's (2006) model as reflected by the respondents

4.1.1. Worship music as an instrument of conformity and compliance

The first characteristic of music emphasised by Brown (2006:4) is that "Music has an important role in bringing about *conformity* and in stimulating *compliance* with social norms". It is notable that each of the respondents involved in this study indicated that they believed conformity to be effected through worship music.

Respondent 6 noted that worship music created a sympathetic atmosphere for conformance in a worship environment, and consequently described the following bodily responses forming part of worship practices: "In our church people may clap, but they don't do that all the time. They may raise their hands; they may even kneel if they want to". Respondent 4 mentioned the examples of swaying and applauding – physical responses that may be interpreted as bodily acts of devotion (cf. Spinks, 2010:101).

Aspirations towards communal conformance were voiced by Respondents 1 and 2 when they mentioned that through the use of specific types or styles of worship music, they aimed to inspire conformity in the missional sense: reaching out to a certain social group by catering for their particular style of worship. Respondent 5 similarly contended that "praise", which he contrasted with "worship", was more "mobilising". He also mentioned that conformity during worship was his current goal: "... when I'm singing there in front and I have this joy of singing even louder so that everyone goes... Come! Come! More, if possible!"

While Respondent 6 encapsulated the idea of conformity in her statement that worship music should "**codify** (what is in the word of God), and then **unify** the people of God, and **glorify** God", Respondent 7 noted that the way people could conform to group norms and styles of worship (including communal bodily movement) in a new worship environment, could be quite "scary" in the strength of its impact. Both respondents 6 and 7 noted that Afrikaans people could be quite conservative, and might deliberately shun conformance during worship.

Spinks (2010:82) likewise observes that the conscious ends of religious persuasion is convincing people to "come again" to church (Spinks, 2010:82), and to donate money to the church. Regarding the latter, Respondent 2 related an incident where "they really psyched the people emotionally up and then just afterwards they had like this one-dollar bill on the screens and on the one-dollar bill was written "In God we trust". And the "trust" part was left out with just a question-mark. Now, that was very sneaky, you know, in order for people to give to that church. And I think that is manipulation, that's not persuasion".

Overall, it was observed that, in the opinions all of the respondents participating in this study, conformity is effected through worship music.

4.1.2. Social identity

Brown (2006:4) points out that music plays an important role in the establishment and maintenance of social identity. In terms of the contexts of worship, Johan Cilliers (2011:4) points out that the social identity of a church powerfully reflects the predominant culture of its congregation as defined by aspects of its hymnological culture (Cilliers, 2011:4).

All of the respondents positively confirmed that social identity formation and maintenance were facilitated through worship music.

Respondent 3 spoke of the persuasive potential of music in different denominations: “I think the persuasion aspect one would normally equate with the idea of perhaps more charismatic churches – the people react to the music in certain ways; they have an emotional reaction to it – whereas in a reformed tradition for example, it will be far less the case because it’s much more... It is not as emotional, it’s a kind of more abstract (or intellectual perhaps) experience”. In situations where mission is the central consideration, Respondents 1 and 2 indicated that they would take into consideration the social identity of those to whom they are reaching out, and that they would choose music with which such target groups could identify.

The fact that every respondent in this study indicated that they were (to a greater or lesser extent) comfortable with the worship music style of their church suggests that worship musicians affiliate themselves with a style of worship with which they can easily identify.

4.1.3. Formation of social groups

Brown (2006:5) furthermore maintains that “music serves as an important basis for *sorting* people into groups in large-scale societies”. The data collected in this study confirmed this to be the case within the contexts studied.

The social division between older and younger generational groups was addressed extensively by all of the respondents. Respondent 1 noted that the youth was often inspired by newer styles of worship. Respondent 5 stated that the youth generally enjoyed songs with “vibe”, while older congregants commonly enjoyed a more tradition “hymnal” style. Respondent 6 likewise observed that the youth enjoyed more “expressive” styles of worship.

Respondent 6 has found through personal experience, that the formation of social groups is practicably achievable through the establishment of different services which aim (through both sermon and musical style) to attract different sectors of any particular congregation. In contrast to the observation made by Respondent 7, namely that “you’re going to have a hard time drawing people who didn’t hear the music and who are not there already”, respondent 5 stated that the musical style of a megachurch he had attended was the alluring factor constituting his attendance. Only Respondent 5 brought up the important matter of multi-culturalism within local worship music practices, indicating that in his congregation, common cultural ground had been found through the singing of hymns.

All of these contributions correlate with Brown's (2006:5) idea that music may serve to organise people into groups according to certain cultural or demographic considerations, though not all of the respondents agreed that this was a positive approach with regard to multi-generational contexts of worship in South Africa.

4.1.4. Enhancement of in-group dynamics

Brown (2006:5) maintains that music facilitates in-group cooperation and coordination. This principle is illustrated, for instance, in American megachurch culture, where the goals of the worship (and consequently, the focus of musical persuasion), is aptly described by way of the acronym "IMPACT". This acronym is used by the Saddleback Community Service in planning their weekly worship: **I**nspire **M**ovement, **P**raise, **A**doration, **C**ommitment, and **T**ied (together by the ultimate worship song) (Spinks, 2010:78-79).

Enhancement of in-group dynamics represents a consideration described by the respondents included in this study. Respondent 7 stressed the importance of music as instrumental in the inclusion of the entire congregation in the liturgy. This respondent also reiterated the need to change styles as the musical preferences of the congregation change over the years. He deemed it of paramount importance to minister to, and connect with the established congregation of believers at all times. For this reason, he embraced the incorporation of energy and hype (although he stated that he found the usual connotation to the word "hype" to be negative) as a connecting factor in his congregation.

Respondent 1 confirmed that worship music should strengthen the congregation, remind them of God's grace, and constantly edify; in this regard it was argued that worship music should uplift and strive to cater for all tastes without offending members of the congregation. Respondents 4 and 5 similarly believed that unity should be constantly reinforced, and that the preservation of unity should remain a key consideration of worship music.

Respondent 7 thought that "Music has the ability, if used correctly [...] you can really connect ninety percent of the congregation, whether they are the *omies* who don't want to sing or whether they're teenagers who live for music, you can connect most of those people with their emotions of what they're really feeling about God in a manner that no other part of the sermon has the ability to do". Similarly, Respondent 6 observed that the music was the "voice" of the congregation within the liturgy. She strongly emphasised that music enhances in-group dynamics: "When people come together, it's a wonderful place too. How can you *not* use music?" She also endorsed the idea that fellowship should be enjoyable; therefore, she would choose songs with which she as leader of the worship team, as well as the congregation could identify.

It is clear from the above comments that the respondents regard music to be a powerful means of enhancing the in-group dynamics, including the unity, of their congregations.

4.1.5. Release ("emotional expression, conflict resolution and social play")

Music may facilitate "emotional expression, conflict resolution and social play" (Brown, 2006:5). As respondent 6 noted, "I pray people will experience God first. But if you are entertained in the process,

it's fine". To this respondent, the focus should be the words and the glory of God, but if people are entertained through the music that is used to reach this goal, to her this was not a cause for concern.

Conversely, Respondent 3 believed that "because music has that potential of conjuring up lots of emotional reaction you can very much lose perspective if the entertainment aspect can supplant the worship aspect". In a similar way, Respondent 5 said that music "can draw someone's attention away from the words and focus on the style of the music and the loudness or how the beat goes".

As a case in point, describing instances of social play during her past, Respondent 1 related the way students in her church during her varsity years had expressed themselves by dancing during worship and participating in "Walk-like-an-Egyptian" actions. The focus, however, she said, was not on God – to her mind; He was not present, and proceedings did not gravitate around Him.

4.2. Jowett and O'Donnell (2012)

Henceforth, the aforementioned categories of persuasion as formulated by Jowett and O'Donnell (2012) will serve to intensify my analysis of responses, namely *response shaping*, *response reinforcing* and *response changing* (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2012:33-34). Each of these forms of persuasion was found to be present in the worship environments sketched by my respondents.

4.2.1. Response shaping

Respondents 1, 2, 5 and 6 mentioned the educational potential of worship music through the memorability of lyrics. One of the central functions of worship music, according to Respondent 6, was to codify the word of God. Respondent 4 likewise stated that "Music in church should be a vehicle of truth or doctrine [...] that are in a form that you can understand while you sing it and that is helpful to remember the truths that you are singing and also to convict and obviously to glorify God through it".

Both Respondents 4 and 5 believed the words of songs or hymns to be the most important factor in worship, and that these should be allowed to impart their message at all times.

4.2.2. Response reinforcing

Response reinforcing takes place when an already established view of persuasion on the part of the recipient, is reinforced to reach a greater degree of conviction. Often, the recipient is expected to indicate his or her conformance to certain attitudes by demonstrating "specified forms of behaviour" (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2012:34). Based upon observations made in points 4.1.1., 4.1.4. and 4.1.5. above, response reinforcing proves to be a key consideration of weekly worship to the church musicians who participated in this research study.

4.2.3. Response changing

Response changing represents the most complex type of persuasion, as it involves interference with opinions that have become established over time and that are resistant to change (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2012:34). Response changing, despite its effect of a substantial change of behaviour in persuadees, nevertheless proves to be present in the beliefs of worship musicians in this study.

The principal way in which worship musicians address response changing is the attempt to persuade non-church members to conform to specific patterns of behaviour, for example, conversion and/or committing to affiliation with a specific church. In fact, an emerging pattern appears to be the incorporation of secular popular music styles in an attempt to establish resonance with the “unchurched” through worship music (cf. also Spinks, 2010:78).

4.2.4. Anchors of persuasion: Beliefs, values, attitudes, behaviour, group norms (and reference group)

Jowett and O'Donnell (2012:38) argue that establishing resonance with an individual or an audience is of great importance during the act of persuasion. A number of strategies may be used by the persuader to establish points of resonance with the recipients of persuasion. These points of resonance are known as “anchors” (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2012:38). A brief discussion is devoted to each anchor of persuasion.

- **Beliefs**

The beliefs of a particular audience, recipient or (in this case) congregation, might be taken into consideration as points of resonance by persuaders. One instance of a possible anchor of persuasion was referred to by Respondent 2, who stated that “worship music is a response to God’s revelation of himself. So, first God reveals himself to us, and then we respond accordingly”. If the congregation of a worship music leader with such a Scripture-bound stance believes accordingly, the music could aid in building upon this shared belief as an anchor of persuasion.

- **Values**

Values may form another type of anchor in the process of persuasion. Respondent 3 noted that people would react differently to different music: “I think music can persuade the people. According to what its effect is on the congregant. But that’s why it’s so complex as the congregant must also be in a way open to a specific kind of musical persuasion. And there can be so many types of music that certain congregants will react differently to different types of music”. This statement appears to imply that worship leaders must, out of necessity, find the values with which their congregations would resonate. Respondent 1 assumed a similar position by underlining the need for establishing resonance with the tastes and values of the congregation.

- **Attitudes**

Attitudes may be used as an anchor of persuasion. Respondent 1 described different attitudes assumed by congregants from different generational groups with regard to “old”, “traditional” or “new” styles. Respondent 6 took the attitudes of members of her congregation concerning this issue into consideration when she stated that “if there’s a younger audience, you have to put in more energetic songs! You just have to. They connect with it... And more power. The young men like the power, even the girls... You have to put it there”.

Respondent 7 mentioned the way in which his defences were immediately lowered when music was played that was in “his” style. In this way, resonance may be established by a conscious consideration of the attitudes a given congregation holds.

- **Behaviour**

Respondent 1 observed that in certain congregations, hype manifests on a regular basis. Congregants therefore “know the drill” but respond to the generation of hype every week. In a similar vein, Respondent 5 mentioned that reaction to hype usually begins during praise songs, before any words have been said which might inspire action. Thus, he concluded that the hype is caused solely by the music. Worship musicians in such instances, are able to predict the patterns of behaviour their congregations are likely to assume, and thus knowledge of probable conformance may represent the anchor of behaviour.

- **Group norms and reference group**

Group norms and the reference group phenomenon represent powerful anchors of persuasion. Respondent 7 demonstrated specialised knowledge on the subject of group norms and reference group dynamics. He deemed the actual employment of the norms of a specific group to be a powerful way of establishing a desired set of norms. He noted that “If you want to have a church where people have *lots* of energy, then you start a church with ten people who know what songs you’re going to sing on Sunday, and know when they should clap. [If] those ten people do, then the other five that pitch up that Sunday will do it as well; next Sunday you have fifteen people doing that. So you can have a huge influence on how people react, but I think you need the people as well, because I can give my happiest, clappiest tune on a Sunday morning – if I give it to the morning service in a way that doesn’t engage them, they’re not going to start clapping because the song is loud or fast”.

Clearly, anchors of persuasion (Jowett & O’Donnell, 2012:34-38) are utilised across the denominational spectrum of worship music to establish resonance with congregants.

5. Conclusion

Through the application of persuasion models by Brown (2006) and Jowett and O’Donnell (2012), the data presented in this article confirm that persuasion forms part of worship music practices within the contexts concerned, and that, far from being a passive element, it is consciously employed in the worship environments explored in this study. Brown’s (2006:21) argument that “persuasion is used principally for the purposes of behavioural control” was proved to have substantial implications in worship music settings, and, as was evident from the responses presented, pointed to applications of musical persuasion which, while inherently mutually beneficial, could also, as some respondents intimated, be manipulated with a view to financial or other ‘secularised’ objectives. Through an empirical investigation of local worship music practices, its persuasive potential was thus confirmed.

It is hoped that the findings presented in this article might serve to inform fellow worship leaders who grapple with the questions and challenges of persuasion in worship music.

Appendix I

Participant Interview Questions

1. What role do you believe Christian worship music should play in church?
2. Empirical studies have shown that music may persuade people to act according to certain patterns of behaviour. What is your opinion on the use of persuasion in worship music specifically?
3. Drawing on your experience as a worship musician, would you be able to motivate that certain worship music styles or genres are more persuasive than others? In other words, how do some styles of music inspire members of the congregation to take action more easily?
4. What role would you say tradition and liturgy play in the worship style of your church, particularly with regard to music?
5. What is your opinion concerning the idea of choosing a style of worship music with a certain “audience” (type of congregation) in mind?
6. The musicologist Nicholas Cook contributed important theories on how music has the ability to communicate associations and sentiments instantaneously. In what way do you feel that music is able, or should be able to do this in a worship context?
7. In your opinion, to what extent should worship music be entertaining?
8. Has church music, in your experience, ever persuaded congregants to conform to specific patterns of behaviour? Please motivate/illustrate your answer.
9. In your experience as a worship musician, how often and in what situations does hype manifest in worship music? (Hype in the sense of excitement and emotionally charged environments.)
10. What is your personal motivation for participating in worship music?
11. How comfortable are you with the style of worship music practised in your church? Please elaborate.

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