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The Function of Music Videos in Everyday Listening Experiences

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Abstract

Streaming music videos (MVs) on social media platforms such as YouTube continues to be a popular method of music listening (see International Federation of the Phonographic Industry, 2018). Empirical research has shown that pairing music with visual stimuli has a significant influence on how the music is perceived and remembered in future listening episodes (Boltz, Ebendorf, & Field, 2009). This suggests MVs experiences may influence subsequent listening episodes, even when the video is no longer present. The aim of the study is to investigate MV watching experiences, particularly addressing the reasons for choosing this method of listening, the cognitive and emotional processes that occur during the experience, and the potential carry-over effects in subsequent listening episodes. Qualitative questionnaire data were collected and personality traits and the use of music for emotional health were measured using the TIPI and HUMS scales. Qualitative analysis was directed at identifying significant themes and causal relationships in the qualitative data. This analysis revealed that participants often experience changes in how they perceive the music's meaning after watching MVs and that future listening episodes would trigger visual mental imagery from the MV. The quantitative analysis revealed that participants with low scores in the trait emotional stability were more likely to experience negative long-term changes in how they perceived the music in subsequent listening episodes. Furthermore, participants with high scores in an unhealthy listening style were more likely to experience long-term effects from the MVs in general. The study identified several characteristics of MV listening experiences, providing new knowledge about this modern listening context. The results elaborate on our understanding of the personal meanings and affective impacts of everyday music listening.

Introduction

The way we listen to music is changing. Smartphones and other portable devices have allowed us to bring music with us virtually any-

where, and streaming services have replaced vinyl records and CDs due to their accessibility and massive music libraries. According to the Music Consumer Insight Report (see International Federation of the Phonographic Industry, 2018) YouTube is currently the most popular method of streaming music online. This suggests that individuals are more likely to consume music as multimedia such as music videos (MVs) as opposed to audio-only formats. Research has shown that music has an important role in young people's psychological and social development (Laiho, 2004; Miranda, 2013). The current study analyses the reasons, emotional outcomes and carry-over effects of this method of music listening in youth audiences and their relationship to certain traits such as personality and use of music for emotional help in order to establish a theoretical framework for understanding these experiences.

MVs differentiate themselves from other forms of music listening due to the fact they are multimedia. Empirical studies which examine the multi-modal component of music listening do exist, however, this previous research has been limited to specific elements such as performance gesture (Davidson, 1993; Vines, Krumhansl, Wanderley, Dalca, & Levitin, 2011) or as they pertain to film music (Boltz, 2004; Cohen, 2001, 2013; Marshall & Cohen, 1988). From a psychological perspective, MVs have mostly been studied in respect to how they influence behaviour in youth (Sun & Lull, 1986) and frequently focus on specific demographics (e.g., Bryant, 2008). Much has changed about MVs since they first appeared on MTV over thirty years ago, for example: they have helped shift the music industry towards a number of online streams as opposed to record sales, having evolved from a means to promote singles to a source of revenue for record companies (Ed-

mond, 2014). Furthermore, their availability on YouTube has allowed audiences to control *which* MVs they watch, wherever and whenever they want. The element of control has been linked to positive outcomes such as contentment and motivation, especially on platforms that allow for personal music collections and curation (Krause, North, & Hewitt, 2015).

Music listening can be used as a tool for regulating affect by maintaining positive mood states or changing negative ones. The GTSM model proposed by van Goethem and Sloboda (2011) highlights how music listening activities succeed in achieving regulation goals by using music listening as a tactic to engage in affect regulating strategies such as mental work or solace, which enable mechanisms such as evoking memories and mental imagery. Another important component to music listening outcomes are individual differences such as gender, age, and personality (Saarikallio, Nieminen, & Brattico, 2013; Vuoskoski & Eerola, 2011), listening style (Chamorro-Premuzic & Furnham, 2007), and use of music for achieving emotion regulation goals (Chin & Rickard, 2014; Saarikallio, Gold, & McFerran, 2015).

MVs are a unique method of listening that can further our current understanding of everyday music use for affect regulation. These listening contexts have been relatively under-explored, despite their popularity and modern role in shaping the music industry. The visual component of MV listening may be an integral source of information for young viewers, who use them as a method of social learning (Hansen & Hansen, 2000), as well for exploring their “private self” (Larson, 1995). This multimodal listening experience may have a significant impact on how the music is perceived, both during the watching episode and in subsequent audio-only listens. As a result, MVs have the potential to influence the way the listener uses the music for affect regulation purposes in the future.

The Current Study

The study aims to create a framework for analyzing MV listening experiences and their relationship to music listening for emotional

health purposes. The study uses questionnaire data and scale measures (TIPI and HUMS) to achieve this. The study uses data from a larger qualitative analysis which aims to create a theoretical model for understanding the process of MV watching over four temporal stages, referred to as: *Intention*, *Attention*, *Reaction* and *Retention* (IARR) (Wilson, Thompson, & Saarikallio, in review). In this framework, *Intention* refers to the reasons an individual chose to watch the MV and what type of goals does aim to fulfil. *Attention* and *Reaction* make up the experience itself; *Attention* themes provide insight into which components of the audio and visual modalities were the object of focus and whether the MV distract them from enjoying the music, and *Reaction* themes provide insight concerning how and why MVs elicit an emotional reaction. The final category, *Retention*, describes the ways in which subsequent listening episodes are affected by the MV’s visual information and the duration of these effects.

Select subcategories from the IARR model were chosen for the current study’s convergent analysis on the grounds they provide reliable insight into the ways in which MVs complement or hinder the use of music to promote emotional health and well-being. These subcategories describe participants’ listening goals, the emotional outcomes they experience, and the

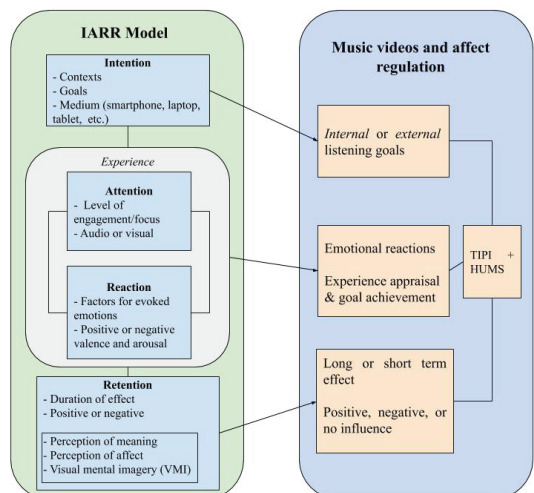


Figure 1. The IARR model (Wilson et al., in review) and the outline of the current study.

potential carry-over effects on future listening episodes. To establish a preliminary framework, these subcategories were transformed into nominal data; this allows for the triangulation of both qualitative and quantitative data sets in order to establish relationships between them. The IARR model and the current study's framework are visualized in Figure 1.

Method

Participants

Data were collected from 34 ($n = 34$) participants between the ages of 15 and 27 ($M = 22.4$). Participants were recruited via social media (Twitter and Facebook). In order to provide an incentive for their participation, all participants who provided a valid email address were entered into a raffle for an Amazon gift card. Participants were encouraged to invite friends to participate. For every friend that participated the original subject had an extra ballot entered for the raffle.

Design and Procedure

The study was accessible online via Qualtrics and took approximately 20–30 minutes to complete. Participants were first asked to complete the HUMS and TIPI measures before they completed the open-ended questionnaire component. Participants were asked to watch a MV they had already seen in order to limit recall bias and to include the song title and artist name or the MVs YouTube link. They were also informed that they may also refer to other MVs in their answers as well. In addition to the selected scale measures, four additional Likert-scale questions were added. Two of these questions were implemented in order to measure how much attention the subject attended to the MV, and whether they found themselves focused on the music or the visual component. The other two Likert questions pertained to how much the MV affected their mood and in what direction (positive or negative). The open-ended questionnaire component was designed in order to allow for detailed responses. Participants were encouraged to provide personal opinions and other details at the end of the study.

Qualitative Data and Analysis

The qualitative analysis was directed at uncovering relationships between patterns of experience and emotional health and well-being. An abductive method was chosen for qualitative analysis; this approach encourages the researcher to revisit the phenomenon in question after exploring and reframing the data from the perspective of existing theoretical frameworks (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012). This was deemed an appropriate method for analysis since individual concepts of MV watching can be understood in light of existing theories on the importance of music during youth and its role in psychological development, the use of music for affect regulation, media use, and gratification, and the cognitive encoding of audiovisual material.

Quantitative Data and Triangulation

The quantitative analysis used two-scale measures: the first measured personality (TIPI; Gosling, Rentfrow, & Swann, 2003) and participants' use of music for emotional health and well-being (HUMS; Saarikallio et al., 2015). Independent sample *t*-tests are conducted on the transformed nominal data from the qualitative analysis and individual variables of interest: personality (TIPI), specifically emotional stability, and healthy or unhealthy use of music for emotion regulation purposes (HUMS).

Results

Qualitative Findings

Reasons for engagement. Two main categories were established in the data: *internal* and *external* goals. *Internal* goals are motivated by the individual's psychological needs and are further subcategorized into *emotional* and *reflective* reasons. Emotional reasons include reports of the subject watching in order to achieve some affect related goal, such as relieving boredom or to change their negative emotional state into a positive one. Reflective reasons consist of watching the MV in order to better understand the meaning or interpretation of the music. In-

dividuals who watched the MV in order to learn how to play the music or to learn dance choreography were also included in this subcategory. *External* goals are influenced by social factors. These social factors include watching MVs that were shared with them by friends, or less personal social influences such as watching MVs that was hyped in the media or recommended to them by YouTube. *External* goals also include using MVs in order to relate to their favorite

Table 1. Categories for intentions and goals of MV watching, descriptions and frequencies.

Intentions and goals		
Category & Frequency	Themes	Example codes
Internal goals 23 cases 67.6%	Emotional: To change or maintain the emotional state	When I am relaxing at night or having an anxiety attack. (P34) During my down-time when I'm procrastinating ... (P36)
	Reflective: To create new associations with the music. To learn how to perform the music or MV choreography.	I love seeing the music videos to songs I love to see how the lyrics combine into visual art. (P24) ... or when I am researching/ learning a song (P36)
External goals 24 cases 70.5%	MV received media hype or is shared by friends For parasocial engagement	Normally I'd only watch the video [if] someone recommended it or if I heard someone mention something special about it. (P10) I think it helps connect to the artist more and to understand what the song means to them. (P12)

media characters, a phenomenon Kristler, Rodgers, Power, Austin, and Hill (2010) referred to as “parasocial interactions”. This form of social bonding occurs when individuals develop a perceived relationship with their favorite media characters, including musicians. Overall, goals motivated by *external* goals were reported in 24 cases (70.5%). *Internal* goals were reported in 23 cases (67.6%). Descriptions and frequencies are also reported in Table 1. Since some participants provided more data than others, it was possible for some individuals to provide codes in both categories.

Experience outcomes. Many participants asserted that whether their experience had any influence on their affective state was contingent on at least one of three key factors: the music, the video, and their personal interpretation of the music. These contingent factors are found in Table 2.

Table 2. Contingent factors for emotions evoked by MVs.

Factors	Contingencies
Musical	Genre, emotional quality, artist, familiarity
Visual	Portrayal of emotion, presence of storyline or performance gestures, quality of the cinematography
Personal	Appraisal of the music (prior to watching MV), current affective state, whether the MVs reflects their personal interpretation of the music

Participants were categorized as having experienced *strong affect* if they disclosed intense emotional reactions in response to the MV. Individuals who did not experience any significant emotional outcomes or changes in mood were categorized as *unimpacted*. These two categories are mutually exclusive: participants could not provide evidence of *strong affect* and also be *unimpacted*. However, some participants are not categorized under either due to lack of data or the number of contingencies they report having an effect on their reaction. These categories and their frequencies are described in Table 3.

Table 3. Experience reaction categories, descriptions and frequencies.

Category & Frequency	Themes	Example codes
Strong affect 16 cases 47%	Experiences strong emotional outcomes during MV episode	I find it makes an already powerful moment in the song even more intense (P16)
	Reports that the video makes the emotional quality more salient.	... in general, I feel happier and more upbeat after I watch music videos (P19).
Unimpacted 5 cases 14.7%	No salient emotional outcomes reported.	[My emotional outcomes are] usually not significant. (P22)
	Reports that the MV does not elicit the same emotions as audio-only.	Videos don't tend to alter my mood. The music is an important part for me. (P12)

Duration of effects. Participants asserted that MVs had the potential to change the way they perceived or understood the meaning of the music in the future; however, these were not always perceived as positive changes. Participants who asserted that the MV had a negative effect on future listening episodes were distinguished from participants who experienced more positive or neutral outcomes in subsequent listens. Furthermore, there were eight participants (24% of cases) who asserted MVs had no significant impact on how they perceived the music in the future. As a result, three categories were created: long term positive, long term negative and unaffected. These categories are used in the triangulation component in order to examine relationships between the trait variables of interest and the duration and valence of MV outcomes. The criteria for these categories are outlined in Table 4.

Three particular subsequent outcomes were distinguished in the data. The first two, described as a change in *perception of affect*,

Table 4. Duration and valence of MV effects.

Duration	Valence & Frequency	Example codes
Long term	Positive 58%	<i>The [MV] is really powerful and had a long-lasting impression on me. Now, every time I hear the song, I am reminded of the video and the message [the artist] was trying to convey. (P19)</i>
	Negative 18%	<i>I've been basically trying to erase the video from my brain so I can love the song the way I did before... (P25)</i>
Unaffected	Neutral 24%	<i>Depends on how in depth the story is but mostly the song means to me despite what the video says. (P35)</i>

change of *meaning and interpretation*, were used to establish whether the individual experienced salient long-term positive or negative salient outcomes. *Visual mental imagery* (VMI) was the most frequently reported subsequent outcome; more than three-quarters of the participants reported experiencing this effect, even those who said the MV had no long-term effects on their future listening episodes. All three categories are described in Table 5.

Quantitative Findings and Triangulation

Independent samples *t*-tests, Mann Whitney *u*-tests and one-way ANOVA were conducted in order to establish potential relationships between the trait variables of interest and categorical data. No statistical analyses were run on the contingent factors nor were any run on the descriptive categories for subsequent outcomes. These categories provide key insights into the type of long-term effects individuals experience, however, for the purpose of this analysis, the subsequent outcome categories were used to establish which participants experienced any long-term effects and whether that change was

Table 5. Descriptive categories for subsequent outcomes, descriptions, and frequencies.

Subsequent Outcomes		
Category	Themes	Example codes
Perception of affect	The emotional quality of the music is perceived differently in subsequent listens. This outcome often effects the subject's subsequent reasons for listening.	<i>It made me feel the song has heavier and more intense than before.</i> (P25)
Meaning and interpretation	Visual information from MV created new associations that changed the way the meaning of the music is understood	<i>Now, every time I hear the song, I am reminded of the video and the message that [the artist] was trying to portray in the video.</i> (P19)
Visual mental imagery (VMI)	The music triggers memories of visual scenes from the MV. This memory recall manifests as general thematic imagery or specific scenes triggered by specific moments in the music.	<i>[Now] every time I listen to the song and it hits a certain point that scene and the movement always replays in my head.</i> (P4)

perceived as positive or negative. For example, if a subject experienced a change in interpretation of the music's meaning in subsequent listening episodes, this was considered a long-term change. If the subject stated they disliked being reminded of the MV in their subsequent listening episodes, it was considered a long-term *negative* change. This was more suitable for the study's objective: to establish potential relationships between the duration and valence of MV

effects and individual traits related to the emotional use of music.

Independent samples t-tests reported a significant difference in unhealthy listening scores, where individuals who reported *externally* motivated goals for MV engagement had lower scores for unhealthy use ($M = 12.9, SD = 4.13$) compared to those who did not report these incentives for watching ($M = 19.5, SD = 3.27$): $t(32) = -4.48, p < .001$. Furthermore, individuals watching to achieve these goals had higher scores in emotional stability ($M = 4.88, SD = 1.35$) compared to those who did not ($M = 3.4, SD = 1.45$): $t(32) = 2.85, p = .008$. No significant relationships were observed for *internal* goals for watching and scale measures. All t-test data for *internal* and *external* goals are found in Table 6.

Table 6. T-test and U-test data for Internal and External goals.

	Internal		External	
	T	P	t	p
Healthy	94.0 [^]	.235	0.09	.926
Unhealthy	-0.27	.79	-4.48	<.001**
Emotional Stability	111.5 [^]	.59	2.85	.008**

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .017$ (Bonferroni correction),
[^]Mann-Whitney (all others t-test)

Experience outcomes were also significantly related to unhealthy listening scores, depending on if the subject experienced *strong affect* in response to the MV or were *unimpacted*. According to the independent sample t-test data, higher scores in unhealthy listening style were significantly related to *strong affect* ($M = 17.2, SD = 4.26$) compared to individuals who did not experience significant emotional responses ($M = 12.8, SD = 4.58$): $t(32) = 2.89, p = .007$. Unhealthy scores were also significantly lower for *unimpacted* individuals ($Md = 9.0$) compared to those who were uncertain or experienced strong emotions in response to the MV ($Md = 15.86$): $U = 12.5, p = .004$. Experience outcomes are reported in Table 7.

Table 7. T-test and U-test data for Experience Outcomes.

	Strong Affect		Unimpacted	
	t	p	t	p
Healthy	0.092	.93	-0.80	.926
Unhealthy	2.89	.007**	12.5 [^]	.004**
Emotional Stability	-1.52	.14	47.5 [^]	.23

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .017$ (Bonferroni correction),

[^]Mann-Whitney (all others t-test)

An independent samples *t*-test revealed that long-term outcomes, regardless of whether they were perceived as positive or negative, were significantly related to higher unhealthy use scores ($M = 16.0, SD = 4.8$) compared to individuals who did not experience long-term outcomes ($M = 12.2, SD = 4.27$): $t(31) = 2.09, p = .044$. T-tests also revealed that individuals who experienced long term outcomes were significantly related to lower scores in the trait emotional stability ($M = 4.04, SD = 1.43$) compared to those who did not, ($M = 5.56, SD = 1.31$): $t(31) = -2.77, p = .009$. A one-way ANOVA revealed a significant effect of long-term outcome on emotional stability scores, $F(2,30) = 5.56, p = .009$. Tukey post-hoc comparisons revealed that those with no long-term outcomes (*unaffected*) ($M = 5.81, SD = 1.36$) had significantly higher emotional stability scores than both positive ($M = 4.13, SD = 1.36$) and negative ($M = 3.67, SD = 1.13$) long-term outcome groups. No significant effects were found for healthy or unhealthy scores.

Conclusion

The aim of the study was to establish a preliminary framework for understanding young people’s experiences with MV media and its relationship to the use of music for emotional health. The study uses categorical outcomes outlined in the IARR framework (Wilson et al., in review) which provides new insight concerning the types of goals this method of music listening may accomplish, the emotional reactions they elicit, and the carry-over effects they impose on subsequent listening episodes.

The findings from this study suggest that MV watching is more than a form of music listening;

it is also a form of social media engagement. For some participants, MV watching was instigated not by an interest in the music or the artist or personal psychological goals, but external factors such as social media sharing, general media hype or feuds between artists. This finding also reflects an important paradigm shift in modern music listening, where an artist’s success can be measured by a number of views their songs have on YouTube rather than albums sold. As a result, the line separating music listening from social media activities is becoming blurred. These *external* goals were significantly related to lower scores in unhealthy listening styles and higher scores in the trait of emotional stability, whereas no such relationships were observed for *internal* goals. The relationship between these measures and *external* goals may be indicative of the individual using MVs to feel connected to others, such as their peers. Participants who used MVs to achieve such goals frequently reported sharing their favorite MVs with their friends, sometimes watching them together. Previous research has suggested that music listening for the purpose of feeling socially connected to one’s peers may have negative impacts on well-being when music replaces real friends (Chin & Rickard, 2014; Laiho, 2004) or when the individual suppresses their thoughts and feelings in order to feel connected with their peers (Chin & Rickard, 2014). Individuals who disclosed *external* reasons for watching may not necessarily be watching MVs for songs by favorite artists, instead of watching in order to be in on the “hype”. This reflects a different kind of social connectedness through music that differentiates itself from previously identified social functions such as identity formation and peer-group identification (Laiho, 2004; Larson, 1995; North & Hargreaves, 1999).

The findings from the experience and subsequent outcome levels can provide a useful foundation for future research examining the links between emotional health and MV music listening during youth. The study finds evidence that stronger emotional outcomes (*strong affect*) in response to MVs were significantly related to higher scores in unhealthy listening styles, whereas individuals who experienced no

significant emotional outcomes (*unimpacted*) had significantly lower scores in unhealthy listening styles. Future research can benefit from using scales which specifically measure emotion regulation tendencies (i.e. Emotion Regulation Questionnaire; Gross & John, 2003) and use of music for mood regulation (i.e. Music for Mood Regulation Scale; Saarikallio & Erkkilä, 2007) in order to establish the relationship between outcomes from MV listening experiences and both musical and non-musical affect regulation strategies.

Future research should investigate whether traits such as empathy are a factor mediating these experiences, particularly when they are used for parasocial engagement. Whether these perceived relationships have a positive or negative influence on the use of music for emotional well-being is especially relevant during MV listening experiences based on the finding that participants frequently engage with this media in order to connect to their favourite artists.

The study identifies ways in which MVs modify future listening experiences by directly influencing mechanisms for music-evoked emotion and affect regulation. Visual mental imagery (VMI) has been identified as an underlying mechanism for music-evoked emotions (Juslin, 2013; Juslin, Harmat, & Eerola, 2014; Juslin & Västfjäll, 2008), however, there has been no research to date which analyses how visual representations of the music (such as MVs) influence this mechanism. VMI was the most frequently reported subsequent outcome, where images from the video were triggered automatically and often unintentionally. There also appears to be a link between this mechanism and scenes depicting human movement, such as performance gestures and choreographed movement. This finding may be particularly relevant for research on embodied cognition in music or neurology studies investigating mirror neuron systems (Overy & Molnar-Szakacs, 2009). Furthermore, the study highlights the ways in which multimodal listening experiences can change the way music is used to regulate affect, during the experience as well as in the future. For example, some participants suggested the MV allowed them to be more absorbed in the music than if

they were only listening to the audio since the visual component made the listening experience less passive and more engaging.

The study successfully highlights the cognitive and emotional processes involved during MV listening episodes, however, there are limitations to address. The online questionnaire component was beneficial in that participants were able to complete the study in an environment where they would usually engage with MVs, however, this also meant that there was no interviewer who could follow up or ask for more detail in the event a subject provided interesting details about their experience. Some participants provided more details than others, in some cases even providing details of more than one MV experience. For example, if a subject provided *internal* and *external* goals for MV watching and several potential subsequent outcomes, there was no way of establishing which outcomes were related to which initial reasons or goals the experience was meant to accomplish.

Overall, the current study is an important contribution to our knowledge of modern music listening, which today often occurs in the context of MV watching. Music psychological knowledge on music listening needs to be kept updated, taking these new contexts into account and we believe this study to be an important pioneering step in this endeavor.

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