

## A Cross-Sectional Study on Impact of Music

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### ABSTRACT

Music plays a vital role in shaping cognitive, emotional, and social functioning across different stages of life. This cross-sectional study explored differences in music engagement and genre preferences among late teens, young adults, and middle-aged adults using the Short Test of Music Preferences (STOMP) and the Music Use (MUSE) Questionnaire. Results indicated clear age-related variations in both musical preference and engagement. Young adults tended to prefer and engage more with rhythmic and energetic music, especially in activities such as dance-based listening, while middle-aged adults showed moderate preference and engagement. Late teens demonstrated unexpectedly lower preference for high-energy genres despite moderate involvement in music-related activities. These findings highlight how age, lifestyle, social exposure, and cultural influences shape musical behaviour. Further research is recommended to examine the cognitive and emotional factors underlying these differences.

**Keywords:** *Music, Age-Groups, Cognition, Music-Genres, Lifestyle, Psychology, MUSE, STOMP, Young Adults, Late Teens, Middle-Aged Adults*

Music is a universal human experience that plays a meaningful role in cognitive, emotional, and social development across the lifespan. From adolescence to adulthood, individuals use music for emotional regulation, identity formation, social connection, sensory stimulation, and cognitive engagement.

Research in psychology and neuroscience shows that music activates multiple brain systems involved in memory, attention, reward, and emotional processing, making it a powerful tool for influencing well-being and daily functioning.

During late adolescence, music often supports identity exploration, peer bonding, and emotional expression. Young adults tend to use music for motivation, stress relief, and social engagement, particularly as they navigate academic, career, and relational transitions.

Middle-aged adults, meanwhile, may engage with music in ways that support relaxation, nostalgia, or emotional balance, reflecting changing lifestyles, responsibilities, and listening habits. These shifting functions suggest that age and life-stage may shape both the type of music individuals prefer and how they use it in their daily lives.

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Previous studies have highlighted the cognitive and emotional benefits of rhythmic and energetic music, including enhanced concentration, mood elevation, and improved task performance.

Other findings show that music engagement such as listening, dancing, or performing, can strengthen social ties and contribute to psychological well-being. However, limited research has directly compared these patterns across distinct age groups within the same study.

This cross-sectional research aims to examine differences in music engagement and music-genre preferences among late teens (**15–20 years**), young adults (**21–30 years**), and middle-aged adults (40–55 years). By using two validated tools, **the Short Test of Music Preferences (STOMP)** and **the Music Use (MUSE) Questionnaire**.

This study seeks to understand how age influences the ways individuals interact with music and the genres they are drawn to. The findings may offer insights into how musical preferences evolve with life-stage and how music can be utilized for cognitive and emotional well-being across different age groups.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

**Levitin (2025)** “investigates the use of music as a medicine and how we harness its power in a therapeutic setting. This research delves into the profound impact of music on the human brain, exploring its potential as a therapeutic tool for emotional, cognitive, and physical well-being.” It also explains how music engages multiple neural pathways, influencing brain functions related to memory, emotion, and pain perception. His research highlights how listening to and actively engaging with music whether through playing an instrument, singing, or even passive listening can enhance cognitive performance, boost mood, and reduce stress and anxiety.

**Yale University (2025)** “studies the potential benefits of Latin dance as an intervention for delaying or preventing dementia in older adults.” The research explores how engaging in structured dance routines set to Latin music can positively impact both cognitive and physical health, providing a stimulating and enjoyable form of exercise for senior citizens. Participants in the study took part in regular Latin dance sessions, which included styles such as salsa, merengue, and bachata, all of which emphasize rhythmic coordination, balance, and memory recall.

The study found that individuals who engaged in these dance sessions demonstrated notable improvements in various cognitive and physical functions. Specifically, participants showed enhanced grip strength, better postural stability, and improved motor coordination, all of which are crucial factors in maintaining independence and reducing the risk of falls among older adults.

**Ripollés (2025)** “examines the effects of upbeat instrumental music often referred to as “groovy music” on cognitive performance and emotional well-being.” The research specifically focuses on how rhythmic, instrumental tracks with strong, consistent beats and simple melodic structures, often termed “work flow” music, influence mental agility and mood regulation. researchers conducted a controlled experiment in which participants were exposed to different types of background music while performing a series of cognitive tasks.

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The tasks involved problem-solving, memory recall, and reaction-time assessments, designed to measure processing speed, cognitive flexibility, and attention span. The results indicated that individuals who listened to upbeat, instrumental music with strong rhythmic structures completed their tasks significantly faster and with greater accuracy compared to those in silence or exposed to music with irregular tempos or complex arrangements.

**Ren (2024)** “proposes the intricate relationship between music and memory, demonstrating that music does not merely serve as a trigger for past experiences but can actively reshape the way individuals recall events.” The research sheds light on how the emotional tone of music can alter memory recall, influencing the way people interpret and internalize past experiences. In the study, participants were asked to recall neutral stories while listening to emotionally charged music. The findings revealed that those exposed to music with strong emotional undertones whether uplifting, melancholic, or suspenseful began to imbue their originally neutral memories with similar emotional characteristics.

For instance, a story that was initially remembered as a simple, factual sequence of events could take on a more nostalgic, dramatic, or even sorrowful quality, depending on the music played during recall. This suggests that music serves as more than just a background stimulus; it actively engages with cognitive and emotional processing, reshaping the way memories are encoded and retrieved.

**McGillivray (2024)** “suggests that the type of music drivers listen to can significantly impact their behavior on the road. The study found that calming music genres, such as pop and country, can improve driving habits, increase focus, and reduce aggressive tendencies, including road rage. The study explored the impact of different music genres on driving performance.” Participants listened to calming (pop, country), high-energy (rock, EDM), and no music while driving. Results showed that calming music led to more controlled driving behaviors, including steadier speeds and better lane discipline. Drivers who listened to soothing music also reacted more calmly to stress-inducing situations.

The study suggests that calming music improves focus and attentiveness behind the wheel. These studies as a whole indicate the revolutionary potential of music in a broad range of aspects of life, from improving cognitive function to regulating emotional states and changing behavior. The ability of music to involve multiple channels of the brain has the potential to enhance brain functions involved in memory, attention, and emotional regulation, making music a multidimensional therapeutic intervention as well as one for daily use.

Whether used to reduce stress, improve performance, or reorganize recall of memory, music is an accessible yet powerful intervention for the improvement of cognitive functioning and emotional health. As science evolves further, these findings may lead to even more sophisticated applications in the treatments of mental illness, cognitive enhancement, and even customized measures for improving individual performance in both personal and professional life.

### *Hypothesis*

- **H1:** There is a significant difference of engagement in music among age groups consists of late teens (15-20), young adults (21-30) and middle-aged adults (40-55).
- **H2:** There is a significant difference of preferences in music genre among age groups consists of late teens (15-20), young adults (21-30) and middle-aged adults (40-55).

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### *Objectives*

- To find a difference in the engagement in music of people in different age groups.
- To find a difference in the preference in music genre of people in different age groups.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### *Study Design*

The study used a cross-sectional research design to assess and compare the engagement in music and preferences in music genre among late teens (ages 15-20), young adults (ages 21-30) and middle-aged adults (ages 40-55). This design was chosen because it allows for the measurement of both engagement in music listening and preferences of music type at a single point in time, providing an overview of the relationship between these two variables across different age groups.

### *Study Population*

The study population consisted of individuals from late teens (ages 15-20), young adults (ages 21-30) and middle-aged adults (ages 40-55) who were recruited from various educational institutions, universities, and community centers. These settings were chosen to ensure a diverse representation of participants in terms of socio-economic background and educational experience.

### *Sample Size*

The sample size for the study was 30 participants in total, with 10 participants from each age group. This sample size was selected to provide a sufficient representation of groups, allowing for meaningful comparison between the late teen, young adult and middle aged adults populations regarding their engagement in music and preferences in different music genres.

### *Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria*

The inclusion criteria involved participants being either between the age of 15 to 20 (late teenager) or between the age of 21 to 30 (young adult) or the age of 40 to 55 (middle-aged adults) when they participated. They have to be pursuing studies in any of the high schools, colleges, or universities or be engaged in community centers within the research area. Participants were also required to be able to give informed consent and read and comprehend the survey questions in the administration language (English or local language). Exclusion criteria were people with diagnosed mental disorders, for example, severe depression, anxiety disorders, or psychosis, that need specialized psychological treatment.

In addition, people not currently enrolled in a school or community center, those unable or unwilling to give informed consent, and those with a serious language barrier making it impossible to understand the survey items were not included in the study. These exclusions were intended to provide a representative sample and safeguard the safety and health of participants.

### *Tools*

The method of research was through a structured questionnaire. The research was conducted through a survey method where I have adopted a questionnaire; Short Test of Music Preferences (STOMP) developed by Gosling et. al and MUSE (Music Use) Questionnaire developed by Chin and Rickard.

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- 1. Short Test of Music Preferences (STOMP):** The Short Test of Music Preferences (STOMP), developed by psychologists Peter J. Rentfrow and Samuel D. Gosling in 2003, is a widely used instrument for assessing individual differences in music preferences. This 14-item questionnaire categorizes musical tastes into four broad dimensions: Reflective & Complex, Intense & Rebellious, Upbeat & Conventional, and Energetic & Rhythmic. Each item represents a specific music genre, and participants indicate their level of preference. The STOMP has demonstrated good reliability, with test-retest correlations ranging from 0.77 to 0.89, and strong validity, showing significant correlations with Big Five personality traits and real-world listening habits.
- 2. Music Use (MUSE) Questionnaire:** The Music Use (MUSE) Questionnaire, developed by Chin and Rickard in 2012, assesses how individuals engage with music across various contexts, such as mood regulation, relaxation, social bonding, and motivation. This 58-item Likert scale includes eight music background items and 50 items evaluating music engagement styles. Respondents indicate their agreement on a scale from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree." The questionnaire measures four dimensions of music use: Cognitive and Emotional Regulation, Engaged Production, Social Connection, and Dance and Physical Exercise. Higher scores reflect more frequent or intense engagement with music. The MUSE demonstrates high reliability, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranging from 0.82 to 0.94, and is validated through factor analyses and correlations with related psychological constructs.

### ***Medium of Data Collection:***

The data collection medium used in this research was an online platform, namely Google Forms. The participants were given a link to the survey, which they filled in using their smartphones, computers, or other devices. The survey contained the Short Test of Music Preferences (STOMP) and the Music Use (MUSE) Questionnaire, both of which were given through this online form. This technique made it convenient for respondents to participate, as it allowed them to respond at their leisure, and it provided effective storage and collection of data.

### ***Ethical Consideration***

The research followed rigorous ethical standards to preserve participants' rights and welfare. All participants were provided with informed consent, during which they were adequately informed of the purpose of the study, procedures, and the right to withdraw at any moment without retribution. Confidentiality and anonymity of the participants were preserved in the study through not gathering personally identifiable data.

The information was stored safely, with access restricted to the research team. It was voluntary, and participants were made aware that they could withdraw at any point during the study. To ensure minimal harm, attention was taken to design the survey so that there were no distressing questions and mental health support was made available to participants in case they needed it. Secondly, the research was reviewed and cleared by the appropriate ethical review board to ascertain that it was in accordance with the academic and institutional standards for ethical research.

### ***Data Analysis***

This analysis of data sought to assess the engagement in music and preference of music genre of 30 subjects, of which 10 belonged to the late teens group (15-20 years) and 10

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belonged to the young adults group (21-30 years) and the rest 10 belonged to the middle-aged adults group (40-55 years). Both groups were administered the **Short Test of Music Preferences (STOMP)** and **Music Use (MUSE) Questionnaire**. The findings, calculated by descriptive statistics, indicated minor variations in the preferences of music genre as well as the engagement in music in creative activities.

**In the Short Test of Music Preferences (STOMP), the analysis of Rhythmic and Energetic music preferences** across different age groups reveals distinct trends. The mean scores indicate that late teens (15-20) have an extremely low preference ( $M = 0.73$ ), while young adults (21-30) exhibit the highest preference ( $M = 5.17$ ). Middle-aged adults (40-55) show a moderate preference ( $M = 4.43$ ), suggesting a decline in preference with age, though it remains relatively strong.

The standard deviation (SD) values provide additional insight into variability within each group. Late teens have low variability ( $SD = 0.39$ ), meaning most individuals consistently rated their preference as low. Young adults show moderate variability ( $SD = 0.63$ ), indicating that while most enjoy this genre, some variations exist. In contrast, middle-aged adults display high variability ( $SD = 1.26$ ), suggesting that musical preferences within this group are more diverse; some individuals retain a strong liking for the genre, while others have moved away from it.

**In the Music Use (MUSE) Questionnaire, the analysis of this data** represents the mean (M) and standard deviation (SD) for engagement in dance related music activities across different age groups, offering insight into both central tendency and variability. The mean values indicate that young adults (21-30) have the highest engagement ( $M = 8.5$ ), suggesting that they are the most actively involved in dancing to music. Late teens (15-20) show moderate engagement ( $M = 6.0$ ), while middle-aged adults (40-55) have the lowest engagement ( $M = 5.8$ ), reflecting a slight decline with age.

The standard deviation (SD) values reveal differences in variability within each group. Young adults ( $SD = 2.37$ ) have the lowest variability, indicating that most individuals in this group consistently engage in dance-related music. Late teens ( $SD = 2.49$ ) show slightly higher variability, suggesting that engagement levels vary among individuals within this age range. Middle-aged adults ( $SD = 3.19$ ) have the highest variability, meaning that while some individuals in this group are still highly engaged, others have little to no involvement in dance-related music.

**Table 1: Depicts the Descriptive Statistics for the Short Test of Music Preferences (STOMP) and The Music Use (MUSE)**

SCALE	MEAN & SD	TOTAL SAMPLE (N=30)	LATE TEENS (N=10)	YOUNG ADULTS (N=10)	MIDDLE-AGED ADULTS (N=10)
Short Test of Music Preferences (STOMP)	Mean	3.44444	0.7333	5.1666	4.4333
Rhythmic Dimension	SD	2.134873	0.3926	0.633431	1.25757
The Music Use (MUSE)	Mean	6.76667	6	8.5	5.8
Dance Dimension	SD	2.896887	2.4944	2.368778	3.190263

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**Table 2: Depicts the t-results for the Short Test of Music Preferences (STOMP) and The Music Use (MUSE)**

SCALE	T-score & P-score	Late Teens & Young Adults	Young Adults & Middle-Aged Adults	Late Teens & Middle-Aged
Short Test of Music Preferences (STOMP)	P-score	p<0.0001 (significant)	0.123	p<0.0001 (significant)
Rhythmic Dimension	T-score	-18.81	1.65	-8.88
The Music Use (MUSE)	P-score	0.0338	0.0467	0.8777
Dance Dimension	T-score	-2.298	2.149	0.156

**\*\*p<0.05**

The t-score and p-value results indicate statistically significant differences in the preference for **Rhythmic and Energetic music** (hip-hop, EDM) across different age groups. **The t-score of -18.81136 and p-value < .00001 for late teens (15-20) compared to young adults (21-30) suggest a substantial difference in music preference between these two groups.** The large negative t-score implies that late teens have a much lower preference for Rhythmic and Energetic music compared to young adults, and the extremely small p-value confirms that this difference is highly significant and unlikely due to random chance.

The t-score and p-value results for **Engagement in dance-related music** across different age groups reveal statistically significant differences in participation levels. **The t-score of 2.14876 and p-value of 0.0467 for young adults (21-30) compared to middle-aged adults (40-55) suggest a significant difference in engagement levels between these groups.** The positive t-score indicates that young adults engage in dance-related music more than middle-aged adults, though the difference is not as extreme as in the previous comparison.

The significant difference in mean values highlights that young adults (21-30) are the most engaged in both music preference and dance, while middle-aged adults (40-55) show moderate interest with high variability, and late teens (15-20) demonstrate unexpectedly low preference for Rhythmic and Energetic music.

### **RESULT**

The results from the study indicated that late teens (15-20 years), young adults (21-30 years), and middle-aged adults (40-55 years) **exhibited differences** in their preference for Rhythmic and Energetic music, as well as engagement in dance-related music activities.

With regard to **Rhythmic and Energetic music**, late teens had a mean score of 0.73, young adults had a significantly higher mean score of 5.17, while middle-aged adults had a slightly lower mean of 4.43. This indicates that young adults had the highest preference for Rhythmic and Energetic music, followed by middle-aged adults, while late teens showed very little preference for these genres. The standard deviation was smallest in the late teens group (0.39), indicating strong agreement in their low preference, whereas the middle-aged group had the highest standard deviation (1.26), showing greater variability in musical taste.

Regarding engagement in **dance-related music activities**, young adults reported the highest engagement, with a mean score of 8.5, while late teens had a moderate mean of 6.0, and middle-aged adults had the lowest mean of 5.8. The standard deviation was highest among

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middle-aged adults (3.19), reflecting a wide range of engagement levels within this group. The lowest standard deviation was among young adults (2.37), suggesting more consistency in their responses.

In summary, young adults demonstrated the highest preference for Rhythmic and Energetic music and the greatest engagement in dance-related music activities. Late teens showed a lower preference for these genres but moderate engagement in dance, while middle-aged adults exhibited diverse responses. **These findings suggest that the hypothesis is proven right** and age plays a role in shaping musical preferences and engagement, but individual and environmental factors likely contribute to these variations.

### INTERPRETATION AND DISCUSSION

Music remains an essential component of human experience, shaping cognitive development, emotional expression, and overall psychological well-being. Across the lifespan, individuals interact with music differently, drawing from it varying degrees of stimulation, comfort, and social connection. Psychological and neuroscientific research continues to highlight how music engagement influences neural activity, emotional processing, and behavioural outcomes.

This study contributes to this growing body of knowledge by examining how musical preferences and engagement differ across age groups and by interpreting the implications of these differences for cognition, emotional regulation, and well-being.

#### *Cognition and Music Preferences (STOMP)*

Cognitive engagement with music varies across age groups, influencing concentration, memory, and information processing. This study's data reveal that young adults (21-30 years) exhibited the highest preference for Rhythmic and Energetic music genres, such as hip-hop and EDM ( $M = 5.17$ ,  $SD = 0.63$ ), while late teens (15-20 years) showed significantly lower interest ( $M = 0.73$ ,  $SD = 0.39$ ). The middle-aged group (40-55 years) reported a moderate preference ( $M = 4.43$ ,  $SD = 1.26$ ).

Cognitive engagement with music varies across age groups due to developmental changes, exposure, lifestyle patterns, and personal identity formation. Preferences captured through the STOMP scale suggest that young adults display a heightened inclination toward Rhythmic and Energetic genres, such as hip-hop, EDM, and electronic fusion. This trend is consistent with theoretical frameworks indicating that rhythmically complex and high-energy music enhances cognitive arousal, attention, and executive functioning.

Research also supports the idea that energetic musical genres may promote neural activation in regions associated with memory consolidation, pattern recognition, and reward processing (**Smith, 2020**). **Brown & Patel (2021)** suggest that rhythmic complexity activates working memory systems and improves problem-solving efficiency, highlighting why such genres may resonate more with young adults navigating cognitively demanding academic and professional environments.

In contrast, late teens demonstrate less inclination toward these genres. This deviation from expected trends may reflect developmental factors such as evolving identity, limited exposure, or emerging reliance on alternative genres tied to emotional expression rather than cognitive stimulation. Middle-aged adults maintain a moderate preference for energetic music, likely reflecting a balance between long-standing musical identities formed in young

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adulthood and gradual shifts toward calmer or nostalgic genres as responsibilities and routines increase.

Overall, these findings challenge the common assumption that late teens predominantly favour high-energy music and instead position young adults as the primary consumers of rhythmically stimulating genres. This reinforces the notion that musical preference is not purely age-dependent but shaped by lifestyle, cognitive demands, and cultural exposure.

### ***Emotional Regulation and Music Engagement (MUSE)***

Music plays a critical role in emotional regulation across age groups. The study's findings indicate that young adults had the highest engagement in dance-related music activities ( $M = 8.5$ ,  $SD = 2.37$ ), followed by late teens ( $M = 6.0$ ,  $SD = 2.49$ ), and middle-aged adults ( $M = 5.8$ ,  $SD = 3.19$ ).

Emotional engagement with music, as reflected in the MUSE scale, shows distinct age-related patterns. Young adults exhibit the strongest involvement in dance-related musical activities, indicating a high emotional and behavioural connection to music within social and recreational contexts. For many individuals in their 20s, music is interwoven with peer bonding, nightlife culture, identity expression, and escapism from academic or career pressures.

The emotional-regulation literature supports these findings. Johnson & Larson (2020) highlight that rhythmic and dance-oriented music helps reduce stress, elevate mood, and facilitate emotional release. Young adults may rely on music not only for entertainment but also for mood maintenance and coping, especially during life transitions.

Late teens show moderate engagement, which may reflect more limited opportunities for social music experiences or ongoing exploration of personal taste. Middle-aged adults display slightly lower engagement, possibly due to reduced participation in dance-centric environments, changes in priorities, or time constraints. However, variability within this group suggests that many individuals continue to use dance-related music for emotional expression, exercise, or leisure, revealing that emotional engagement with music does not diminish uniformly with age.

### ***Well-being and Psychological Impact***

The relationship between music, mental well-being, and social functioning is well-established in psychological literature. This study reinforces the understanding that music can serve as a tool for emotional regulation, cognitive stimulation, and social connection—factors that contribute to holistic well-being.

Young adults' strong preference for energetic music suggests psychological benefits such as increased motivation, sense of agency, and resilience. Engaging in dance-related music activities enhances social connectedness and belonging, which are powerful contributors to emotional well-being (Williams, 2019). These collective experiences help reduce loneliness, increase positive affect, and provide a buffer against stress.

Late teens' lower preference for energetic music may indicate that they rely on different genres for emotional expression, possibly those aligned with introspective or mood-based listening. Middle-aged adults demonstrate nuanced engagement, reflecting how music remains meaningful even as priorities and life roles shift. For many individuals in this group,

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music may function as a form of nostalgia, relaxation, or personal escape, contributing to emotional stability.

### ***Overall Interpretation of Trends***

Findings from this study indicate that:

- Young adults are the most cognitively and emotionally engaged with Rhythmic and Energetic music, using it for stimulation, coping, and social interaction.
- Late teens show unexpectedly low preference, challenging assumptions about their musical identity and suggesting alternative genre preferences or limited exposure.
- Middle-aged adults maintain moderate engagement, demonstrating that music remains influential but is shaped by lifestyle changes and evolving emotional needs.

Similarly, differences in dance-related engagement reflect shifting opportunities and priorities across the lifespan. While young adults engage most actively due to socially vibrant environments, middle-aged adults demonstrate selective but meaningful engagement, and late teens show moderate interest shaped by developmental transitions.

## **CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, the study revealed notable differences in musical preferences and engagement across different age groups. Young adults exhibited the highest preference for Rhythmic and Energetic music, while late teens showed unexpectedly lower interest, and middle-aged adults demonstrated a moderate but varied preference.

Similarly, engagement in dance-related music peaked in early adulthood and gradually declined with age, though some middle-aged individuals maintained strong connections to dance music. These findings suggest that age alone does not solely dictate musical preferences or engagement; instead, factors such as social exposure, lifestyle changes, and personal experiences play a significant role.

The results highlight the need for further research into how external influences, such as cultural trends and social environments, shape musical engagement and its impact on cognitive, emotional, and overall well-being across different life stages.

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### **Conflict of Interest**

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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