

Investigating Emotional Experiences of Music Listener: Impact on Psychological Well-being

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ABSTRACT

One of the primary goals of music is to enhance well-being and to reduce stress and make us feel better. However, sometimes it may hinder our emotional state. This study is aimed to examine the effects of music on the listener's psychological well-being and health. Qualitative research design was used. Sample size of 9 young adults was recruited through purposive sampling technique. All of them were regular music listeners. Data collected through semi-structured interviews were analyzed employing thematic analysis. The results have shown the diversity of emotional experiences and the role of music in the alleviation of stress and anxiety. It was also observed that the music helps in catharsis and spiritual connection. Further, music plays an important role in fostering and promoting social connection and emotional health. The study can be implied in community engagement, educational and health settings.

Key words: *Music, Psychology, Emotions, Well-being*

1. INTRODUCTION

Ever wondered how just a single piece of a song whisk you away to another time, evoke intense emotions, or swiftly influence your emotional state? As Friedrich Nietzsche said, Without music, life would be a mistake. But, if we talk beyond just simple pleasures, how deeply a music can affect our mental state? Current study shows that music plays very important role in everyday lives, it is not just something we listen to for fun, rather it has a deeper impact on how we feel. It is like a language that we all are able to understand. Music directly speaks to our hearts. People often use music consciously to change their state of mind, and some studies provide proof that individuals rely profoundly on music for this change (Getz & Roy,2014; Van Goetham & Sloboda, 2011). Music is increasingly offered in medical settings for pain and stress relief and to promote fast recovery like during childbirth, surgery and to manage mental health (Hanser, 2010; Standley, 1986).

From nostalgic tunes that takes us back to cherished memories, to upbeat melodies that energize our souls, the impact of music on our well-being is undeniable. Studies have shown that individuals usually understand the messages and experience the emotions that artists endeavor to convey to their audiences (Juslin, 2005). Music is considered as one of the most universally accepted way of expression and communication for humanity and is spread across all cultures around the world in the everyday lives of people of all ages (Mehr et al., 2019).

Music is so powerful that it can awake a wide range of emotions from joy and motivation to sadness and unwillingness. To involve oneself in music listening could be beneficial for experiencing emotional release

(Batt-Rawden, 2010; Damasio & Habibi, 2015). Music not only can change our emotional state but it also can help us to maintain our emotional health. In a study by Lonsdale and North (2011) they discovered that about 96% of the time, the participants listened to music to normalize their feelings. Recent research emphasizes the cognitive benefits associated with music, revealing its ability to boost up the executive functions and neuroplasticity. From early exposure to lifelong musical training, the profound impact of music on cognitive resilience and brain development plays a crucial role in interdisciplinary study and therapeutic advancement (Thaut et al., 2015). However, apart from emotional regulation, people may turn to music to shape or maintain their social identity as music expedite social bond and communication. As a universal language, music promotes social cohesion and interpersonal rapport. Whether through shared enjoyment of live performances, collective rituals, or mutual music making, it surpasses all cultural or language barriers to forge bonds that bind society together (MacDonald & Kreutz, 2012). Furthermore, there is a noteworthy impact of music on cognition as some individuals may analyze the structural properties of music, such as harmony and rhythm which can enhance their memory and attention (Getz et al., 2014). As there have been many studies conducted on the music, this research will examine the effects of music on the psychological well-being of the listeners and how music shape and transform our inner worlds? how it influences the mood, emotions and cognition of the listeners? and how it helps them in forming social relations? This study will serve the purpose to answer all these questions.

1.1 Research Question

How music affects the psychological well-being of a listener and what is the importance of music in one's life?

1.2 Objectives

- To explore the effects of music on the listeners psychological states and emotions.
- To find out the significance of music in one's life.

2. METHOD

2.1 Sample

Random sampling technique was used to gathered the data from the participants and to eliminate bias in selection process. This step was taken to ensure the accuracy of sample reflecting the population.

2.2 Script

A well-structured script was written to standardize the language and to follow the uniform procedure for each participant. This step was taken to maintain the consistency and to minimize the complications throughout the interview.

2.3 Participants

Undergraduate students ($N = 13$; 53.84% females and 46.15% males) of Government College University, Faisalabad participated in this research project. All the participants were adult (aged 18 or above). Only active music listeners were included in this study.

2.4 Procedure

Data was collected through semi-structured interviews. Participants were encouraged by the researcher to share their past experiences during the interviews. Dummy codes were used to protect the participant's

identities. One on one interviews were taken to protect the confidentiality of the participants. 15 to 20 minutes were spent on each interview. Thematic analysis was used for the examination of data. Participants were informed on the study's objectives.

2.5 preliminary analyses

Preliminary analyses conducted for accurate, honest responses and to eliminate non-serious participants, those who carelessly respond or failed to respond correctly were removed ($N = 4$). After analyses, 9 participants were left in analyzed data.

3. FINDINGS

3.1. Diversity in emotional responses of the students

First theme included the wide range of emotions evoked in participants while listening to the music. It encompasses both positive and negative emotional states. Following sub themes emerged.

3.1.1 *Rage and Intensity*

Participants mentioned that they felt a wide range of intense emotions while listening to the music, sometimes music energize them and sometime may depress them. Sometimes it resulted in a lot of joy and happiness while sometimes may cause sadness.

"Depend krta hai ma kis mood may shift hona chti hn, music mujhy waha tak rsai deta hai" (P 1)

3.1.2 *Duration*

This sub theme focused on the duration and longevity of the emotions evoked by the music. The duration of emotional experience varies from person to person with respect to context. For some participants, emotions go no longer after the music has ended while for some it persists for a long time even after the music has ended.

"Ma to music sirf waqti mzy k liay sunti hn" (P 2)

So, duration of the emotions is a highly subjective experience and it depends on participant's mood and the situation.

3.2 Music as a mood regulator

For participants, music is very crucial in regulating and maintaining their emotional state and well-being. This theme focused at how participants used music to change how they feel and navigate through various psychological states.

"Agr ma sad hona chta hn to ma sad songs prefer krta hn or agr mujhy motivation chy to ma high beat music sunta hn" (P 3)

3.2.1 *Strategies*

Music serves as a tool for the regulation of mood state. It can awake a wide range of emotions. Participants often use specific songs, genres or singers to change their emotional states. Sometimes they use music to become more nostalgic and sometime it makes them more imaginative. For example, a participant is missing his time spent with loved ones, he starts listening romantic songs to feel the nostalgia or if he needs motivation, he may get exposure to upbeat and energetic music to imagine his

success in the future. Hence, participants often use music as a coping mechanism to cope up with their present situation in an effort to calm down their inner conflicts.

3.3 Impact of music on mental health

Music has vast impacts on mental health and overall well-being. It can influence our behavior, emotions and thoughts in various ways. Some of the key impacts of music has explained in this theme.

3.3.1 Stress Relief

Music play an important role in the lives of participants in alleviating stress and improve overall well-being by providing them comfort, distraction and satisfaction. For example: Participant 3 shared one of his personal experience with the researcher, when he has to go to a police station to help his friend out. He was very nervous and stressed. To overcome these negative emotions, he listened Sidhu Moose wala's songs. These energetic songs not only helped him to overcome these negative emotions but also boost up his confidence and courage. In addition, music has a power to stimulate our neurotransmitters such as dopamine and serotonin. Both of these are responsible for mood regulation and pleasure.

3.3.2 Improve Memory

Participants shared their different experiences where music not only helped them in improving memory and recalling rather also increased their learning capacity. They learn better while listening to the good music. Music stimulates the neural pathways responsible for memory formation. Participants often listen music while studying or working, it helps them to focus and concentrate and also help in better retention of memory.

"Mery liay music lgay bgair parhna na mumkin hai" (P 5)

3.4 Social Connections

Music helped participants in fostering and maintaining social connections. Shared musical experiences provide them sense of belonging, shared enjoyment and mutual support. It also provides them a safe place to share their thoughts, feelings and emotions with each other to connect on a deeper level.

"Music ki koi zaban nhi hoti, phir bhi har koi isy smjh skta hai" (P 1)

Music breached all the linguistic, cultural and geographical barriers, providing an opportunity to foster new connection with the people around the globe.

"Mujhy India may aik BTS ki fan mili and aj wo meri best friend hai, wo mery bary may sab kuch janti hai or mujhy bht achy say smjhti hai" (P 5)

3.5 Role of music in one's life

The researchers asked each of the participants to rate the role of music in their lives. For this purpose, they used an 11-point scale ranging from 0 to 10 (*0 means very small and 10 means very significant*).

- Out of 9 participants, 4 participants rated the role of music in their lives as 6 and 3 rated it as 7
- In addition, 2 participants rated it as 4, which indicates a lower significance as compared to others.
- If we generalize the result to the whole music listening community, about 78% of the music listeners considered that the music plays a significant role in their lives.

3.6 Music and Catharsis

Researchers found that out of 9 participants, 6 participants used music for emotional release or catharsis. At time, they felt so down that they just have to put on sad music to accompany their pain. And also, there are those moments of joy and happiness when they listen upbeat and energetic songs to dance with the beat. All these scenarios are the moments where music act as a tool for emotional release.

“Music mujhy trauma say nikalny may madad krta hai” (P 6)

3.7 Music and Spirituality

Out of 9 participants, 2 participants prefer to listen sacred music like hymn and chants that connect them with the divine.

“Jab ye wali qawwali sunti hn (ya hayyu ya qayum) to bht zyada spiritual connection feel hota hai” (P 4)

In addition, spiritual music encourages them to introspect or reflect within themselves. It makes them realize who they are and to whom they belong to. They often feel complete and satisfied while listening to the spiritual music.

4. DISCUSSION

Music promote and manage our psychological well-being in multifaceted ways. Interviews of university students, who were regular music listeners were conducted and thematic analysis was used to extract the themes. The diversity in emotional responses found among the participants, keeping in view the complex nature of music influence. Furthermore, some participants felt the intense emotions like joy and sadness while listening to the music, while for others, it was just a source of regulation of mental state. Music listening is a highly subjective experience and is influenced by context, situation, emotional state and past experiences. For example, to express more complex emotions like grief, loss and heart break through music may also become more difficult because the more complex the emotion is, the more subjective the interpretation becomes because the experience of loss is different for every person (Juslin & Laukka, 2004). Moreover, the duration of emotional experiences felt by the participants varies from person to person. Another important finding, was the role of music in the promotion of mental health. For many participants, it was a source of stress relief, distraction and comfort during the challenging times. For instance, participants shared their personal experiences how listening to energetic music lifted their confidence and also helped them overcome feelings of nervousness. In healthcare settings, music has become a potent source to manage pain, stress relief and overall health and well-being. The calming effect of music helps in healing both the body and the mind (Odler-Miller, 2016). Moreover, music enhances learning process and has a positive impact on memory. Music affects the multiple aspects of student life, including physical & mental well-being, self-esteem, confidence, social relations and positive emotions (Hu et al., 2021). Different music genres play an important role on the emotional wellbeing of people. The highlight of the study was, music provides a sense of belonging and help in making social connections. Music helps in connecting cultures and people from all aspects of life.

The study also revealed the use of music as a form of catharsis for emotional release and to find solace during hard times. If the listener intended to reduce stress while listening music, it can indeed have stressreducing effect, particularly when the aim is to relax (Linnenmann et al., 2015). Similarly, for some participants, music was a source of spiritual connection. It plays a key role in finding spiritual encouragement. Overall, the results suggested that the music is very crucial for everyone.

4.1 Conclusion

In conclusion, this study illuminates the profound impact of music on an individual's psychological wellbeing. Data collection took place through semi-structured interviews. Thematic analysis helped in extracting themes and subthemes to understand the crucial role of music in one's life. Through studying the experiences of regular music listeners, this study signifies music's capacity for creating a sense of belonging, emotional regulation and social connections. Overall, the study focused on the importance of music in multidimensional aspects of life to promote holistic well-being and happiness.

4.2 Implications

4.2.1 Educational Settings

The findings of this study can be implicated in educational settings by incorporating music therapy sessions into the curriculum that will help in promoting the cognitive and emotional development among the students. Teachers can use music as a tool for promoting memory and learning enhancement. In addition, counseling communities in the universities and colleges can include music-based interventions to enhance over all well-being of the students.

4.2.2 Community engagement

Music based events such as concerts, music festivals can be arranged that will help in fostering social connections and community cohesion. This could include cultural exchange programs or sing along music performances. Such events can help people of different backgrounds to form new connections and feel a sense of togetherness.

4.2.3 Awareness campaigns

Mental health awareness campaigns can be arranged to promote the therapeutic benefits of music on individual's psychological health and well-being. Through social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, these campaigns can help millions of people to come out from insulation and form new connections. Through these campaigns, music can be promoted as a tool for stress relief, self-care and emotional regulation.

4.3 Limitations

The study contains several limitations. Sample size of only 9 participants were very small and the data was collected from a specific area of the specific city, limiting the generalizability of findings and may restrict diversity of experiences. As thematic analysis solely rely on subjective interpretation, may causing bias during the analysis process. Interviews were taken from undergraduate students only, limiting the applicability of results to other age groups. In addition, the absence of control group makes it difficult to observe whether the changes in psychological well-being solely caused by music or were influenced by other factors.

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