

The Impact of Rock Music on Indian Young Adults: A Qualitative Study on Emotions and Moods

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Abstract

Music has proven to play a vital role in social and emotional development in teenagers and young adults. From contemplation, developing self-identity, understanding interpersonal relationships, and providing possibilities of experience mastery, agency, and self-control with the help of self-directed activities, music helps its audience develop in all aspects of life. In specific, Rock music, since its existence has been more than entertainment, artists expressed themselves and shared their opinions through their musical pieces. Infamous for promoting drugs and alcohol, Rock Music used its platform to enlighten the audience about taboo topics like racism, inequality, and other social issues. This research paper uses a qualitative methodology approach to understand Rock Music listeners' points of view. Data was collected through 'in-depth interviews' of 15 participants hailing from different parts of the country. Rock Music has several positive effects on the listeners. Rock can elevate moods, induce emotions, helps the listeners be more productive and creative with their everyday work, and constantly motivate them to do better in every aspect of life. Rock provides a platform to express feelings and vent out all the angst, especially for those who otherwise do not voice their opinions because of their nature in general. Rock Music has been able to shape personalities, characteristics, and thought processes. Moreover, majorly, Rock Music helps people with anger management.

Keywords: Music, Moods, Emotions, Positive Effects, Rock, Mood-Booster, Motivation, Anger-Management.

1. Introduction

Rock music is a popular music genre widely celebrated amongst adolescents and young adults. Discovered in the early 50s, this genre of popular music has used its medium to talk about

social and political issues [1]. However, many observers believed Rock n' Roll harmed the youth; in a sense, the music (supposedly) encouraged teenagers to rebel against the societal rules, parents, and authoritative figures, leading to experts conducting research. Most of the studies show that music, in general, impacts the individual's personality, actions, moods, decisions, and even cognitive enhancement [2].

To begin with, listening to music has reportedly proven to be an effective means of boosting mood, increasing productivity, and relaxation. Several readings show those adolescents, adults, and even the elderly population use music for mood regulation [3]. Music has proven to play a vital role in social and emotional development in teenagers and young adults. From contemplation, developing self-identity, understanding interpersonal relationships, and providing possibilities of experience mastery, agency, and self-control with the help of self-directed activities, music helps its audience develop in all aspects of life [4]. Music boosts an individual's mood and helps deal with negative emotions, uplifts the spirits, and provides them with some relaxing experience(s) [5]. Studies also suggest adults strongly connect to music, as it helps in emotional development and self-conceptual processing. A study conducted by Sloboda, O'Neil, and Ivaldi proves that music and its effect on the adult samples were closely related to moods, memories, and emotions [6]. Affect Regulation is an important concept discussed in various academic papers to understand music and its effects. According to experts, individuals make conscious decisions to listen to music to alter their moods and emotions, called Affect Regulation [7].

Rock n' Roll first emerged in Cleveland through a radio show in 1951. Alan Freed, a radio host in Cleveland, played some rock in the radio station for the listeners. According to several findings, Freed hosted Moondog Coronation Ball – the first-ever rock n' roll concert [8]. Then comes the 1960s, the decade when Rock n' Roll thrived and became the 'pop' music. Several artists experimented with this genre and gained popularity, like Elvis Presley, Chuck Berry, Bo Diddley, Buddy Holly, and Little Richard. Rock n' Roll expanded such that, with time, it was identified as 'Rock Music' and gained major traction [9]. After a worldwide rock movement, popular bands emerged like The Beatles, Gerry, Pacemakers, Freddie and the Dreamers, Animals, and Rolling Stones. However, that is not where it stops; rock music continued to expand, the artists experimented with the popular genre and created sub-genres like Psychedelic Rock, Punk Rock, Glam Rock, Roots Rock, and Heavy Metal. Rock music has evolved throughout the years, and it is observed that today Pop Rock and Indie Rock are highly popular among the youngsters [10].

Rock music, since its existence, has been more than entertainment; artists expressed themselves and shared their opinions through their musical pieces. Infamous for promoting drugs and

alcohol, Rock Music used its platform to enlighten the audience about taboo topics like racism, inequality, and other social issues [11]. Studies show Rock Music enabled freedom of speech since the 1960s in the most honest and effective form [12]. Experts believe that rock is a rebellious genre of music, projecting negative emotions, especially in youth culture; however, research conducted by scholars from the University of Queensland found that Rock Music can be a potential mood booster and improve listener's well-being, and is effective for anger management [13]. Rock music can be distinguished into two types: Hard Rock and Soft Rock. Both types serve different moods to the listeners [14]. For instance, Soft Rock regulates positive emotions and increases productivity while Hard Rock induces negative emotions [15]. Several studies suggest that Rock Music and Metal Music increase feeling, and extreme music helps individuals achieve positive emotions.

For this research paper, a qualitative methodology was adopted to understand the psychology and effects of Rock Music on emotions and moods. Data collection was done via in-depth interviews, through virtual video calls [16]. Young adults between the ages of 21 to 26 were targeted, as they have a better understanding and control over their emotions. Fifteen in-depth interviews were conducted, and the analysis was done from the data collected [17].

2. Literature Review

In the following literature review, music, the relation between music and emotions, listeners' perception of music, musical preferences, and rock music & its effects on listeners are discussed [18]. This paper aims to concentrate on Indian young adults and their perception of rock music, how it induces emotions and regulates their moods [19].

Music is a ubiquitous phenomenon; we listen to music every day, create music, and share experiences through music [20]. However, why does music create emotions in us? There are four different explanations: (a) Learned Associations – it means an individual's geographical and cultural environment influences their understanding of music and they connect it with emotional contacts, (b) Musical Expectations – here while listening to music has become an everyday phenomenon, an individual has musical knowledge, expectations and is now aware of statistical musical patterns, (c) Expressive Emotional Movement – every emotion that we feel also has a behavioral movement to it, for instance, when we are feeling sad, we tend to move slowly in contrast to feeling happy, that is when we are active and moving fast, (d) Activating Sounds – music has a direct influence on human's sympathetic nervous system, it creates certain kind of orientation in our body. Out of these four-pointers, the first two explanations are individual-centric, whereas the last two points made are

universal-centric [21]. We may be unaware, but music plays a vital role in our lives; individuals can deeply relate to their personal experiences and emotions with music. Music represents one's lifestyle, image, and social belonging [22]. In research conducted by Anne J. Blood and Robert J. Zatorre, using Positron Emission Tomography (PET), found that subject-selected music-induced intense pleasurable feeling likes "shivers-down-the-spine" or "chills." Their result showed that music is connected to survival-related stimuli along with emotions like pleasure and reward [23].

According to studies, psychology finds it strange that each individual has a different musical preference; the phenomenon is named style/genre preference [24]. According to scientific research, music executes three essential psychological functions for the listeners: (1) improve [any] task performance (for example, while completing household chores, driving, working out, etc.), (2) stimulate intellectual curiosity (cognitive abilities), and (3) manipulate one's emotional state by achieving the desired state of mind (mood - sad, happy, anger, etc.) [25]. As research shows, listeners use music to regulate emotions. Music has three different uses, 1) active uses: it modifies mood, (2) social uses: creates a sense of belonging by exchanging music and experiences with it, and (3) uses of music lyrics: allows individuals, especially students, to acquire information and seek moral guidance (Slides.com) [26].

Researchers found that music preferences also play a vital role; music preference groups were identified based on their factor analysis which showed that 'Intense and rebellious' is one such preference that includes rock, alternative, and heavy metal music [27]. An exploratory study was conducted to analyze the role of music listening for college students and how these preferences affect their general coping [28]. The demographic page method, short test memory of music preferences (STMOMP), and four questionnaires were used to understand the purpose of the study [29]. The results showed a significant bivariate and linear correlation between music preferences and coping. Music function, significantly and moderately associated with overall coping [30]. All the coping subscales used in the study were significantly and linearly related to music function [31]. Music listening was significantly related to music function but was not necessarily associated with overall coping. There are three major aspects of music: (1) understanding communication and perception of emotion in music, (2) understanding emotional consequences while listening to music, and finally (3) understanding music preferences and predictions [32].

There are three dynamic characteristics of music: (1) Arousal – usually a song with fast beats and intense music, (2) Valance means emotional reactions – here, there are two types of positive and negative valances. Positive valance portrays happy music, negative valance represents sad music, and (3) Depth - it is how we understand the complexity of songs. In their paper, Bowling, D.L.,

Sundararajan, J., Han, S., and Purves, D' Expression of Emotion in Eastern and Western Music Mirrors Vocalization', explain that music and speech both denote emotions such as anger, fear, and happiness are termed as high-arousal emotions, faster beats usually portray them compared to low-arousal emotions like sadness, love or tenderness [33].

Under the semiotic approach in music, it is essential to understand music anthropology. Alan P. Merriam defines the study of music in culture linked to mutual interactions of sound, behavior, and concepts as ethnomusicology. In the early 70s music was studied and analyzed as an important sign/artifact of culture. Since then, the semiotic approach claims musical structures are denoted as affective meanings [34].

It is essential to understand emotional contagion to connect music and emotions. It is best described as when an individual "automatically mimic and synchronize facial expressions, vocalizations, postures, and movements with those of another person and, consequently, to converge emotionally [35]." The theory implies a minimum level of self-consciousness; the emotion is instantly felt. When an individual listens to music alone, he or she is most likely to respond through intense emotions; meanwhile, if one listens to music with a close friend, the response is more positive [36]. Music listeners relatively have a common emotional response to music in the form of chills, shivers, and piloerection. Music preferences are linked to emotional benefits. For example, if an individual is exposed to an anxious environment, his/her preferred genre of music will reduce their anxiety levels and provide comfort than listening to an unknown piece of music. Saam Trivedi, the music philosopher, believes music moves us because it provokes our fantasy to make conceptions. He also claimed music does not represent humans; rather, it represents the emotional expression [37]. The resemblance between musical beats and the sound we are familiar with daily drives a fantasy in our subconscious minds. Familiarity is considered one of the reasons for affective responses to music; it most likely induces emotional feelings. According to theoretical findings, speech and music share few common acoustic features, such that emotionally expressive cues, be it in the form of music or speech, remain the same in the minds of human beings [38].

When we talk about music and its relation to emotions, two positions can be defined: cognitivist position and the other is an emotivist position. While emotivist position claims, music can induce emotion so that listeners can feel the emotions, not just recognize it in the song(s). However, the cognitivist position argues, music only expresses emotions; it cannot induce emotions in listeners. Some studies show that music improves cognitive performances and academic achievements as well. While few authors argue that music does not necessarily regulate or induce emotions, individuals react to music concerning the environment; for instance, one would get angry if the neighbor is

playing loud music. Although, there have been several studies that prove that music induces certain emotions and regulates one's mood [39].

Uses and Gratifications Theory talks about two important aspects: (1) media users are active, and (2) media users are aware of their choices and consumption content. Considering the Uses and Gratifications Theory in consuming music, we can understand that individuals listen to music only to gratify their mood and probably enhance their well-being. Music helps people escape the reality of life and supports them through difficult times [40].

Through Rock n' Roll musicians in the 1960s, it is believed that their opinions and perspectives about society. Playing Rock Music was not all about having fun, but the lyrics talked about taboo topics like drugs, racism, and inequality. Precisely Rock n' Roll enabled freedom of speech for several musicians and enlightened the audience. Rock Music represents more than 'pop culture'; it is a fine art and aesthetics of Romanticism. Elvis Presley and Chuck Berry represented the youth in the 1950s; they were the prominent superstars of Rock n' Roll [41].

Music is such that it encompasses several genres under it, right from classical music to rock music to jazz to pop, etc. Certain genres are visibly different, while few genres sound very similar but have distinct differences. However, any music genre cannot be defined by operational definition; the auditory sensory system can only explain it [42].

Rock Music has evolved throughout the years; it has several sub-genres under the umbrella. Soft Rock and Hard Rock, although fall under the same genre, have distinct features and characteristics, both the sub-genres generate a different kind of emotions and feelings in an individual. A study was conducted using projective and objective tests to analyze the type of emotions both Hard and Soft Rock regulate; it was found that subjects exposed to soft rock reported positive emotions; meanwhile, participants exposed to hard rock reported negative emotions [43].

Different music genres have different effects on our moods. For instance, Classical music and lyric-less music induces positive emotions, increases your concentration, and fuels a positive attitude towards everything in life. Meanwhile, Rock Music is considered to be rebellious music, which induces negative emotions, although a study by the University of Queensland found that Rock music has a positive impact and can be effective for anger management and improve the listener's well-being [44].

Despite the criticism, Rock Music continues to be a favorite to those who understand genuine and deep content. Another study from the University of Queensland in Brisbane reveals that loud and hard-hitting music helps the listeners with anger management and induces energy and active feeling [45].

If one had to imagine a Rock fan or musician, it is always in a long t-shirt, torn jeans, long hair, satanic necklace, leather jackets, and pierced belly. Parents believe rock is all about the 'rebellious nature. However, it is argued that, through rock music, the artists address social issues and taboo-like topics, which helps spread awareness and induces positive emotions towards all the community. For instance, Bob Marley's "Buffalo soldiers in the heart of America" raised a voice against American imperialism [46].

Rock n' Roll is an amalgamation of two music styles, Blues and Country. The combination of urban blues and country blues led to the innovation of Rock n' Roll. Chuck Berry, the country blues player, joined Sir John's trio and created a genre called Rockabilly. Back in the time, Chuck Berry was considered one of the first Rock n' Roll musicians (FUNK) [47].

Rock and Heavy Metal Music use the fundamental feelings and experiences to serve the society with some relatable content and entertainment. However, few people believe Rock and Metal genre is devil's music, to argue that a longitudinal study shows individuals who grew up in the 80s & 90s era are leading a healthy and successful life. So, even after listening to "devil's music," the kids from 80s & 90s turned out fine. Researchers have found that people who are more aggressive and violent can achieve positive emotions through metal music. It is because metal music has increased arousal feelings, and at the moment, it matches the person's physiological state. Few studies also reveal that listening to extreme music can help individuals' process anger. A detailed study on 414 British undergraduate students reveals that participants who like metal music were open to experiences, unique, and hated the authority.

2.1. Research Questions

1. Why do people prefer listening to Rock Music?
2. Does Rock music have positive effects?
3. Can Rock Music induce emotions and regulate moods?
4. Has Rock Music shaped personality (ies)?

3. Research Method

This research paper uses a qualitative methodology approach to understand Rock Music listeners' points of view. The qualitative methodology aims at understanding subjective answers, personal experiences, and participants' perspectives about the concerned topic. The data collected

with the help of qualitative methods are not 'factual data or information that can be measured. Several techniques under qualitative methodologies, like small-group discussions, semi-structured interviews, and in-depth interviews, can be used for data collection. For this paper, the researcher aims to understand emotions and moods involved while listening to Rock Music; hence, 'in-depth interviews' were taken to interpret personal experiences. As per the requirement, efforts were made to carry out a discourse analysis. With the help of discourse analysis, one can analyze spoken words in a certain social context. Since the in-depth interview method was the key approach to collect data in this paper, discourse analysis was the best way to go. Under this, an in-depth questionnaire was designed, consisting of 14 open-ended questions, and a few follow-up questions were asked according to answers given by the participants. Apart from primary data collection, as a part of the literature review, the researcher managed to find content and important theories relevant to the research topic. Data collection (including both primary and secondary data) took place in the span of four months, from May 2020 to August 2020. The sample size of the study was 15 participants hailing from different parts of the country – India. Gender roles were not taken into consideration as they did not match the objectives of the research paper. Out of the 15 participants, nine were male, and six were female, all between the age groups of 21 to 26.

4. Findings and Analysis

After reading through each of the interviews, several positive effects of listening to rock music were found. For instance, participants preferred listening to certain sub-genres under a rock, like Blues Rock, Hard Rock, Psychedelic Rock, Alternative Rock, Progressive Rock, Pop Rock, Punk Rock, etc., according to their moods, social context, and the activity (ies) they are performing at the very moment. Activities like exercising, yoga, working, completing an assignment, cutting vegetables, and taking a shower. Most of the participants said Rock Music could amplify their emotions, improve their moods, and induce immense energy in them. Through the in-depth interviews, it was also found that rock can increase efficiency, productivity, and creativity while working. For example, one of the participants said she prefers listening to hard rock while designing a poster or editing a video; it boosts her energy and helps her get more creative, while another participant said he prefers listening to psychedelic rock while working, it helps him focus on his work far better than not listening to any music. However, few participants do not prefer listening to rock while working on assignments or projects to meet a deadline, as the lyrics and fast beats can be distracting. So, rock does not always help in focusing on work. Anger management is another

important finding in the data collected; some experts believe that hard rock can be a great source of venting out anger, which helps the listeners calm down and control their anger. One of the study participants said that rock has majorly helped with her anxiety, hyperactivity, and anger. She said, listening to rock music has immensely helped her calm down and control her emotions, and it gives her the space to think and then react. The process of venting out angst via head banging to hard rock or metal music is a popular choice amongst young adults to deal with a bad mood. It has been noticed, rock addresses several social agendas talks about taboo topics, it is a platform for the musicians to express their perspective of society, and they do so. However, even the listeners (the listeners) in this study feel rock songs help them express their feelings, voice their opinions, and boost their confidence.

Meanwhile, rock also provides different perspectives to the listeners; it helps them gauge the reality of this world and humans. Through the interviews, it was found that rock induces emotions in the participants even when they feel absolutely nothing. 14 out of 15 participants said Rock Music induces emotions that did not exist at the moment. Meanwhile, rock can regulate listeners' moods. For example, one of the participants prefers listening to Queen (rock band) when she is upset; it makes her feel better instantly; she believes rock is an absolute mood-booster. One of the most common findings from the data was 'feeling less lonely' while listening to Rock Music. Most of the participants said, listening to rock like having great company, which helps them get through the hardest times. Three participants from the study said Rock Music 'saved' them.

One understood the meaning of life; to one, rock helped her get through a rough phase, and the third person said rock helped him get over his addictions and gave him a positive direction. In simple terms, Rock Music was their coping mechanism when they were going through a hard time. It gave them the confidence to be themselves. Rock has also helped people with introspection and encouraged them to be more reflective in life. Out of the 15 samples, 13 said rock has shaped their personality, thought process, and key characteristics. It has provided a wider spectrum of life. All the participants agreed upon one common aspect that is 'social circles'; rock helped create the right social circle with like-minded people; through the music they found friends and a safe space. One of the participants said, listening to rock with friends has always been a great experience; it brings a small group of people together and ignites oneness. Through the data collection process, it was found that certain appealing elements of rock instantly draw the listeners; they were lyrics, the complexity of rock songs, and the convergence of various instruments, emotions conveyed by the artists, guitar solos, and drum beats. Common Attributes after data collection are observed in Table 1.

Understanding the difference between emotions and moods, "Emotions are caused by specific events localized in time, whereas moods build up as a consequence of either a concatenation of minor incidents, persistent conditions in the environment, and/or internal metabolic or cognitive processes." It is essential to understand the difference, as most of the participants listened (and listen) to rock depending upon their moods and emotions. Firstly, popular sub-genres under Rock were Hard, Alternative, Progressive, Psychedelic, and Blues Rock. For better understanding, below is a table where each sub-genre is linked to a mood or emotions. Participants' responses do the deduction. Rock, Emotions, and Moods were created through Sub Genres, which is shown in Table 2.

Table 1 - Few Common Attributes Observed after Data Collection

| Preferred Sub-Genres Under Rock | Activities During which Participants Listen to Rock | Appealing Elements of Rock |
|--|--|-----------------------------------|
| Hard Rock | Working Out/ Yoga | Lyrics |
| Alternative Rock | Working on Assignments or Projects | Convergence of Instruments |
| Progressive Rock | While Taking A Shower | Artists Emotions |
| Psychedelic Rock | While Doing Household Chores | Guitar Solos |
| Blues Rock | Hanging Out with Friends | Rhythm/Beat/The Music |

Table 2 - Sub-genres of Rock and Emotions and Moods Created

| Sub – Genre | Emotions | Moods |
|--------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Hard Rock | Happiness, Sadness, Anger | Gloomy |
| Alternative Rock | Happiness | Hopeful |
| Progressive Rock | Loneliness | Reflective |
| Psychedelic Rock | Sadness | Calm and Peaceful |
| Blues Rock | Sadness, Loneliness | Reflective, Calm, and Peaceful |

Hard Rock bands make meaningful music. One can easily connect to the message behind the song more than the artist's approach (the kind of instruments used). The sub-text in the song is more impactful than the music itself. While listening to hard rock, a few of the participants calm down and introspect the situation. Few people believe hard rock makes a person anxious and maybe even induces negative emotions. However, it has been the opposite for most rock lovers. Through personal experiences and perspectives, hard rock has helped people with anger management. The main understanding here is that listening to hard rock amplifies the feeling of happiness.

After interviewing 15 young adults aging between 21 and 26, there was one common finding, all of them preferred listening to rock while performing certain activities. The most common activities were working out while taking a shower, doing household chores, hanging out with friends,

and working on assignments or projects. Here, the deduction made was that listening Rock helped the participants be more efficient, get into a better mood, and increased their concentration. The following table demonstrates the emotions and moods felt while performing the tasks and listening to rock music. Emotions and Moods created while listening to rock and activities being done are shown through Table 3.

Table 3 - Emotions and Moods Created while Doing Activities and Listening to Rock

| Activities during which Participants Listen to Rock | Emotions | Moods |
|--|-----------------|-------------------------|
| Working Out/ Yoga | - | Calm and Peaceful |
| While Taking a Shower | Happiness | - |
| Household Chores | - | Cheerful |
| Hanging Out with Friends | Happiness | Light-Hearted, Cheerful |
| Working on Assignments/Project | - | Reflective, Serious |

Another common emerging theme from these interviews was the appealing element(s) of rock. Although every participant in this study is a rock lover, few rock elements instantly drew them to the genre. The most common and popular choices were lyrics, the convergence of instruments, emotions portrayed by the artists, guitar solo riffs, and the rhythm/music/beats. The participants who said artist's emotions said artists express themselves through the songs. The song initially recorded in the studio is heavily experimented on and edited to make it a perfect rock song, but the same cannot be done on a live stage. The artist's live versions of the same songs are better than the studio version because he can see what the artist feels while playing and singing the track. Not only one gets to see the artist in their element on the live stage, but also, they feel it with them; a sense of familiarity is induced instantly. One of the participants said, "Music is speech. It is how one speaks but with a different language, and in this case, it is music." Live rock shows can induce the emotion which artists themselves are feeling.

Meanwhile, few samples talked about guitar and drums being the appealing elements as the vocalists can use words to express themselves and convey a message, guitarists and drummers only use their respective instruments to speak to the audience communicating, and people instantly relate to it. In this case, the amalgamation of guitar and drums enhances the songs. The sound of the drums instantly draws individuals to rock music. Drums are the backbone of any rock song, and the whole track is built upon drum beats. For example, 'Smells like Teen Spirits' by Nirvana is one of the songs that starts with the drum beats, and it instantly draws the listeners to the song; it sets the mood. Here we can notice how just the beats of the drums speak so much to the listeners; it has captivating power.

5. Conclusion

Music has always been a source of entertainment. Usually, people listen to music in their leisure time for stress release. Through this paper, we found that music plays a vital role in the lives of the samples who participated in this study. It is a mood-booster; it can comfort people in their dark times. Talking about Rock Music, as it is the main theme of this paper, several positive effects were found through data collection and data analysis. Rock can elevate moods, induce emotions, help the listeners be more productive and creative with their everyday work, and constantly motivate them to do better in every aspect of life. Rock provides a platform to express feelings and vent out all the angst, especially for those who otherwise do not voice their opinions because of their nature in general. The participants in the study resonated with Rock music, as it provides entertainment and educates them about the world, the naked reality, and society. Rock addresses several social agendas and talks about taboo topics, which other genres fail to cover. We found that Rock Music has been able to shape personalities, characteristics, and thought processes. Moreover, majorly, Rock Music helps people with anger management.

6. Limitations and Future Scope

Since the paper was directed at understanding the psychology of the listeners, the qualitative method was the approach to the study; however, 15 samples do not represent the whole of India's young adult population. One could further extend the age group and sample size. Another limitation was the medium of data collection; I had to resort to virtual interviews due to the unprecedented times. The social environment of the sample is equally important while answering questions, which was a major issue as few participants were conscious while responding to the interview questions. Apart from that, there were internet glitches as well. If one wishes to dig deeper into this topic, focus group discussions can also be another method of data collection, as it can help the researcher to understand the psyche of the samples.

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