

Everyday Listening Experiences

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ABSTRACT

Background

The technologies of the twenty-first century are influencing the ways in which people interact with music (North, Hargreaves, & Hargreaves, 2004; Sloboda, Lamont, & Greasley, 2009). Mobile devices, personal computers, and the Internet allow people to expand how, when, and where they experience music (Heye & Lamont, 2010; Sloboda, et al., 2009).

Moreover, the contexts and settings in which people listen to music are far more varied and complex. While exposed to music in public places, our ever increasing technology further allows us to control what we hear (North, et al., 2004; O'Hara & Brown, 2006).

To account for the wide variations that exist in the 'everyday' contexts in which people experience music, a participant-centered approach to capturing naturalistic responses must be utilized. Sloboda, O'Neill, and Ivaldi (2001) adopted the Experience Sampling Method (ESM; see Czikkentmihalyi & Lefevre, 1989) as a way to approach everyday listening and concluded that ESM was a strong approach to examine individuals' subjective real-time musical experiences in the everyday context.

Employing the same method, North et al. (2004) utilized the Internet in order to contact a much larger sample (346 participants) via text messages to mobile telephones, thereby overcoming the main limitations that Sloboda, et al. (2001) faced. Participants completed a questionnaire in response to a daily text for 14 days, providing data regarding the 'who, what, where, when, and why' of everyday listening. Results indicated that that majority of listening occurred while at home, more often in the evening, and while participants were more likely to be able to be at leisure. Additionally, enjoyment and functions varied in relation to factors including who they were with, as well as time and place, and whether they chose to hear the music.

The music experienced by the listeners was rarely the focus, but more often was an accompaniment, or backdrop to other tasks; this led the authors to hypothesize regarding the influence of music technology. While newer technology had increased access to music and degree of choice regarding what people heard, North and colleagues concluded that their findings reflected a rather passive attitude towards music, and proposed that this may correspond with a decrease in the perceived value of music.

Aims

This study aimed to present a more detailed description of everyday listening by utilizing the Experience Sampling Method. It was more focused on the 'how' and 'why' elements

of these musical interactions in light of the current technological climate in Western industrialized society. With the growing influence of technology on the portability and accessibility of music, the potential impact on how we hear music necessitated such investigation.

This study conceptualized the 'why' element of music heard in the everyday context in two different ways. First, in response to North et al.'s (2004) suggestion that future research might examine self-reports of affect before and after exposure to music in order to provide "a naturalistic demonstration of the effect of music on mood" (p.76), emotional response to the music encounters was measured. Secondly, the perceived effects of the listening experiences were also addressed. With prior research exploring the various functions of music, it was hoped a large-scale sample could provide a similar naturalistic demonstration of the influence of music and possible reasoning behind listening in terms of temporal and situational contexts.

Method

370 UK residents, recruited through a University campus in Scotland, agreed to take part in the weeklong study. Participants were expected to complete a total of 14 responses (i.e., two per day) and data analyses were conducted using the data submitted by those who completed at least 12 entries. The resultant 177 participants (57.06% female) were aged 17-75 (mean: 32.70, median: 28, standard deviation: 14.61), and 41.24 % were students.

For seven days, participants received two text messages daily sent at random times between 8:00 and 23:00. Text messages were sent to individuals' mobile telephones using a free Internet service and an online random day and time value generator determined when the text messages were sent to that approximately the same number of messages was sent during hour intervals throughout the day across the participant pool.

Each text message asked the participant to complete one response entry via a survey website as soon as they could safely do so. For every entry, participants noted the date, time they received each particular text, and the time that they completed the entry. If music was heard within a two-hour period prior to receiving the text message, they then responded to a series of questions regarding that listening experience. Participants ticked where they were, how they heard the music (e.g., radio, mp3 player), and how they selected what was heard (e.g., a specific album, random/shuffle) from a list of options.

They also indicated their level of choice regarding what was heard, how much attention they were paying to the music, how much they liked the music, how arousing the music was, as well as how they felt before and after the episode by providing ratings for 'bored / unstimulated', 'excited / festive', 'peaceful / relaxed', 'unsettled / disconcerted'; how pleasant their mood was; and how aroused they were on seven-point Likert scales (1=not at all, 7=very much). Lastly, individuals indicated the effect of

the music heard by responding to 12 statements (presented on seven-point Likert scales with a negative and positive version of each possible effect as a statement occupying each end).

Results

Chi-squares investigated the relationships between the where, when, and how aspects of the listening situation. Multiple regression analyses explored the potential relationships between participants' background characteristics and the frequency with which they heard music; between variables and mood factor scores; between several variables and the effects of what was heard; between degree of choice and the effects of what was heard; and between degree of choice and mood factor scores. One-way MANOVA analyses examined several variables with regard to how the music was heard (device and selection method); and whether ratings regarding choice, liking, arousal, and attention were associated with where participants were when they heard the music. Lastly, a five-way MANOVA addressed location, time, choice, attention, and factor scores concerning the effects of the music.

To highlight some of the findings, overall, across the entire study period, music was heard within two hours prior to receiving the random text messages on 46.31% of occasions, and participants were more likely to hear music throughout the week if they rated music as important in their lives.

While overall percentages indicated that music was heard throughout the day, most often while at home, striking patterns concerning listening location were revealed when examining various contingent relationships. In particular, there were notable differences in terms of how the music was heard, levels of choice, and mood ratings depending on whether the music was heard in public or private.

Intricate patterns relating to choice were found in terms of where, when, and how listening took place and also pertained to how individuals rated their liking of what was heard, their mood, and the effects of the music. Time, choice, and how the music was heard were involved in complex relationships with participants' moods and the effects of the music as well.

Conclusions

While specific findings will be discussed in greater detail, degree of choice and whether individuals had control over how the music was heard were significantly related to every other aspect of the listening situation (and participants' reaction to it) in some way. Therefore, the main implication that arises is that user control (often as a consequence of newer listening technologies) greatly influences how listeners use and consume music in the everyday context. Moreover, there was some indication that music has been accommodated into everyday activities rather than *vice versa*.

The findings imply that listening, even in the everyday context, is not a passive act, but depends on choice and context. As a result, it is important to consider listeners as active consumers of the music they hear, as O'Hara and Brown (2006) have argued. By conceptualizing music as a resource that is used and in light of the accessibility and portability that newer listening technology afford, it is argued that, in contrast to North et al.'s (2004) proposition that their findings reflected a

passive attitude denoting a reduction in music's value, its value has instead increased.

Keywords

Everyday, listening, Experience Sampling Method, MP3, mobile, mood, effects

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