## INTRODUCTION

Coleman's *"Alternative Music Clusters: Defining The Boundaries of the Format"* study is designed to provide an updated, national assessment of the state of Alternative music. Its specific goal is to identify various styles of music within and just beyond the Alternative music spectrum, provide an understanding of how those styles may and may not work together and determine the Alternative format's level of "ownership" of each of those sounds, particularly in comparison with the AOR/Active Rock and Modern/Hot AC formats.

The primary tool used for completing this task is a proprietary clustering technique employed by Coleman in each of its FACT$_®$ auditorium music studies. For a complete description of this technique, as well as details on the methodology employed in this study, please see the Appendix of this document.

GRUNGE EMERGES AS THE LARGEST CLUSTER

The most striking finding of this study is the apparent health of Grunge. While the FACT$_®$ studies Coleman has completed for individual Alternative stations over the past few months have pointed towards a significant decline in the popularity of this style of music, on a national basis it performs solidly. Such findings lead us to believe that had we fielded a similar study 18 to 24 months ago, we would have isolated a much larger Grunge cluster that would have finished in first place in terms of magnitude by a much wider margin. Thus, while we believe Grunge is not as strong as it was in the past, it is still the "biggest" sound in the Alternative spectrum.

CLUSTER MAGNITUDE
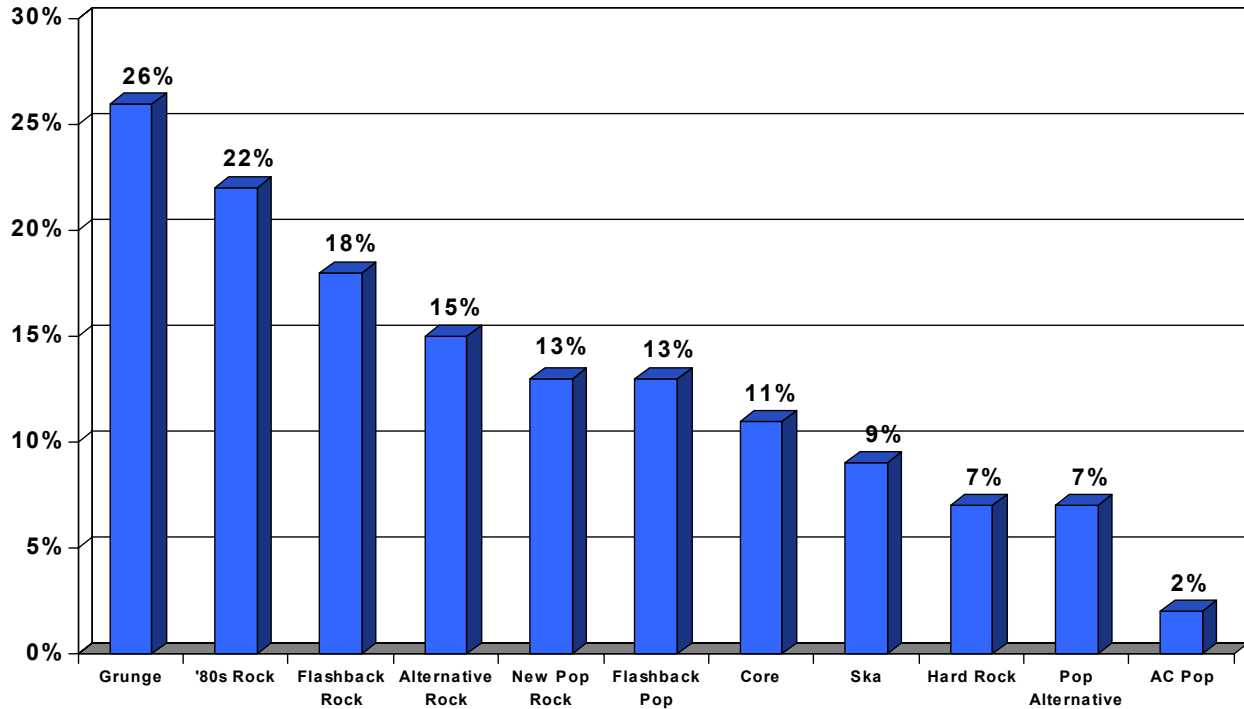
In addition to Grunge, we pinpointed ten other clusters in this study. For each of these clusters, we provide the titles they consist of, as well as a descriptive label. The figure in parentheses next to each label is the size of the cluster, or the percentage of respondents who gave all three songs in the cluster a "five" on the one-to-five Acceptance score scale.

GRUNGE (26%)
"Come As You Are" - Nirvana
"Plush" - Stone Temple Pilots
"Alive" - Pearl Jam

'80S ROCK (22%)
"You Shook Me All Night Long" - AC/DC
"Crazy Train" - Ozzy Osbourne
"Tom Sawyer" – Rush

FLASHBACK ROCK (18%)

"Pride (In The Name of Love)" - U2
"Message In A Bottle" - The Police
"Don't You (Forget About Me)" - Simple Minds

ALTERNATIVE ROCK (15%)
"Tomorrow" - Silverchair
"Cumbersome" - Seven Mary Three
"Comedown" – Bush

NEW POP ROCK (13%)
"You Were Meant For Me" - Jewel
"Ironic" - Alanis Morissette
"Two Princes" - Spin Doctors

FLASHBACK POP (13%)
"Hungry Like The Wolf" - Duran Duran
"(There's) Always Something There To Remind Me" - Naked Eyes
"West End Girls" - Pet Shop Boys

CORE (11%)
"Sabotage" - Beastie Boys
"Bulls On Parade" - Rage Against The Machine
"More Human Than Human" - White Zombie

SKA (9%)
"The Impression That I Get" - The Mighty Mighty Bosstones
"Santeria" - Sublime
"Sell Out" - Reel Big Fish

HARD ROCK (7%)
"Symphony of Destruction" - Megadeth
"Planet Caravan" - Pantera
"The Unforgiven" – Metallica

POP ALTERNATIVE (7%)
"Bitch" - Meredith Brooks
"Your Woman" - White Town
"Where Have All The Cowboys Gone" - Paula Cole

AC POP (2%)
"Un-Break My Heart" - Toni Braxton
"Change The World" - Eric Clapton
"As I Lay Me Down" - Sophie B. Hawkins

LARGE APPETITE EXISTS FOR '80S MUSIC

Also noteworthy is the isolation of three large '80s-based clusters—'80s Rock, Flashback Rock and Flashback Pop—in the data. Although—as we will reveal in subsequent sections of this report—other findings in this study raise significant questions about the role any of this music can have on Alternative stations, there clearly is a segment of the Alternative audience that finds '80s music compelling.

QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STRENGTH OF POP-BASED MATERIAL

We find the relatively small magnitudes of the Pop-based clusters—Pop Alternative and New Pop Rock, in particular—surprising as well. This runs somewhat counter to our recent local findings, which while not necessarily reporting a surging appetite for Pop, have placed it on a comparable level with other Alternative sounds—particularly Grunge, and to a lesser degree, Alternative Rock—whose popularity has declined.

THE POTENTIAL OF SKA

Finally, the presence of a Ska cluster—albeit not a large one—is encouraging. There has been much discussion in Alternative circles regarding this sound, and the fact that titles with Ska "texture" cluster together (rather than merely perform well as individual titles), suggests it is emerging as a cohesive musical style. While there is not enough evidence to declare that Ska is "the next big thing," it appears to be a phenomenon that bares watching.

GRUNGE LEADS IN TERMS OF "PASSION"

Among all 11 clusters, Grunge comes out on top in terms of Cluster Passion, leading '80s Rock and Alternative Rock by a slim margin. (See the Appendix for a complete description of the Cluster Passion calculation.) At the other end of the spectrum, Passion is lowest for Pop Alternative, AC Pop and Ska.

CLUSTER PASSION
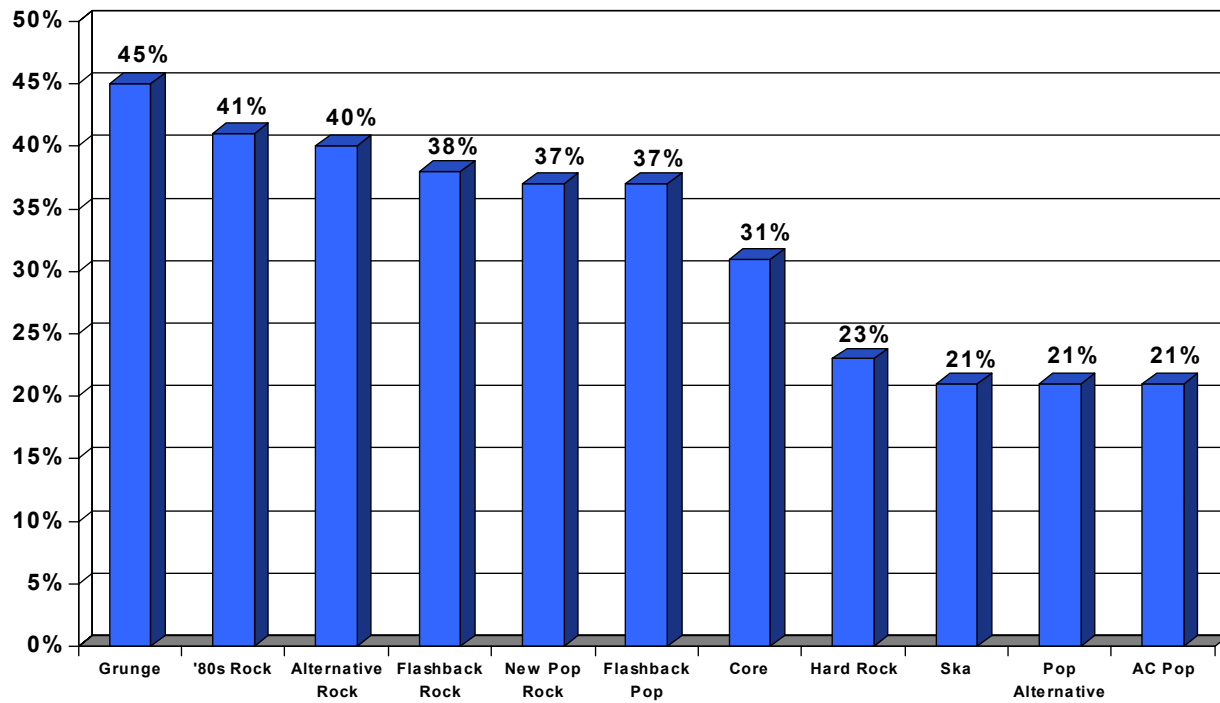
CLUSTER CROSS-COMPATIBILITY

Some of the most important data in this study concerns itself with the issue of Compatibility. Such data provides programmers with a sense of which sounds or styles of music are most easily "combined" on a radio station and which ones do not appear to "blend" well together. It has been our experience at Coleman that stations who focus their music mixes on styles of music that are highly Compatible with one another are more successful at developing clear music images in the minds of listeners. These stations tend to generate high Time Spent Listening levels, which result in improved Average Quarter-Hour performance in Arbitron.

The following table contains the correlation scores for each possible combination of the 11 clusters identified in this study. Correlation scores—which theoretically range from 0 to 100—indicate the relationship between how listeners feel about one sound and another. On one end of the spectrum, a correlation score of 100 indicates complete positive correlation, meaning listeners feel exactly the same about two clusters. At the other end, a correlation score of 0 indicates complete negative correlation, meaning listeners feel exactly the opposite about two clusters (those who love one hate the other, and vice versa). A correlation score of 50 indicates neutrality, in other words how listeners feel about one cluster in no way predicts how they feel about the other. As a general rule if two sounds do not achieve correlation scores of at least 55 with one another, the wisdom of combining them is questionable.

CLUSTER CROSS-COMPATIBILITY

	Flashback Rock	AC Pop	Grunge	Flashback Pop	Core
AC Pop	54	--	--	--	--
Grunge	54	51	--	--	--
Flashback Pop	70	59	53	--	--
Core	45	43	62	45	--
Ska	53	49	58	51	65
Hard Rock	46	50	60	46	64
'80s Rock	54	55	60	53	56
Alternative Rock	50	52	70	51	64
Pop Alternative	49	63	55	58	49
New Pop Rock	56	65	56	60	45

	Ska	Hard Rock	'80s Rock	Alternative Rock	Pop Alternative
AC Pop	--	--	--	--	--
Grunge	--	--	--	--	--
Flashback Pop	--	--	--	--	--
Core	--	--	--	--	--
Ska	--	--	--	--	--
Hard Rock	53	--	--	--	--
'80s Rock	47	66	--	--	--
Alternative Rock	63	63	58	--	--
Pop Alternative	57	52	51	61	--
New Pop Rock	50	46	55	57	62

HOW TO READ: The cluster group Compatibility matrix indicates the degree of correlation between clusters. Fifty (50) is considered neutral Compatibility. Correlations below 50 indicate a negative Compatibility, while correlations above 50 suggest a positive Compatibility.

Strongest Compatibility exists between the Flashback Pop and Flashback Rock clusters, as well as between the Grunge and Alternative Rock clusters, as both combinations have correlation scores of 70. Conversely, AC Pop and Core are the two least compatible sounds, with a correlation score of 43.

Among the more interesting findings in this data are the incompatibility of Flashback-based sounds with the main styles of music that make up the Alternative format, the formation of a coalition that AOR/Active Rock stations can build upon and where Ska could eventually "fit in." We will now review each of these findings.

FLASHBACK NOT COMPATIBLE WITH CONTEMPORARY ALTERNATIVE MUSIC

Flashback Rock and Flashback Pop, while highly Compatible with one another, do not achieve highly-positive correlation scores with any of the other clusters in this study. The Flashback Rock cluster, in particular, does not appear to "blend well" with other sounds, while Flashback Pop has moderately positive correlations with New Pop Rock (60) and Pop Alternative (58). These findings, particularly the latter, suggest that Flashback probably has more of a place in the Hot/Modern AC format than in the Alternative format, although most of the Hot/Modern AC station-specific research we conduct raises doubts about whether Flashback should have any role in Hot/Modern AC.

**GRUNGE AND ALTERNATIVE ROCK BLEND WELL WITH AOR/ACTIVE ROCK SOUNDS**

AOR/Active Rock programmers should be enthused by the finding that the clusters we would normally attribute to their format—'80s Rock and Hard Rock—enjoy decent Compatibility levels with Alternative Rock and Grunge. This may suggest AOR/Active Rock stations can play all four of these sounds without alienating a significant portion of their core audiences, although such a suggestion should be tested through research based on a Rock sample, instead of an Alternative sample.

SKA: A POTENTIAL EXCLUSIVE SOUND FOR ALTERNATIVE FORMAT

Finally, should Ska emerge as an important sound, it appears to be clearly destined for a position in the Alternative format, rather than the AOR/Active Rock format. This is because it shows the highest Compatibility with the Core and Alternative Rock clusters and is virtually incompatible with the '80s Rock and Hard Rock clusters.

All of this Compatibility data can be combined in graphic form to provide insight into how various sounds "work together." For example, the following graph shows how other sounds blend on a station featuring Grunge and Alternative Rock as its two primary sounds. Only those sounds that appear in the green-colored area in the upper right-hand corner achieve Compatibility scores of 55 or greater with both Grunge and Alternative Rock, while those in the yellow area fall below the 55 threshold for at least one of the two clusters.

Grunge vs. Alternative Rock
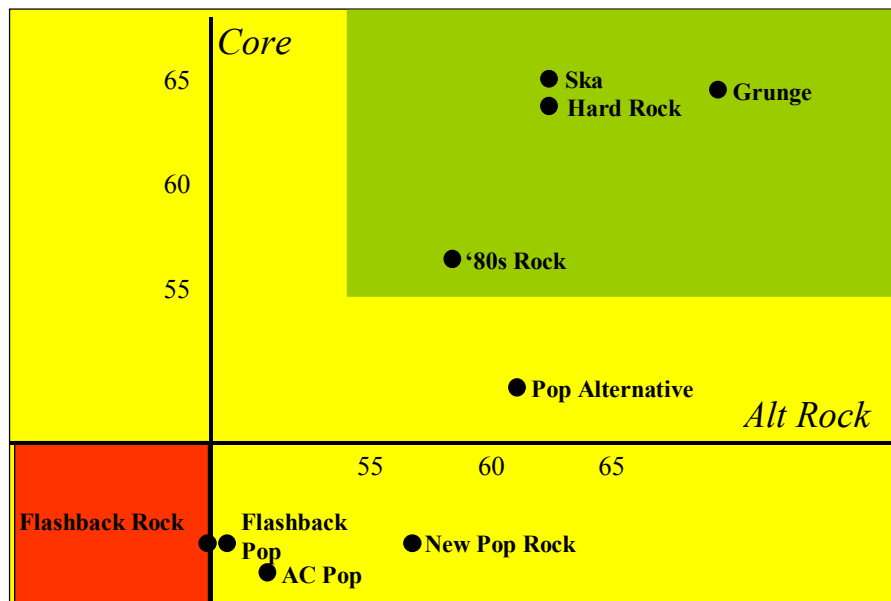**CLUSTER COMPATIBILITY MATRIX**
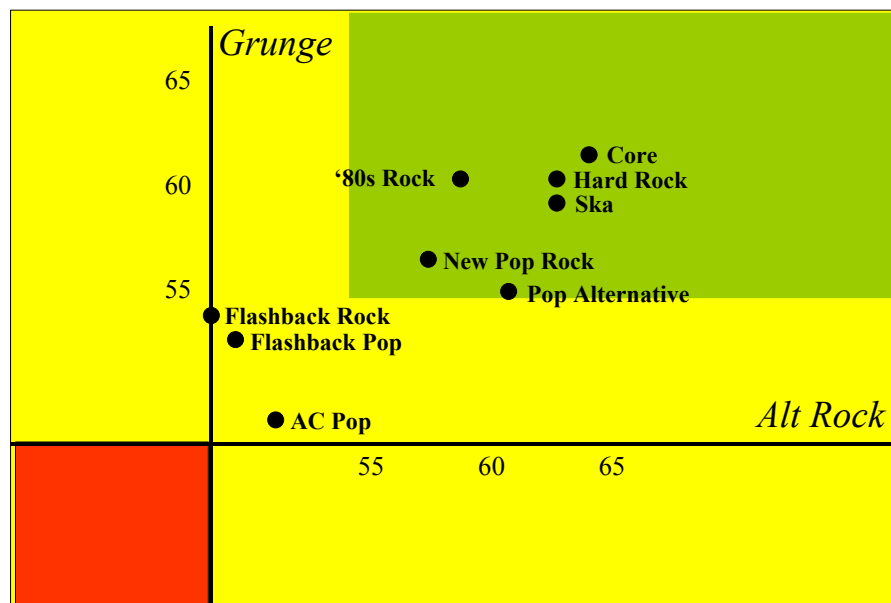
The following tables show similar relationships for radio stations built on other two-primary-sound combinations. For example, for a station focusing primarily on Ska and Core, Alternative Rock and Grunge are the only other sounds that are highly compatible.

**Ska vs. Core**
CLUSTER COMPATIBILITY MATRIX
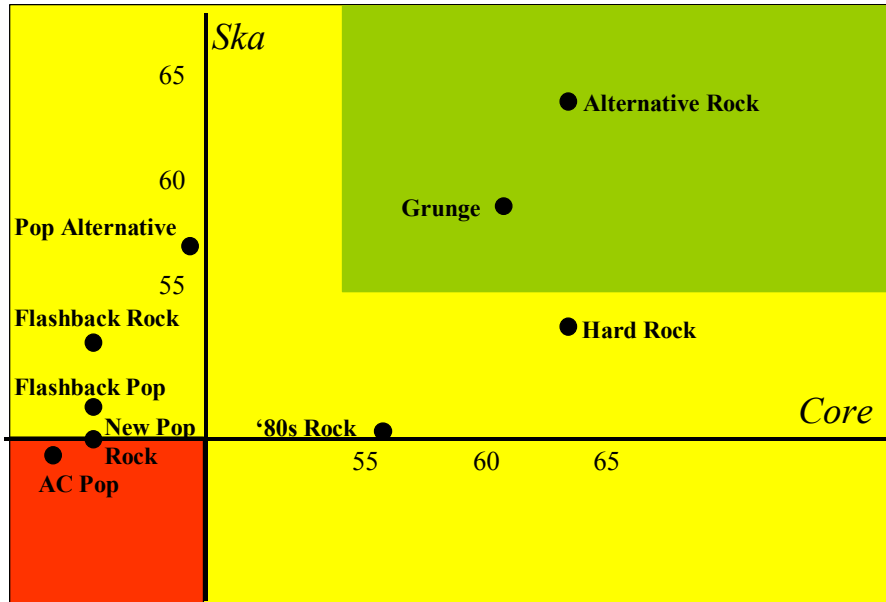
A Core- and Alternative Rock-based station has four other sounds that appear to "mix" well.

**Core vs. Alternative Rock**
CLUSTER COMPATIBILITY MATRIX

Core, Alternative Rock and Grunge all appear to work well on a station built on the Hard Rock and '80s Rock sounds, which is the basis of many AOR/Active Rock stations.

Hard Rock vs. '80s Rock
CLUSTER COMPATIBILITY MATRIX
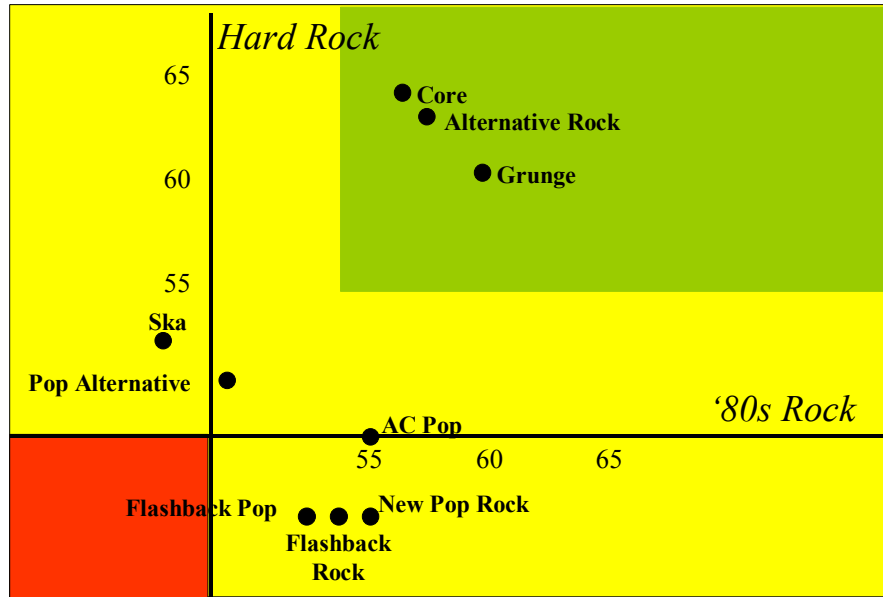
AC Pop, which is perhaps the least Alternative-oriented of the clusters identified in this study, is the most compatible with the overall sound of a station built on Pop Alternative and New Pop Rock—the basis for many Hot/Modern AC stations. Flashback Pop, Alternative Rock and Grunge also appear to have a role on such stations.

New Pop Rock vs. Pop Alternative
CLUSTER COMPATIBILITY MATRIX
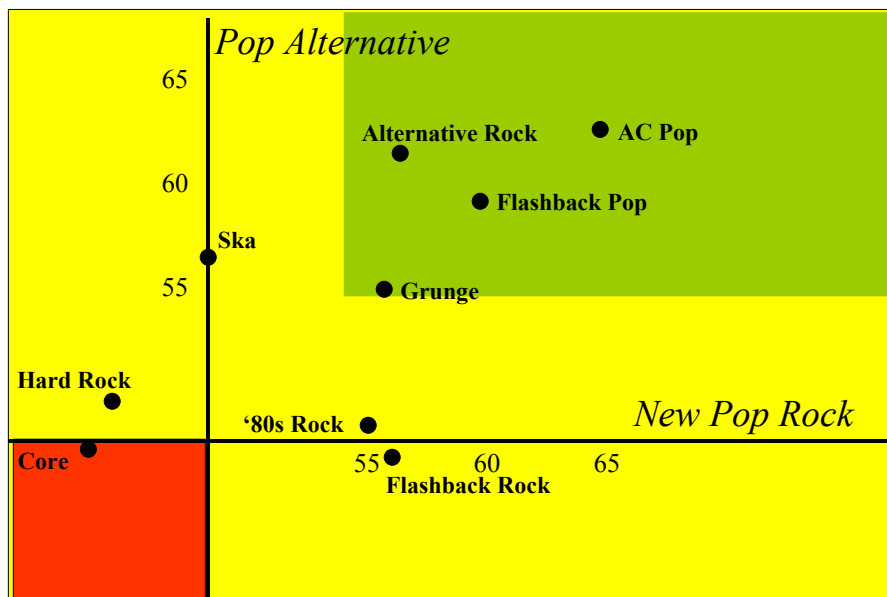
FIT DATA SHEDS LIGHT ON LISTENER EXPECTATIONS

The final point of analysis of the clusters isolated in this study concerns "Fit," Coleman's measure of listener expectations. Quite simply, Fit scores tell us which songs listeners would expect to hear on various stations. It has been our experience that winning stations not only play the most popular music, they consistently meet listener expectations as well.

In this study, we calculate Cluster Fit scores by taking the Fit scores for each song in a cluster and averaging them together. Using the Flashback Rock cluster as an example, we see that 45% of all listeners associate U2's "Pride (In The Name of Love)" with the Alternative station in their market, while The Police's "Message In A Bottle" and "Don't You (Forget About Me)" by Simple Minds achieve Alternative Fit scores of 31% and 30%, respectively. To calculate the Flashback Rock cluster's Alternative format Fit score, we average these three numbers together, giving us a score of 35%.

SKA "UNIQUELY" ALTERNATIVE

Of the 11 clusters isolated in this study, Ska is the most strongly associated with the Alternative format, as an average of 84% of the listeners in this study link the songs in the cluster with the Alternative station in their market. Other songs strongly associated with the Alternative format are Alternative Rock, Grunge and Core.
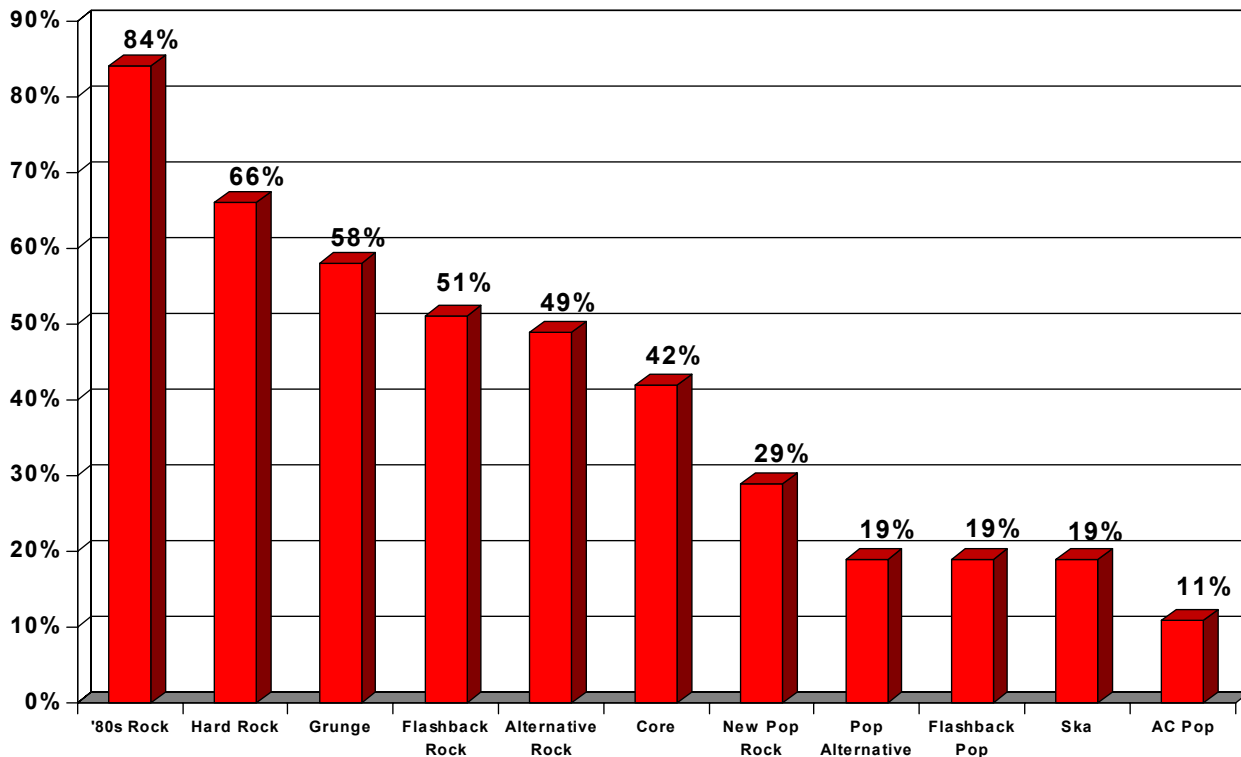
ALTERNATIVE CLUSTER FIT
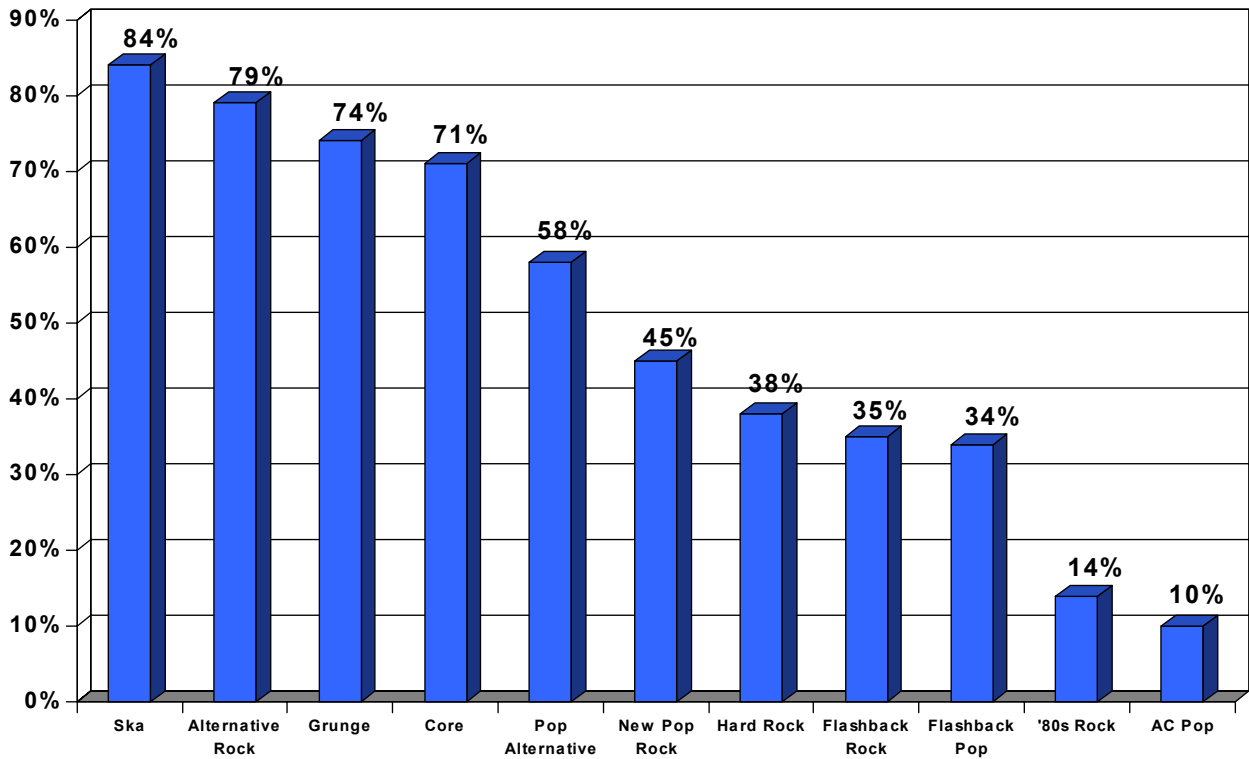
'80S ROCK AND HARD ROCK EXCLUSIVELY AOR/ACTIVE ROCK

The '80s Rock and Hard Rock clusters are the most strongly associated with the AOR/Active Rock format, with Grunge, Flashback Rock and Alternative Rock next in line.

AOR/ACTIVE ROCK CLUSTER FIT

Bar chart showing AOR/Active Rock Cluster Fit percentages:

Cluster	Fit
'80s Rock	84%
Hard Rock	66%
Grunge	58%
Flashback Rock	51%
Alternative Rock	49%
Core	42%
New Pop Rock	29%
Pop Alternative	19%
Flashback Pop	19%
Ska	19%
AC Pop	11%

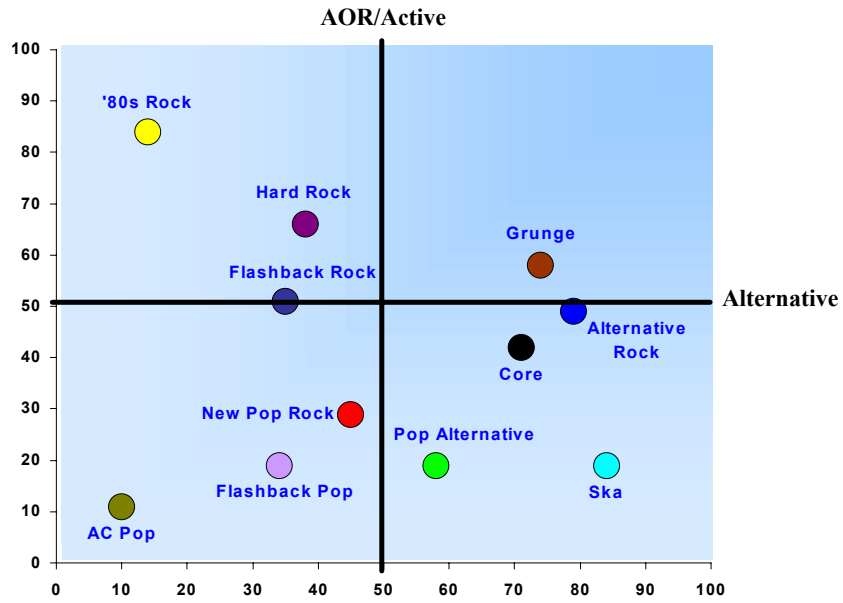## HOT/MODERN AC NOT ASSOCIATED WITH ALTERNATIVE SOUNDS

Finally, listeners most strongly link the songs that make up the AC Pop cluster with the Hot/Modern AC station in their market. Hot/Modern AC stations also receive high Fit scores for New Pop Rock, Flashback Pop and Pop Alternative. This is noteworthy, considering only 20% of the respondents in this study are Hot/Modern AC core listeners.
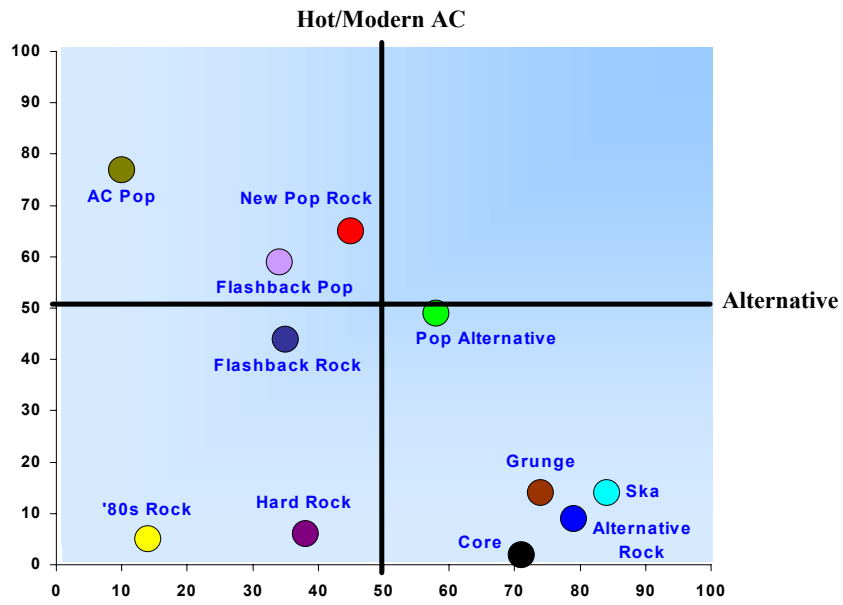
HOT/MODERN AC CLUSTER FIT
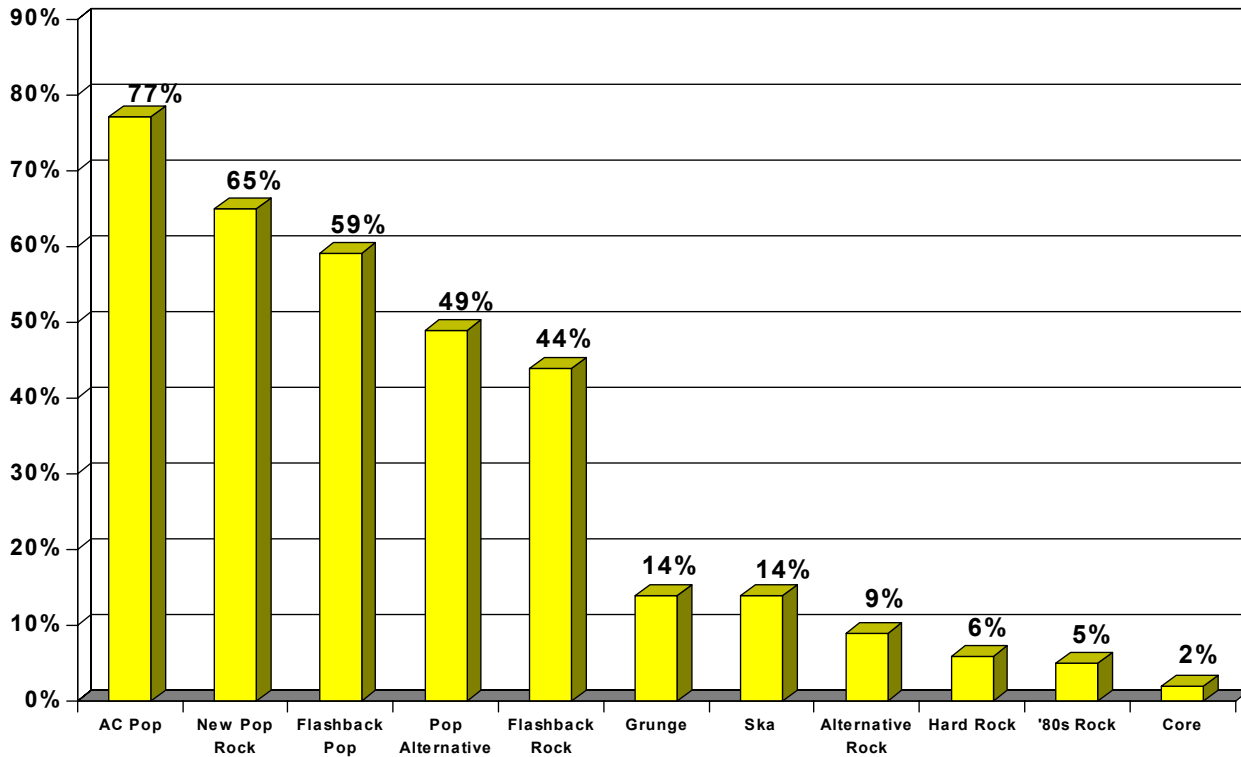
To bring all this Cluster Fit data together, we have assembled the following graphs to show which sounds each format "owns" and which sounds the formats are battling over. Clusters appearing in the upper left-hand corner of each graph are strongly associated with the format appearing on the vertical axis and weakly associated with the format on the horizontal axis. The reverse is true for clusters appearing in the lower right-hand corner of the graph. The upper right-hand corner shows the "points of contention" between two formats, as clusters appearing in this quadrant are highly associated with both formats displayed. A cluster that appears in the lower left-hand corner is not strongly associated with either format.

Cluster Fit Matrix

AOR/Active

'80s Rock — (14, 84)
Hard Rock — (38, 66)
Flashback Rock — (35, 51)
Grunge — (73, 58)
Alternative Rock — (79, 49)
Core — (71, 42)
New Pop Rock — (45, 29)
Flashback Pop — (35, 19)
AC Pop — (10, 11)
Pop Alternative — (58, 19)
Ska — (84, 19)

Alternative

Cluster Fit Matrix

Hot/Modern AC

AC Pop — (14, 77)
New Pop Rock — (45, 65)
Flashback Pop — (35, 59)
Pop Alternative — (58, 49)
Flashback Rock — (35, 44)
Grunge — (74, 14)
Ska — (84, 14)
'80s Rock — (14, 5)
Hard Rock — (38, 6)
Alternative Rock — (79, 9)
Core — (71, 2)

Alternative

16

When reviewing the graph comparing Alternative and AOR/Active Rock Cluster Fit, we can easily see that only two of the 11 clusters are clearly "owned" by either of these formats. AOR/Active Rock stations have a "lock" on the '80s Rock sound, while Ska totally belongs to the Alternative format and is in no way associated with AOR/Active Rock. The Grunge cluster, on the other hand, represents a sound that both formats are battling over, as listeners clearly think both Alternative Rock and AOR/Active Rock stations are sources of this kind of music. In addition, while Core and Alternative Rock technically fall into the lower right-hand quadrant of this graph, they also appear to be sounds the two formats battle over. It is also noteworthy that neither Flashback Rock nor Flashback Pop is strongly associated with either format.

The second graph, which compares Alternative and Hot/Modern AC Cluster Fit, is striking in that no cluster falls into the upper right-hand quadrant, meaning there is no sound identified in this study where these two formats are in direct competition. The Pop Alternative cluster comes closest to such a designation. This chart also demonstrates how Grunge, Alternative Rock, Core and Ska are completely owned by the Alternative format, particularly in relation to Hot/Modern AC-formatted stations.

APPENDIX

METHODOLOGY

Listeners in approximately a dozen radio markets participated in a telephone-based version of a Coleman Fit Acceptance Compatibility Test. The Fit Acceptance Compatibility Test, or FACT®, is Coleman's auditorium music testing service. Much as FACT® respondents would normally do in an auditorium setting, these listeners evaluated music hooks over the phone utilizing "traditional" music test measures, such as Familiarity (on a yes/no basis), Acceptance (on a one-to-five scale where 1 equals "Dislike A Lot" and five means "Like A Lot") and Burn (on a "Tired Of"/"Not Tired Of" basis). In addition, listeners provided Fit data—a standard feature in FACT® studies that provides Coleman clients with data on listeners' musical expectations of their stations as well as their stations' main competitors. Because of the limitations of the telephone-based methodology, only 115 song hooks were tested.
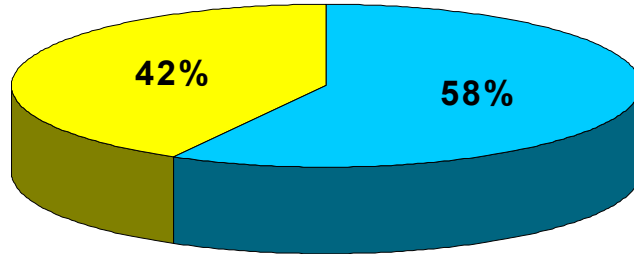
Geographically dispersed markets of various sizes were sampled for this study. In addition, interviews were conducted only in markets that have a viable Alternative station, as well as competing AOR/Active Rock and Modern/Hot AC stations.

To develop the song list, Coleman culled data from numerous FACT® studies completed over the past six months. In addition, major Alternative format consultants and programmers submitted songs lists containing five to eight titles each from what they perceived to be the major "sounds" within and just beyond the format's boundaries. Thus, the final song list represents a marriage of research "science" and programming "art."
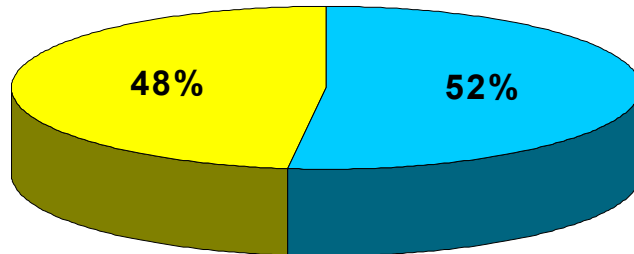
THE SAMPLE

In July and August 1997, 165 interviews were completed with 18- to 34-year-old Alternative cume listeners distributed by sex, age cell and P1 status as described in the following graphs:
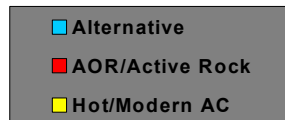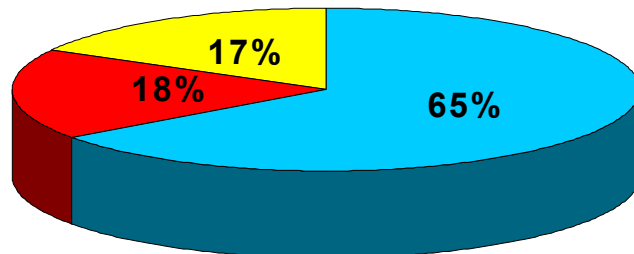
ALTERNATIVE MUSIC STUDY
SEPTEMBER 1997

**SAMPLE
By Gender**

42%   58%

Male   Female

**SAMPLE
By Demographics**

48%   52%

18-25   26-34

**SAMPLE
By P1**

17%
18%   65%

Alternative

AOR/Active Rock

Hot/Modern AC

These distributions were achieved by establishing and adhering to quotas for each of the above demographic factors; the final sample finished within 10% of each pre-set quota.

A NOTE ABOUT CLUSTERING

The primary research technique employed in this study is Cluster Analysis, a concept Coleman introduced to music testing with its 1991 launch of FACT®. In a non-technical manner, we will attempt to explain how Cluster Analysis works in this section.

The goal of Cluster Analysis in music testing is to identify specific musical styles or "bodies of taste" within a music test sample. To do this in this study, Coleman utilized a proprietary computer program that took all 115 songs tested and put them in every three-song combination possible. This yielded 246,905 total three-song combinations. Then, each of these combinations was analyzed by the software, which located only those combinations for which there were strong statistical correlations between how people scored each song in the combination and for which there were a large number of people in the sample who independently scored each of the songs in the combination as a "five" on the one-to-five Acceptance score scale. Those combinations meeting both of these criteria were then considered as candidates for designation as clusters.

Three-song combinations that were considered potential clusters were then reviewed by the staff of Coleman, who—relying on subjectivity and Cluster Analysis findings in previous individual market FACT® studies—selected those three-song combinations that most appropriately represented distinct sounds within and just beyond the Alternative music spectrum.

It should be stressed that although they also contain three songs each, clusters are very different from the montages that are frequently used in various types of radio programming research. Montages, by design, represent preconceived ideas about what makes up various musical styles. Clusters, however, are based on how listeners rate individual songs interspersed thoughout the music test. Thus, the clusters form "naturally" in that they are based on the statistical relationships between how different

songs are scored, and, therefore, are not based on a researcher's or programmer's beliefs regarding the existence of various musical styles.

In addition, readers of this study should be aware that the names we have given each cluster are for descriptive purposes only, and are wholly subjective. It is important that when considering the clusters we have designated, readers focus on the individual titles that make up a cluster, and not its name or label.

CLUSTER "PASSION"

Cluster "Passion" is an additional means for analyzing the clusters. In basic terms, Cluster Passion looks at the percentage of the total sample—as opposed to just those listeners in a cluster—that rates the songs in each cluster with a "five" on the one-to-five Acceptance score scale. Then, an average "Like A Lot" score is calculated for the three songs that make up each cluster. The size of each cluster is then divided by this average "Like A Lot" score, producing an index we refer to as Cluster Passion. When clusters achieve high Passion indexes, this suggests listeners are finding the represented sound to be particularly compelling, and the cluster's performance is not being fueled simply by the fact that listeners like the individual songs making up the cluster.