

Personality and masculinity-femininity traits as predictors of music preferences

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ABSTRACT

Music is a powerful tool for emotional and social communication. It connects and brings people together, and serves as a medium to express their emotions. Music listening is a ubiquitous leisure activity and is used by people for different purposes. For years, researchers have studied the psychological aspects of music and its impact on people. The current study focuses on exploring a correlation between music genre preferences and personality traits in young adults (18-30 years, N=120). It also tries to find a possible relationship between music preferences and masculinity-femininity traits. Since the previous studies have majorly been conducted in Western countries, the current study examines the individual differences and their impact on the choice of music in the Indian population. Standardized tools were used for the assessment. The findings corroborated the earlier studies and observed a relationship between individual differences and music preferences. A positive correlation was found between Extraversion and Energetic & Rhythmic music (i.e., dance/electronic and hip-hop music). Agreeableness was found to be negatively correlated with Intense & Rebellious music (i.e., heavy metal, rock music). A relationship between masculinity-femininity traits and music preferences was also determined. Expressive traits were negatively correlated with Intense & Rebellious music and instrumental traits were found to be positively correlated with Energetic & Rhythmic music. The results also revealed some gender differences. Future investigations are required to determine the extent to which music listening behaviours serve as a reflection of personality.

Keywords: *Music and Personality, Music Preferences, Masculinity-Femininity*

“The power of music and the plasticity of the brain go together very strikingly, especially in young people.” – Oliver Sacks

Music is a constant companion to people's everyday lives. It serves different purposes to different people ranging from being a source of entertainment, inducing sleep, uplifting mood, and a tool for expressing emotions. Humankind and art go hand in hand, and music is a form of artistic expression. It is a tool of social and emotional communication. Merriam (1964), an eminent ethnomusicologist, described music as the only human cultural activity which is pervasive, delves into, moulds, and often

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controls human behaviour. Music is of prominent significance in society. It serves as a medium to communicate information and express emotions. Hence, often used as a catalyst to spread/convey social messages. It binds people together in a meaningful manner and fills a void in society to enrich our culture.

For years, psychologists have been exploring the various whys and how of music listening. They have also tried to shed light on the association of music preferences with other variables. There are numerous studies which have explored the relationship between music preferences and personality (Arnett, 1992; Cattell & Anderson, 1953; Cattell & Saunders, 1954; Little & Zuckerman, 1986; McCown et al., 1997; Rawlings, & Ciancarelli, 1997; Renfrow and Gosling, 2003; Desling, et al., 2007). Cattell was one of the first theorists to explore a link between individual differences and music preferences. He believed that music preferences reflect unconscious motives and urge (Cattell & Anderson, 1953; Cattell & Saunders, 1954).

According to uses and gratification theory, people make their media choices based on their personality characteristics (Arnett, 1995; Larson, 1995; Rubin, 1994). Music preferences are found to be a reflection of their values, images, beliefs, and identifications (Arnett, 1995; Larson, 1995); and perceptions of self (White, 1985).

Keston & Pinto (1955) tried to investigate a possible relationship between music preferences and masculinity-femininity traits. Traditionally, masculinity and femininity have been conceptualized as the two extreme ends of a continuum. Gender stereotypes characterize women and men as complementary: men are perceived to be agentic but not communal, whereas women are perceived to be communal but not agentic (Kahalon, Shnabel, & Becker, 2020). Masculinity is linked with instrumentality whereas femininity with expressivity. Although the concept of measuring masculinity and femininity is doubtlessly complex and problematic, it is reasonable to assume its association with music choices.

Personality

Personality trait constructs are typically viewed as enduring dispositions that persist and remain relatively stable over time (Boyle, Matthews, & Saklofske, 2008).

Personality reflects basic dimensions on which people differ (Matthews, Deary, & Whiteman, 2003).

The Big Five Model conceptualized by Costa & McCrae (1992) is a widely used approach to measure personality traits. The five-factor model as measured by the Neo Personality Inventory-Revised (NEO PI-R) comprises of five trait dimensions, namely Openness, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness and Neuroticism.

Music Preferences

Music has the power to evoke intense emotional responses. Studies show that music can target the dopaminergic reward system of the brain, responsible for pleasurable sensations and reinforcing behaviours (Gebauer, Kringelbach, & Vuust, 2012). Individuals listen to particular styles of music for regulating their moods. For example, when angry or sad, one might choose to listen to heavy metal or rock music to vent their anger. One might even listen to blues or melancholic music during a breakup to feel comforted and understood (Saarikallio & Erkkilä, 2007).

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According to recent studies, people use music as a medium to communicate their attitudes and self-views (North & Hargreaves, 1999). Adolescents use music for impression management i.e., portraying an external image to others, and to please family/friends. Music fulfils their social and emotional needs and helps them build peer relationships (North, Hargreaves & O'Neill, 2000).

Music preferences and Personality

Rentfrow and Gosling (2003) conducted the first comprehensive analysis of the measure of music preferences and its relationship with personality. In their devised 14 genre scale (STOMP), they found that the structure of music preferences can be classified into four broad dimensions, Reflective & Complex (R&C), Intense & Rebellious (I&R), Upbeat & Conventional (U&C), and Energetic & Rhythmic (E&R). Openness to Experience was found to be positively correlated with R&C and I&R dimensions. Extraversion was found to be positively correlated with U&C and E&R dimensions.

Dollinger (1993) found out that excitement seeking, a facet of extraversion (Aluja, Garcia and Garcia, 2003) was positively related to the preferences for hard rock music. Sensation seeking was found to be positively linked with the choices of punk music, heavy metal and hard rock music (Little & Zuckerman, 1986). Additionally, Extraversion and Psychoticism have shown a direct correlation to music with exaggerated bass, like rap (McCown et al., 1997).

Masculinity-femininity traits

Masculinity and femininity refer to traits or characteristics typically associated with being male or female, respectively. Gender roles are the culture's expectations of how a male and female should behave. Males and females are taught to behave and express emotions differently in society. They are stereotyped to possess certain distinct qualities to a greater extent than one another. For example, stereotypes of "masculinity" are dominant, independent, rational, and include physical qualities such as strength and appearance (e.g. toughness). Femininity on the other hand is believed to include qualities like kindness, helping emotional and nurturing.

Bem's Sex Role Inventory (BSRI) includes traditional masculine and feminine traits and, the masculinity scale measures dominance, and femininity is associated with love and nurturance (Wiggins and Brogton, 1985). In addition, men were found to be more assertive than women, and women were found to be high in nurturance (Feingold, 1994).

The masculine/instrumental traits comprising of features like assertiveness independence and self-reliance were reported to be positively correlated to self-esteem (Whitley, 1983) and mental health (Bassoff & Glass, 1982).

The traditional concept of masculinity-femininity rejects the existence of androgyny (possessing both masculine and feminine characteristics). Bem (1974) introduced the concept of androgyny and defined masculinity and femininity as separate constructs. Gender roles and the formation of gender identity influence the development of personality and hence could affect their media preferences. Eagly (1987) described the adoption of gender roles as the reason for gender differences.

Purpose of the research study

The present study examines the personality traits as predictors of music genre preferences in young adults. It also investigates any possible relationship between masculine/instrumental and feminine/expressive traits and music preferences. In addition to examining individual personality differences, the study also measures gender differences (males and females) in the mapping of music choices.

Hypothesis

- H1. The preference of music genres is closely linked to the individual's personality.
- H2. Masculinity-femininity traits have a probable influence on the choice of music.
- H3. There will exist a difference between the music preferences of males and females.

METHODOLOGY

An online survey questionnaire was created using google forms, an online survey administration tool. The questionnaire was designed to measure (a) demographics (age, gender), (b) music genre preferences, (c) individual personality traits, (d) instrumentality-expressivity traits. Participants submitted responses to each measure included in this study.

Sample

A total of 120 individuals participated in the study, consisting of 70 females and 50 males. The age range for this study was 18 to 30 years of age. The sample was selected from the cities of Delhi NCR and Chandigarh in India.

Measures

1. **Short Test of Music Preferences (STOMP):** Given by Rentfrow and Gosling (2003), it measures music preferences on a seven-point Likert-type scale (ranging from dislike strongly to like strongly). It consists of 14 music genres and assesses four broad music-preference dimensions.
 - Reflective & Complex (R&C; covering blues, jazz, classical, and folk music)
 - Intense & Rebellious (I&R; rock, alternative, heavy metal music)
 - Upbeat & Conventional (U&C; country, soundtracks, religious, and pop music)
 - Energetic & Rhythmic (E&R; rap/hip-hop, soul/funk, electronic/dance music).
2. **Ten-Item Personality Inventory (TIPI):** Given by Gosling, Rentfrow & Swann (2013), this 10-item self-report questionnaire measures the Big Five personality dimensions, i.e. neuroticism (N), extraversion (E), openness to experience (O), agreeableness (A) and conscientiousness (C) on a seven-point Likert-type scale (ranging from disagree strongly to agree strongly).
3. **Personal Attributes Questionnaire (PAQ):** PAQ by Spence, Helmreich, & Stapp (1974) is a 24-item self-report questionnaire that measures the degree of masculinity and femininity in terms of respondents' self-perceived acquisition of various characteristics that are stereotypically believed to differentiate the sexes. The items are measures of two scales, instrumentality and expressivity. "Masculinity" as defined by the PAQ means being "self-assertive" or "instrumental", and femininity as "expressive" or "interpersonal".

Procedure

The participants were informed about the purpose of the research and the questionnaires were filled via google forms. The participants were assured of confidentiality to elicit their

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honest responses without any fear or inhibitions. Standardized psychological tests were administered to the participants.

RESULTS

Mean, standard deviation, Pearson product-moment correlation, and Mann Whitney U were calculated for the sample (N=120).

Table 1: Difference between the scores of males and females.

| | Gender | N | Mean Rank | Mann-Whitney U |
|----------------|--------|----|-----------|----------------|
| E | Female | 70 | 60.41 | 1743.500 |
| | Male | 50 | 60.63 | |
| A | Female | 70 | 61.87 | 1654.000 |
| | Male | 50 | 58.58 | |
| C | Female | 70 | 64.14 | 1495.000 |
| | Male | 50 | 55.40 | |
| ES | Female | 70 | 53.88 | 1286.500 |
| | Male | 50 | 69.77 | |
| O | Female | 70 | 59.61 | 1688.000 |
| | Male | 50 | 61.74 | |
| R&C | Female | 70 | 58.29 | 1595.500 |
| | Male | 50 | 63.59 | |
| I&R | Female | 70 | 54.19 | 1308.500 |
| | Male | 50 | 69.33 | |
| U&C | Female | 70 | 58.37 | 1601.000 |
| | Male | 50 | 63.48 | |
| E&R | Female | 70 | 61.94 | 1649.000 |
| | Male | 50 | 58.48 | |
| M | Female | 70 | 57.56 | 1544.500 |
| | Male | 50 | 64.61 | |
| F | Female | 70 | 66.42 | 1335.500 |
| | Male | 50 | 52.21 | |

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Table 2: Correlational Values

| | E | A | C | ES | O | R&C | I&R | U&C | E&R | M | F |
|-----|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| E | | | | | .332** | | | | .198* | .339** | |
| A | | | .301** | .343** | | | -.230* | | | | .308** |
| C | | .301** | | .332** | .195* | | | | | .377** | .352** |
| ES | | .343** | .332** | | | | | -.189* | | .343** | |
| O | .332** | | .195* | | | | | | | .367** | |
| R&C | | | | | | | .359** | .517** | .226* | | |
| I&R | | -.230* | | | | .359** | | .324** | .349** | | -.207* |
| U&C | | | | -.189* | | .517** | .324** | | .332** | | |
| E&R | .198* | | | | | .226* | .349** | .332** | | .240** | |
| M | .339** | | .377** | .343** | .367** | | | | .240** | | |
| F | | .308** | .352** | | | | -.207* | | | | |

Note:

i. ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$

ii. E- Extraversion, A- Agreeableness, C- Conscientiousness, ES- Emotional Stability, O- Openness to Experience, R&C- Reflective & Complex, I&R- Intense & Rebellious, U&C- Upbeat & Conventional, E&R- Energetic & Rhythmic

DISCUSSION

The study assessed personality and masculinity-femininity traits as predictors of music preferences in young adults. The findings suggest a significant association between personality dimensions and music preferences, supporting the first hypothesis. Extraversion was found to be positively correlated with Energetic and Rhythmic music ($r = 0.198$, $p < 0.05$). Agreeableness was found to be negatively correlated with Intense and Rebellious music ($r = -0.230$, $p < 0.05$). A negative correlation between emotional stability and Upbeat and Conventional music was also present ($r = 0.189$, $p < 0.05$). Masculinity-femininity traits were also found to be linked with music preference dimensions. Intense and Rebellious music was negatively correlated with feminine/expressive traits ($r = -0.207$, $p < 0.05$) and Energetic and Rhythmic music was positively correlated with masculine/instrumental traits ($r = 0.240$, $p < 0.01$). Thus, the second hypothesis stands true.

The results indicate that individuals who prefer hip-hop/rap and dance/electronic music (E & R) tend to be talkative, sociable, and fun-loving. Extraverts' desire to socialize and have fun with peers may account for this positive correlation (Desling et al., 2008).

It can be seen that individuals who enjoy heavy metal and rock music (I & R) are critical and lack compassion. People who prefer Intense & Rebellious music tend to be curious, adventurous, and consider themselves intelligent (Renfrow & Gosling, 2003). Though previous studies didn't find any substantial correlation between signs of neuroticism and music preference dimensions (Rentfrow & Gosling, 2003), the current study observed a

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negative relationship between Upbeat & Conventional music and emotional stability, indicating that such individuals are sensitive and likely to worry more. An indirect correlation between Energetic & Rhythmic and Intense & Rebellious music dimensions and Openness to Experience was determined. The study, however, didn't find any correlation between Conscientiousness and music preference dimensions.

As per the findings, it can be observed that people who were relatively warmer, emotional, and understanding didn't enjoy Intense and Rebellious music. It can also be seen that people who considered themselves independent, superior, and active preferred Energetic and Rhythmic music. Gender differences were also determined in music preferences. A significant difference in preference for Intense & Rebellious music was found; males preferred heavy metal and rock music more than females. Reflective & Complex and Upbeat & Conventional music was slightly more preferred by males whereas females preferred Energetic & Rhythmic music more. Previous studies also reported gender differences, like females extremely preferred pop music (Colley, 2008; Zwegenhaft, 2008; George et al, 2007) whereas men preferred heavy and rebellious music, like heavy metal, punk, and rock music (George et al., 2007).

CONCLUSION

Music is an integral part of our lives. It plays a crucial role in our social and personal lives. It fulfills the emotional and social needs of people. People listen to music for numerous reasons, for instance, to relieve stress, to relieve boredom, to please others, and so forth. Music is not only used as a leisure activity but also helps regulate the mood in varying situations.

The current study was conducted to determine the impact of individual differences on music preferences. The study has certain important implications. Music preferences speak a lot about an individual's personality. This could help in revealing the information about the personality traits of a person and what they are like. Music preferences are also influenced by self-views and could help provide information about their qualities and other facets like political orientation, values, and goals (Rentfrow and Gosling, 2003). Its knowledge could help parents and counselors in establishing a dialogue and facilitating individuals with developmental issues (Schwartz and Fouts, 2003) like identity crisis, gender-role confusion, or emotional issues.

However, the results of the current study were generally consistent with those of Rentfrow and Gosling (2003), George and colleagues (2007), Delsing and Colleagues (2008), and Langmeyer et al. (2012), yet there are certain limitations. First, the sample size was disproportional in terms of gender and was limited to only young adults, mostly college-going. This leaves out the other factors that could possibly have an impact on music preferences like age, socio-economic background, and intelligence. Hence, the sample should be more heterogeneous. Second, there exist cultural differences, owing to India's diverse culture. The scale used for measuring music preferences didn't include genres like Bollywood, Indian folk music, Qawalli, and others, which are highly prevalent in India. Hence the current scale limited the music choices.

Personality is influenced by cultural and social factors. Considering the diverse culture of India and the cultural factors affecting the variables present, the results of the current study can be compared across different groups and cultures. Further research needs to be conducted to study this conjecture.

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Conflict of Interest

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