

Research Paper

Influence of Music Genre Preference on Quality of Life among College Students

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ABSTRACT

Music is more than just a soundtrack to our lives; it's a powerful tool that shapes our emotions, mood, and even our lifestyle. But how do our favourite genres influence our quality of life? This study delves into the dynamic relationship between music genre preference and overall quality of life among college students, with a focus on four music genre preferences: Reflective & Complex, Intense & Rebellious, Upbeat & Conventional, and Energetic and Rhythmic. A sample of 236 college students completed the Short Test of Music Preference (STOMP) and the WHOQOL-BREF, which measures quality of life (QoL) across four domains: Physical health, Psychological Well-Being, Social Relationships, and Environment. Multiple linear regression was used to explore the relationship between genre preferences and QoL. The findings of the study revealed that Upbeat & Conventional music was the genre that significantly predicted overall QoL ($R^2=0.34$, $\beta = 12.704$, $p < .001$, $F = 30.4$). Students who preferred this genre reported better physical health, stronger social relationships, improved psychological well-being, and higher satisfaction with their environment. The findings from the study suggest that upbeat and conventional music has a substantial influence on well-being across multiple domains. This genre's positive impact on quality of life points to its potential as a tool in therapeutic interventions. Future research could explore how different demographics respond to various music genres, further supporting the therapeutic benefits of music-based strategies for improving overall well-being.

Keywords: *Music Genre Preferences, College Students, Quality of Life, Upbeat & Conventional*

Music is a fundamental aspect of human experience, deeply embedded in culture and daily life, influencing emotions, behaviour, and social interactions (Bradt & Dileo, 2014). Research indicates that music is not merely an auditory experience but a multifaceted phenomenon impacting various aspects of life. Studies have shown that music can combat loneliness, reduce stress, and alleviate boredom (Wells & Hakanen, 1991). Additionally, music preferences often reflect personal identity and can serve as a medium for emotional regulation (Rentfrow & Gosling, 2003). For college students, who are often navigating academic challenges, social pressures, and personal development, music

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serves as an important outlet for emotional expression and stress relief (Daykin et al., 2017). While it is well-established that music impacts mood and cognitive processes, there remains a gap in understanding how specific music genre preferences affect broader aspects of well-being, such as quality of life (QoL).

It has been studied that listening to music can trigger the release of dopamine, providing a pleasurable reward similar to that experienced during other enjoyable activities (Blood & Zatorre, 2001; Menon & Levitin, 2005). These findings lend biological support to the idea that music can evoke deep emotional responses, as proposed by Sacks (2007). Research shows that different music genres evoke various emotional and psychological responses. For example, Reflective & Complex genres like classical and jazz often foster introspection and cognitive engagement, while Intense & Rebellious genres such as rock or heavy metal can channel feelings of empowerment or aggression (Rentfrow et al., 2011). Upbeat & Conventional genres like pop and country are frequently associated with positivity and energy, contributing to better emotional regulation and social connectedness (Papinczak et al., 2015). However, little is known about how these preferences translate into overall QoL, especially across domains such as physical health, psychological well-being, social relationships, and environment.

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines QoL as an individual's perception of their position in life within the context of culture and value systems relative to personal goals and concerns (Diener & Suh, 1997). This study aims to explore the connection between music genre preferences, categorised as Reflective & Complex, Intense & Rebellious, Upbeat & Conventional, and Energetic & Rhythmic and overall QoL among college students. Understanding how music preferences shape an individual's well-being can provide valuable insights into the ways in which people seek out and respond to different forms of musical expression. Using multiple linear regression analysis, this study provides insights into how music preferences impact various domains of well-being, offering practical applications for therapeutic interventions and everyday life enhancement.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical foundation for this study is derived from the Theory of Music, Mood, and Movement (MMM), developed by Murrock and Higgins (2009). The theory posits that music can influence health outcomes through three interconnected mechanisms: altering mood, serving as a cue for movement, and enhancing the enjoyment of physical activity. Music's ability to alter mood is well-documented, indicating that listening to music can trigger the release of 'feel-good' hormones. These mood alterations can lead to improved psychological well-being. Additionally, music can serve as a cue for movement, encouraging physical activity. The rhythmic elements of music can stimulate movement, which is associated with improved physical health outcomes, such as better cardiovascular health and weight management. Furthermore, music can enhance the enjoyment of physical activity, making it more likely that individuals will engage in and sustain such activities. In the context of this study, MMM provides a framework to examine how music genre preferences impact different QoL domains.

Based on the theoretical underpinnings and existing literature, the present study proposes the following hypothesis and sub-hypotheses to examine the relationship between music genre preferences and quality of life among college students.

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- **H00:** There is no significant relationship between music genre preferences and overall quality of life among young adults.
- **H01:** There is no significant relationship between Reflective and Complex music preference and quality of life among young adults.
- **H02:** There is no significant relationship between Intense and Rebellious music preference and quality of life among young adults.
- **H03:** There is no significant relationship between Upbeat and Conventional music preference and quality of life among young adults.
- **H04:** There is no significant relationship between Energetic and Rhythmic music preference and quality of life among young adults.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Participants and Procedures

The research study sample consisted of college students (N= 236) aged 18-26 years, all of whom were regular music listeners. Data collection was conducted through both online and offline methods. A total of 320 responses were administered through a combination in both paper-and-pencil and online formats. After applying the study's inclusion and exclusion criteria, 236 responses were deemed valid and included in the final analysis. Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure that the sample aligned with the research objectives. Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the Institutional Review Board at Christ (Deemed to be University), Bangalore. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to their involvement in the study, ensuring adherence to ethical research standards.

Instruments

1. **Short Test of Music Preferences (STOMP):** STOMP is a 14-item self-report scale that assesses individual preferences across four broad music dimensions: Reflective & Complex, Intense & Rebellious, Upbeat & Conventional, and Energetic & Rhythmic. This instrument, developed by Rentfrow and Gosling (2003), captures a range of genres, including classical, jazz, rock, pop, and hip-hop, among others. Each item is rated on a 7-point Likert scale, from 1 (strongly dislike) to 7 (strongly like), allowing participants to express the degree of their preference. The STOMP has demonstrated strong psychometric properties, with an average reliability of 0.84 and an average variance extracted of 0.77, both exceeding the typical threshold values of 0.50 for reliability and 0.70 for validity (Faran & Malik, 2021). In this study, the STOMP provided a robust measure of genre preferences, yielding a Cronbach's alpha of 0.731, consistent with its established reliability. These characteristics make the STOMP a reliable and valid tool for examining how various music genres might influence aspects of quality of life.
2. **World Health Organization Quality of Life-BREF (WHOQOL-BREF):** This instrument, developed by the World Health Organization (1998), is designed to evaluate an individual's subjective perception of their quality of life across four primary domains. The Physical Health domain assesses areas such as pain and discomfort, energy levels, sleep quality, and an individual's ability to perform daily activities. Psychological Health evaluates factors including self-esteem, body image, positive and negative feelings, and personal beliefs. The Social Relationships domain focuses on the quality of personal relationships, social support, and satisfaction with sexual life, reflecting the importance of interpersonal connections to overall well-being. The Environment domain considers aspects such as financial resources,

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safety, access to healthcare, and satisfaction with living conditions, thereby addressing broader societal and environmental influences on quality of life. Responses are rated on a 5-point Likert scale, with higher scores indicating better perceived quality of life. The 0.91 reliability value of the scale demonstrates the instrument's stability over time and across diverse settings (Almarabheh et al., 2023). In this study, the WHOQOL-BREF achieved a high Cronbach's alpha of 0.895, further indicating its suitability for evaluating the interplay between music preferences and quality of life among college students.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations, were calculated to summarise participant's music preferences and QoL scores. The Shapiro-Wilk test was used to assess the normality of the data distribution, revealing that some variables were not normally distributed. Therefore, Spearman's rho correlation coefficients were calculated to assess the relationships between music genre preferences and QoL, given the non-normal distribution of some variables.

Subsequently, multiple linear regression analysis was conducted to determine the extent to which preferences for specific music genres (predictor variables) predicted overall quality of life and its individual dimensions (criterion variables). This analysis allowed for the identification of the unique contribution of each music genre preference to QoL outcomes, while accounting for the influence of the other genre categories. All the statistical analyses were conducted using JAMOVI software.

RESULTS

Descriptive Statistics Results (Table 1)

- 1. Music Genre Preferences Descriptive Results:** Reflective & Complex music was the most preferred genre, with a mean score of 17.9 (SD = 4.01), indicating a strong inclination towards thoughtful and sophisticated music. Intense & Rebellious music followed with a mean score of 12.8 (SD = 3.64), showing moderate variability in preference. Upbeat & Conventional music had the lowest mean score of 10.4 (SD = 1.94), but preferences were quite uniform across the sample. Energetic & Rhythmic music had a mean score of 14.2 (SD = 3.61), reflecting a moderate preference for lively and rhythmic music.
- 2. Quality of Life Descriptive Results:** The overall quality of life mean score was 302.3 (SD = 42.72), indicating a generally high quality of life among students. The Physical Domain had the highest mean score of 97.8 (SD = 16.50). The Psychological Domain's mean score was 78.3 (SD = 13.85). The Social Relationships Domain had the lowest mean score of 41.8 (SD = 9.67). The Environment Domain had a mean score of 84.4 (SD = 14.94).

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics

	N	M	SD
Reflective & Complex	236	17.9	4.01
Intense & Rebellious	236	12.8	3.64
Upbeat & Conventional	236	10.4	1.94
Energetic & Rhythmic	236	14.2	3.61
Physical Domain	236	97.8	16.50
Psychological Domain	236	78.3	13.85

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Social Relationship Domain	236	41.8	9.67
Environment Domain	236	84.4	14.94
Total Quality of Life Score	236	302.3	42.72

Note. N= sample population; M= mean; SD= Standard deviation.

Regression Analysis Results (Table 2)

The research hypotheses were tested using multiple regression model to study the relationship between music genre preference and overall QoL. The quality of life was measured across four domains: Physical Health, Psychological Health, Social Relationships, and Environment.

The results of the regression analysis indicate that overall quality of life was significantly predicted by Upbeat & Conventional music preference ($F = 30.4, p < .001$), with a significant positive effect ($\beta = 12.704, p < .001$) and an explained variance of $R^2 = 0.34$. In the Physical domain, Upbeat & Conventional music preference was also a significant predictor ($\beta = 4.724, F = 25.9, p < .001$), with a variance of $R^2 = 0.31$.

For the Psychological domain, while Upbeat & Conventional music preference remained a significant predictor ($\beta = 1.273, F = 3.62, p = 0.006$), the effect was smaller with $R^2 = 0.058$. Similarly, in the Social Relationships domain, Upbeat & Conventional music preference significantly predicted social well-being ($\beta = 1.264, F = 4.66, p < .001$), with an explained variance of $R^2 = 0.074$.

In the Environment domain, Upbeat & Conventional music preference emerged as the strongest predictor ($\beta = 5.442, F = 58.4, p < .001$), with $R^2 = 0.50$ indicating a strong association between this genre preference and environmental satisfaction.

These findings support the rejection of the null hypothesis H03, demonstrating that students who prefer Upbeat & Conventional music report significantly higher overall quality of life. In contrast, Reflective & Complex, Intense & Rebellious, and Energetic & Rhythmic music preferences were not significant predictors of overall quality of life, supporting the retention of hypotheses H01, H02, and H04.

Table 2 Predicting influence of Music Genre preference

Domain	β	t	F	R^2	p
Overall Quality of Life	12.704	10.807	30.4	.0345	<0.001
Physical	4.724	10.135	25.9	0.310	<0.001
Psychological	1.273	2.786	3.62	0.058	0.006
Social Relationships	1.264	3.998	4.66	0.074	<0.001
Environment	5.442	15.194	58.4	0.503	<0.001

Note. Predictor Variable: Upbeat & Conventional, Dependent variable: Quality of Life and its Domains.

DISCUSSION

Interpretations of the Findings

The present study investigated the relationship between different music genre preferences and quality of life among college students. The results indicated that among the four music genres examined, only the preference for Upbeat and Conventional music was a significant positive predictor of overall quality of life and its domains. This finding suggests that

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students who prefer music genres with positive, familiar, and energetic qualities, such as pop, country, soundtrack/theme songs and religious music, tend to report higher levels of well-being. (Gabrielsson & Wik, 2003; Saarikallio, 2012). Research by Rentfrow et al. (2011) and Papinczak et al. (2015) suggests that genres like pop and country are often associated with feelings of optimism, which can lead to enhanced emotional regulation and improved social interactions. The current study extends this understanding by demonstrating how these effects manifest across broader life domains, contributing to overall well-being.

In particular, the strongest effects of Upbeat and Conventional music were observed in the physical health and environment domains, while psychological well-being and social relationships showed moderate but notable effects. Strong influence of this genre on the environment domain suggests that students who prefer upbeat and conventional music are more likely to feel satisfied with their living conditions, financial resources, overall environment and its critical role in shaping their perceptions of their environment, possibly due to the positive and optimistic themes often found in mainstream music (Yamasaki et al., 2013). The significant impact in this domain highlights the potential of music preferences to shape not only individual well-being but also how people interact with and feel about their broader environment.

The substantial relationship of this genre with the Physical domain indicates its strong influence on physical well-being, possibly due to the motivational and energising nature of such music (Radocy & Boyle, 2012). It suggests that students who prefer this genre may experience better physical health, greater satisfaction with their ability to carry out daily activities, and improved overall health outcomes (Murrock & Higgins, 2009), such music may encourage physical movement, exercise, and active engagement in daily routines, all of which can contribute to physical well-being.

The Psychological Domain, which includes factors such as self-esteem, body image, and mental health, showed a weaker but still significant relationship with Upbeat & Conventional music preference. The positive influence of upbeat music on mood and emotional regulation may contribute to better psychological health (Cook et al., 2017; Kivy, 2006), though its effect may be less pronounced than in the other domains.

In the Social Relationships Domain, which encompasses personal relationships, social support, and sexual activity, the Upbeat & Conventional music preference was again a significant predictor. This finding suggests that individuals who prefer this genre might experience more fulfilling social relationships (Coffman, 2002). The communal and social aspects of music, particularly genres that are commonly shared in social settings, such as upbeat and conventional music, could enhance social bonds and interpersonal connections, contributing to a better quality of social relationships (Boer et al., 2011). The relatively low explained variance indicates that while music preferences play a role in social well-being, other factors such as personality, social support, and life circumstances likely have a stronger influence (Vella & Mills, 2016).

Implications of the Findings

Understanding that Upbeat & Conventional music preferences can be linked to higher quality of life can inform the design of well-being programs aimed at enhancing physical health, improving mood, and fostering a positive perception of one's environment for instance, incorporating such music into counselling sessions, wellness programs, or daily routines may support emotional regulation and improve overall well-being. Incorporating

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this genre into interventions for counselling sessions, wellness programs, or daily routines could help regulate emotions, improve social skills, enhance physical health, and foster a more positive perception of the environment. For educators and counsellors working with college students, these insights can guide the development of support strategies that encourage students to engage with music that promotes optimism and energy, helping them build resilience and manage academic and social stress more effectively.

Additionally, the study opens avenues for future research. The limited impact of other music genres on quality of life suggests the need for further exploration into how factors such as personality traits, cultural background, or life experiences interact with music preferences to influence well-being. Research could also investigate the potential therapeutic benefits of genres that did not show significant effects, focusing on specific populations or life stages.

Limitations

While the study offers some valuable insights, there are several limitations that should be addressed. One major weakness is the reliance on self-reported data, which is susceptible to biases such as social desirability or memory recall issues. Participants may have overestimated or underestimated the effects of their music preferences on their QoL due to subjective interpretation.

Additionally, the study focused exclusively on college students aged 18-26 years. QoL is influenced by numerous factors, such as life stage, cultural background, and socio-economic status, which may moderate the effects of music preferences. Future research should include a more diverse sample to better understand how these factors interact with music preferences to impact QoL.

The cross-sectional nature of the study also limits the ability to draw causal conclusions. While the study identifies a relationship between Upbeat & Conventional music and improved QoL, it cannot definitively establish that music preference directly causes a better quality of life. Longitudinal studies in the future would be necessary to explore the long-term effects of music preferences on well-being and determine whether changes in music habits lead to sustained improvements in QoL.

CONCLUSION

This study provides a nuanced understanding of the relationship between music preferences and QoL, offering both theoretical insights and practical implications for using music as a tool for well-being. By revealing how different genres relate to various aspects of QoL, the findings contribute to more understanding of music's potential as a tool for enhancing well-being. The findings of this study indicate that among the four music genre preferences examined, only the Upbeat and Conventional music category significantly predicts quality of life (QoL) among college students. Participants who prefer this genre report higher overall QoL scores. They demonstrate improved physical health, greater psychological well-being, stronger social relationships, and increased satisfaction with their living environment. These results suggest a positive and consistent influence of Upbeat and Conventional music on various dimensions of well-being. The positive association between Upbeat & Conventional music and QoL underscores the need for tailored approaches in both research and practical applications. However, its findings should be interpreted with caution, given the limitations of the study design and sample.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors affirm that there are no conflicts of interest related to the conduct of the research, authorship, or publication of this manuscript.

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