



## **PART 3**

**Read the text below and answer questions 27–40.**

### **THE SOCIAL SOUNDTRACK: MUSIC IN EVERYDAY LIFE**

Music is often described as private taste: a solitary listener, headphones, and an endless stream of tracks selected by algorithmic curation. Yet this picture is incomplete. In everyday life, organised sound functions as a social instrument that structures environments, communicates norms, and allocates attention. Sociologists and psychologists therefore ask not only what music “is” as an aesthetic object, but what it “does” in homes, streets, workplaces, and online communities. Much of this action is implicit. People rarely announce that a playlist is being used to manage a room, but they behave as if it is: sound becomes a form of soft governance, shaping how long people stay, how quickly they move, and which interactions feel permitted.

One widely documented use is emotional regulation. Individuals select playlists to energise themselves before exercise, to maintain concentration while commuting, or to decompress after stressful encounters. This is not merely mood matching, in which sound reflects a pre-existing feeling. More often, listeners practise mood management: they choose music to move themselves toward a desired state, using tempo, familiarity, and lyrical themes as levers. Over time, many people build personal repertoires that operate like emotional shortcuts—tracks reliably associated with confidence, comfort, or determination. The mechanism is partly cognitive and partly physiological: a steady pulse can stabilise breathing, predictable structure can reduce perceived effort, and familiar progressions can create a sense of control. Even when the listener cannot articulate why a particular song “works”, the pattern of selection reveals an everyday technology of self-direction.

Music also regulates social boundaries by managing space. In shops and cafés, background playlists are a form of sonic branding: they create ambience, influence pacing, and signal the type of clientele a venue imagines itself serving. A bright, fast soundtrack can encourage turnover; a slower, softer one may invite lingering. In open-plan workplaces, headphones frequently operate as auditory gating. They reduce unwanted input, but they also communicate a social message: the wearer is busy, privately occupied, or not available for interruption. At home, family members negotiate volume and genre as part of ordinary conflict and compromise, because control of sound is also control of attention. These dynamics reveal a micro-politics of listening: the question of who chooses the soundtrack of a shared environment is rarely neutral, since the choice distributes comfort and distraction unevenly.



Taste is also a resource for identity construction. Musical preference can signal age cohort, subculture, class orientation, or political sensibility, and shared taste can create rapid affiliation among strangers. But identity signalling has an exclusionary edge. Some genres are treated as prestigious, others as embarrassing; mockery and dismissal become tools of social stratification. Online platforms intensify this effect because listening becomes visible through public playlists, profiles, and metrics of endorsement. Likes and shares turn private consumption into performative display, allowing music to function as a badge that attracts insiders and repels outsiders. Importantly, this signalling is not always conscious. People may claim they “just like the sound” while simultaneously using taste to position themselves within a social map of status and belonging.

Rituals and collective events make music’s social force especially obvious. Anthems, chants, stadium songs, and festival choruses synchronise bodies and emotions, producing a form of shared intensity that sociologists have described as collective effervescence. In protests, simple melodies support coordination: they keep crowds together rhythmically, make slogans memorable, and sustain morale under pressure. In religious settings, repeated musical forms can structure attention, support trance-like absorption, or stabilise communal belonging. The same mechanisms that support individual mood management—predictability, repetition, and bodily entrainment—scale up to organise groups. Yet collective musical feeling is not inherently benevolent: synchronisation can also enforce conformity, amplifying hostility toward outsiders while strengthening in-group solidarity.

Digital systems have transformed these processes while leaving their social logic intact. Streaming platforms offer inexpensive access to vast catalogues, but recommendation engines steer attention, often by predicting what will keep a listener engaged. This can broaden exposure, yet it can also narrow it by repeatedly reinforcing familiar patterns, producing a personalised “comfort zone” that feels natural precisely because it is constantly reaffirmed. Short-form social media has encouraged listening that concentrates on fragments: a chorus can go viral, and the social life of a song may revolve around a few seconds rather than a complete track. Creators respond to these incentives. To avoid skipping and to maximise sharing, some place hooks earlier, compress introductions, or craft sections designed to be clipped. In this way, the platform becomes part of the compositional environment, shaping musical form through metrics rather than through purely artistic intent.

Music’s social effects are not always positive, and conflict often exposes the politics hidden in “background” sound. Loud nightlife can generate disputes over sleep and public order; constant workplace music can undermine concentration for some employees even



if it helps others. Public playlists can also operate as subtle exclusion, making a space feel unwelcoming to particular age groups or communities without explicit rules. Cross-cultural research complicates generalisations: some societies prioritise participatory music-making, while others treat music mainly as performance consumed by audiences, and even within a single city norms vary by venue and generation. The most consistent finding is flexibility. Music can regulate emotion, organise interaction, and mark identity, but its meaning depends on context and shared norms. Understanding music in everyday life therefore requires combining psychological mechanisms with sociological insight, because the same sound can be comfort, status, or conflict depending on where, when, and with whom it is heard.

### Questions 27–31

Select the correct answer.

**27** What is the writer’s main point in the first paragraph?

- A** Music is primarily a private preference shaped by individual personality
- B** Music operates as a social instrument that structures behaviour and environments
- C** Music has become less meaningful because algorithms select most tracks
- D** Music influences people only when they deliberately analyse what they hear

**28** What does the passage imply about “mood management”?

- A** Listeners often use music to move toward a desired state rather than simply mirror feelings
- B** Mood regulation through music depends entirely on lyrics rather than tempo or familiarity
- C** People typically avoid associating particular songs with particular situations
- D** The main purpose of playlists is to eliminate stress without other coping strategies

**29** In the workplace example, headphones are presented as

- A** a sign that colleagues share the same musical identity
- B** evidence that background music is unacceptable in offices
- C** a tool used mainly to increase volume and productivity for everyone
- D** both a barrier to sound and a signal discouraging interruption

**30** What is suggested about social-media-driven listening habits?

- A** Viral platforms have shifted attention back to full-length works
- B** Short clips reduce the importance of memorable choruses



- C** Listening may concentrate on a brief, shareable segment of a song
- D** Platforms discourage creators from adapting songs to performance metrics

**31** Which inference best reflects the final paragraph's argument?

- A** Participatory music cultures experience no conflicts over shared sound
- B** Public soundtracks can operate as subtle exclusion without explicit rules
- C** Workplace music improves concentration for all employees in most cases
- D** Cross-cultural research shows that "background music" is always welcomed

### Questions 32–36

Complete the sentences below. Choose **NO MORE THAN TWO WORDS** from the text for each answer.

**32** The passage describes music as a form of soft governance that shapes how long people ..... in a space.

**33** Many listeners rely on personal repertoires that act as emotional ..... for confidence or comfort.

**34** Background playlists in retail settings are described as .....

**35** The passage states that online taste display can become ..... through likes and shares.

**36** The text explains that some creators place ..... earlier to reduce skipping.

### Questions 37–40

Choose **TRUE** if the statement agrees with the information given in the text, choose **FALSE** if the statement contradicts the information, or choose **NOT GIVEN** if there is no information on this.

**37** The passage suggests that control of shared music choices can distribute comfort and distraction unevenly among people.

**38** The passage indicates that recommendation engines may create a personalised comfort zone by repeatedly reinforcing familiar patterns.

**39** The passage states that the use of public playlists as exclusion is more common in cities than in rural areas.

**40** The passage claims that the meaning of music is fixed and does not depend on context or shared norms.



## Answer Key

27. B

28. A

29. D

30. C

31. B

32. stay

33. shortcuts

34. sonic branding

35. performative display

36. hooks

37. TRUE

38. TRUE

39. NOT GIVEN

40. FALSE