

# Music and Personality

**Ria Xavier**

Student, Department of Media Studies, School of Arts and Humanities, CHRIST (Deemed to be) University

## ABSTRACT

In this paper, we will seek to discuss the effect of music on an individual's personality. We will look at whether there is any correlation between the two and how the music tastes of a person determines their personality. The main objective of this study is to examine the relationship between the Big Five personality traits, i.e., Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Emotional stability, Openness and music preferences namely Mellow, Unpretentious, Sophisticated, Intense and Contemporary. This paper will also focus on the history of music theory in relation to psychological and philosophical theories.

**Keywords:** Music, Personality, Extraversion, Introversion, Psychology

## INTRODUCTION

Music is a part of every culture and everyone's life. "Personality has been defined from the Latin word Persona which means mask used by the actor to change their look." It is a mixer of a person's ideas, perceptions, attitude, habit, behavior. Personality is the base to get socialized in group life in society. It germinates during the process of socialization in a culture of a society. Studying personality traits and adding music preference to the research can help researchers and the public to be aware of this important element to peoples' everyday lives. Including elements of everyday life in psychological research can bring awareness to psychology that is typically not used in mainstream research. Using music as a factor in psychological research can also interest others to broaden the typical research focus that uses everyday factors rather than focusing on the abnormal or the unordinary. Using music and the findings of music preference tied with psychological traits regardless of the findings adds to the information regarding social behaviors. Using music, an everyday element of social behavior, can aid in the research that generalizes to the general public as music is something that is a large part of people's lives as well as social behavior. It is hoped that the research findings can also aid in understanding the social/psychological aspects. Professionals in the fields of medicine and psychology use music as a tool and technique in health care. Music can express the inner thoughts, political ideas, emotions as well as the situations related to their emotional state. Tomas Chamorro-Premuzic, Ph.d., believes that music was created to fulfill three mental functions. In another sense, people also listen to music according to the popularity of music and social circle. Individuals select their music, people exhibit clearly unique tastes.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Music and Personality are linked according to Isabelle Boccia. She explains that an individual's personality traits may be linked to the types of music they prefer and enjoy. The personality of a person could influence the music they listen to or, the music they listen to could influence their personality.

Isabella Boccia further explains this by using the Structural Equation Modeling and the Five-Factor model known as the Big Five. The psychological aspect of music and personality is explained through these models. The preference of music also differs on the basis of their geographical location.

Sulekshana Khatoniyar in her research paper focusing on music and its association with personality says that “*there is no standardized musical preference scale suited to the Indian population.*” Indian classical music, pop-rock, and soft music do not affect or prove to be a result of the personality of the Indian population. This could be due to the heterogeneous culture in the country. On the other hand, the western culture largely associates the music a person listens to, to their personality. They believe that personality traits such as- extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotional stability, and openness to experiences all have some impact on the music a person listens to. Khatoniyar conducted a global survey and based his research paper on the results he received. Through the survey, he concluded that the west and more developed countries have an inclination to base their personality on their music preferences and vice versa. On the other hand, the Indian population seems to show no standardized musical preferences and are a rather versatile bunch.

Robert K Hule, in his research paper about the relationship between personality and music preferences, focuses on the psychological effects of music on an individual's psyche and also gives us an insight into music therapy. A music therapist conducts and evaluates a program and implements it based on the child's needs. According to him, music therapy is more beneficial in the care of children rather than adults. An adult's emotions and other psychological factors seem to be more rooted and less susceptible to change in comparison to a child's or an adolescent's psychological factors. He says that “*music therapy is effective in treating emotionally disturbed children and adolescents.*”

The notes of a musical piece can affect an individual's psyche in many ways. A major scale in music is often linked with happy and joyful emotions. A person who is emotionally very down or a person slipping into depression might find listening to pieces based on a major scale more uplifting. A minor scale in music is often linked to sad and negative emotions. In this case, the music may not help uplift the mood of the listener.

Sheila Ann Smith in her research paper “A study of personality factors and music preferences, involvement and use among youth” talks about the various types of interpretations of music.

1. Those related to the structural characteristics of the musical stimulus: This is where the musical notes and the arrangement of a piece makes an impact on the personality. The kind of music they listen to could determine their extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotional stability, and openness to experiences. A musical piece based on a major note could be related to positive moods and a minor scale could be associated with negative emotions. This is what she means by the structural characteristics of the musical stimulus.
2. Those related to the listener: The listener's experiences and ability to gauge music could determine the impact that music has on the personality. A listener who has been exposed to Indian classical music from a very young age might find listening to Indian classical music effective and soothing. On the other hand, a person who constantly listened to a specific genre of music during a bad experience or a negative phase in their life may always associate the music of that particular genre to that negative phase in their life. This is what she refers to when she says that the perception of music changes from listener to listener.
3. Philosophical and psychological theories regarding the function of music: Philosophy and psychology have come up with various theories regarding the impact of music on an individual's personality.

Psychology claims music to be a useful tool in therapy which may be effective in treating emotionally disturbed children and adolescents. Philosophy has made various connections between music and its impact on an individual's personality.

Sheila Ann Smith also focuses on the impact and use of music among the youth. A survey conducted determined the most listened to or liked genre by the young adults. She noticed that the kind of music had an effect on their personality. Majority of the population shaped their music tastes based on their personality or vice versa.

Radha Gangil in her research article talks about the main personality types of human beings- extraversion, neuroticism, and introversion. Extroverts are those that have no social inhibitions. They are known for their friendly and outspoken personality. Neurotics are those people that have minimal to no capabilities when it comes to controlling their feelings and emotions. Introverts are those people that are more to themselves and they are not as outspoken as their counterparts. There are also ambiverts but Radha Gangil does not focus on these personalities.

Her survey notes that extroverts listen to soft music, neurotics listen to rock music, and introverts listen to pop music. This is a very general idea and is totally based on the sample population but this clearly indicates a relationship between the personality of an individual and the kind of music they listen to. An individual's personality can be gauged on the basis of the music they listen to and the music a person listens to could mould their personality.

All these research papers show a direct or indirect relationship between an individual's personality and their preferred music genre.

## ANALYSIS

The objective of this study was to examine the relationship between the Big Five personality traits, i.e., Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Emotional stability, Openness and music preferences namely Mellow, Unpretentious, Sophisticated, Intense and Contemporary. What was done for the study was a combination of analysis of prior research papers as well as manual statistical finding of data to a demographic of people aged between 14 and 21. Through this, we were able to (with a fair degree of accuracy) the relationship between music preferences and personality.

The findings of the study reveal that the Sophisticated dimension is positively correlated to all the five personality traits. Moreover, there exists a significant positive correlation between this dimension and extraversion at .05 level of significance. This indicates that individuals who prefer sophisticated music such as classical, jazz, blues, opera etc. are socially outgoing, curious, careful and responsible, emotionally stable, kind and cooperative in nature. This particular finding is consistent with previous research (George et al., 2007; Herrera et al., 2018). The dimension called Mellow is positively correlated to all personality traits except emotional stability. It has a positive significant correlation with extraversion at .01 level of significance. This indicates that individuals who enjoy mellow music such as dance/electronica, world, new age are extroverted, warm, dutiful, curious in nature but they may show signs of insecurity, anxiety, irritability and worry. The Unpretentious and Contemporary dimensions are positively related to extraversion, conscientiousness and openness but negatively related to agreeableness and emotional stability. This suggests that those who prefer unpretentious and contemporary music such as country, pop, religious, rap/hip hop, reggae, soul etc. are outgoing, dependable, curious and imaginative but they tend to be anxious, insecure and may lack warmth and sympathy. The last dimension, i.e., Intense is positively

related to extraversion and openness but negatively related to agreeableness, conscientiousness and emotional stability.

This means that individuals who enjoy intense music such as heavy metal, punk, alternative and rock are extroverted, open to new experiences but lack emotional stability, warmth, cooperativeness, orderliness and self-discipline. This particular finding is compatible with previous findings (Herrera et al., 2018; George et al., 2007). The current research results also corroborate previous findings in the sense that all music dimensions were found to be positively related to extraversion and openness of the Big Five personality traits. This finding is consistent with Rawlings and Ciancarelli (1997).

## **HISTORY OF MUSIC THEORY IN RELATION TO PSYCHOLOGICAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL THEORIES**

Since its origins in ancient Greece, the Western philosophical tradition has investigated the nature and value of music. Aesthetic concerns remain in the background of Western philosophical thinking on music until the early modern period. Plato and Aristotle are interested in music chiefly because of its educational and political implications, and medieval thinkers typically relate music to metaphysical speculations. This relative neglect of music as an art may be surprising, but it is in line with the late emergence of aesthetics as a branch of philosophy.

Toward the end of the Middle Ages, music theorists began to pay more attention to the sensuous dimension of music. Subsequent shifts in musical taste prompt questions regarding the origin and value of music's capacity to express and arouse the emotions.

The study of sound and musical phenomena prior to the 19th century was focused primarily on the mathematical modeling of pitch and tone. The latter 19th century saw the development of modern music psychology alongside the emergence of a general empirical psychology, one which passed through similar stages of development. The first was structuralist psychology, led by Wilhelm Wundt, which sought to break down experience into its smallest definable parts. This expanded upon previous centuries of acoustic study, and included Helmholtz developing the resonator to isolate and understand pure and complex tones and their perception, the philosopher Carl Stumpf using church organs and his own musical experience to explore timbre and absolute pitch, and Wundt himself associating the experience of rhythm with kinesthetic tension and relaxation.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study was successful in finding a relationship between music preference and music type. There we found a relationship between Neuroticism and rock music, Extroversion with soft music and neutral relationship with rock, hip-hop and sad, Openness in rock music is high than other music dimensions, agreeableness is highly related with soft and neutral with sad music dimension, and conscientiousness is highly related with hip-hop music. "The findings suggest that there is a definite relationship between music preference and personality type". While a huge example measure got for this examination, a more significant change in the age gathering would have given a more significant effect on this finding. This finding depended on cross-sectional information which implies it just relates with implies it just takes a study at relationships yet no causations can be acquired from it. It is additionally difficult to state whether it is a person's identity divine that what music they tune in to, or on the off chance that it is music they tune in to that influences their identity.

## REFERENCES

1. Associations between personality traits and music preferences, Isabella Boccia, Lindenwood University, Volume 1, Issue 22
2. A study on music preferences and its association with personality, Suleksha Khatoniyar, Cotton University, 202 IJRCT, Volume 8, Issue 6 June 2020
3. Hule, Robert K, “The Relationship between Personality and Music preference” (2009). Lome Linda University Electronic Theses, Dissertations and Projects. 64D
4. Smith, Sheila Ann, “A study of Personality Factors and Music Preference, Involvement, and sue among youth” (1989). Dissertations. 2146
5. Gangil, Radha, “Relationship between Music Preference and Personality Type” (2018)