

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MUSIC LISTENING PURPOSES AND EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING AMONG UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS.

Kamilov Ismail Zairovich,

First year student of Philology Faculty of

UrIU in Khorezm region in Republic of

Uzbekistan (ismail.oscorb.kamilov@gmail.com)

Abstract:

This study investigated the relationship between music listening purposes and emotional well-being among undergraduate students. A survey was administered to 50 undergraduate students aged 18 to 22 from several universities in Urgench, Uzbekistan. Participants reported their main purposes for listening to music, how frequently they use music to cope with negative emotions, and completed the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS). Results indicated that mood management and relaxation were the most frequently reported listening purposes, with 60% of participants using music to cope with negative emotions at least occasionally. Despite this, overall well-being scores fell within the moderate range ($M=21.2/35$), suggesting that frequent use of music for emotional regulation does not necessarily correspond with high well-being. The findings broadly support Zillmann's (1988) Mood Management Theory and Saarikallio and Erkkilä's (2007) model of music-based mood regulation, while contributing empirical evidence from a Central Asian undergraduate context that remains underrepresented in existing literature.

Keywords: Music listening purposes, emotional well-being, emotional regulation, undergraduate students, mood management, WEMWBS, Uzbekistan.

Introduction:

Music is a common part of daily life and serves many functions beyond entertainment. It is one of the most common forms of everyday media consumption and

is used by many people to regulate emotions, improve mood, reduce stress or accompany daily activities. Due to its accessibility through streaming services, social media, and personal devices, music has become an integral part of many people's everyday lives. Beyond providing enjoyment, music can influence thoughts, emotions, and behavior, making it an important topic in psychological research. As a result, researchers have increasingly become interested in understanding how and why people use music in different situations and whether these listening habits are associated with emotional well-being.

Previous studies have consistently shown that music is closely related to emotional experiences and psychological functioning. Researchers have examined why people choose particular music (Zillmann, 1988), how music regulates emotions through different psychological mechanisms (Saarikallio & Erkkilä, 2007) and how personality influences this process (Chamorro-Premuzic & Furnham, 2007). Although researchers have also examined music preferences through instruments such as the STOMP scale (Rentfrow & Gosling, 2003), the current study focuses on the purposes for which music is used rather than on genre preferences.

Undergraduate students represent an important population for this study because they frequently experience academic demands, social adjustment and emotional challenges. During this period of life, music is often used as an accessible coping mechanism for managing stress and regulating emotions. Understanding how different music-listening purposes relate to emotional well-being among students may therefore contribute to a better understanding of students' psychological experiences. Nevertheless, far fewer studies have compared different purposes of music listening among undergraduate students. Therefore, the present study aims to investigate whether undergraduates who use music for emotional regulation report higher levels of well-being than those who use it primarily for distraction or background listening. It is expected that students who use music for emotional regulation will report higher well-being.

Literature review:

Zillmann's (1988) Mood Management Theory proposes that individuals unconsciously select media, including music, to optimize their emotional states. This process is guided



by four mechanisms: excitatory potential, which refers to the arousal level a piece of music produces; absorption potential, which describes how much attention music demands; semantic affinity, which reflects how closely music mirrors the listener's personal situation; and hedonic valence, which describes the natural preference for pleasant over unpleasant content. Although influential, the theory has been criticized for assuming people always seek mood improvement, failing to explain why individuals sometimes deliberately choose sad or intense music. Saarikallio and Erkkilä (2007) addressed this limitation by identifying seven strategies through which music regulates mood in everyday life: Entertainment, Revival, Strong Sensation, Diversion, Discharge, Mental Work, and Solace. Their research demonstrated that strategies such as Discharge and Solace support emotional processing in healthy individuals, but may reinforce rumination in those experiencing depression. This distinction between adaptive and maladaptive music use is particularly relevant to the present study, as it suggests that the purpose of music listening — rather than listening itself — may determine its effect on well-being.

Chamorro-Premuzic and Furnham (2007) further demonstrated that personality traits shape how individuals use music. Neurotic individuals were more likely to use music for emotional regulation, extraverts for social and background purposes, and those high in Openness for intellectual engagement. These findings suggest that personality represents an important moderating variable in the relationship between music listening purposes and emotional well-being, and should be considered in future research. Together these theoretical frameworks suggest that music listening is a psychologically purposeful behavior whose relationship with well-being depends on how, rather than simply whether, individuals engage with music.

Methodology:

This study used a quantitative survey design. Data was collected from 50 undergraduate students from several universities in Urgench, Uzbekistan, through an online Google Form distributed via university communication channels in July 2026. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 22 and were enrolled across all four year levels. Participation was voluntary and anonymous. The survey consisted of three sections. The first asked participants to



select their main purposes for listening to music from eight options. The second asked how often they use music to cope with negative emotions, rated on a five-point scale from Never to Always. The third assessed emotional well-being using the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS; Tennant et al., 2007), a seven-item validated scale rated from Never to Always, producing a total score between 7 and 35. Data was analyzed descriptively. Due to the exploratory nature of the study and the sample size, inferential statistics were not conducted. Findings are interpreted in relation to existing theoretical frameworks.

Results:

The most commonly reported purposes for listening to music were mood management (46%), relaxation (44%), and energizing (40%). Background listening was selected by 36% of participants, while distraction was the least common purpose at 16%. These findings suggest that the majority of undergraduates in this sample use music primarily as an emotional regulation tool rather than for passive or social reasons. The majority of participants reported using music to cope with negative emotions at least occasionally. The most common response was Sometimes (36%), followed by Rarely (24%) and Often (18%). Only 16% reported never using music for emotional coping, while 6% reported always doing so. The mean coping frequency score was 1.74 out of 4, falling between Rarely and Sometimes overall.

The mean WEMWBS total score was 21.2 out of 35, placing the sample in the moderate well-being range. The highest scoring item was feeling optimistic about the future ($M=3.38$) and the lowest was dealing with problems well ($M=2.62$), suggesting that while participants maintain a generally positive outlook, their confidence in handling problems is comparatively low.

Discussion:

The findings of this study offer several insights into how undergraduate students in Urgench use music in relation to their emotional well-being. Overall the results suggest that music serves primarily as an emotional regulation tool for this population, a pattern consistent with Zillmann's (1988) Mood Management Theory, which proposes that individuals select media consciously or unconsciously to optimize their emotional states.

The fact that mood management and relaxation were the two most frequently reported listening purposes — selected by 46% and 44% of participants respectively — strongly supports this theoretical position.

The finding that 60% of participants use music to cope with negative emotions at least sometimes is also consistent with Saarikallio and Erkkilä's (2007) model of music-based mood regulation, which identified strategies such as Diversion, Discharge, and Solace as common ways young people use music to manage difficult emotions. The prevalence of emotional coping through music in this sample suggests that these regulatory behaviors are not limited to Western populations and are observable among undergraduates in a Central Asian context.

However the moderate overall well-being score ($M=21.2$) despite high rates of music use for emotional regulation raises an important question. If music is so frequently used for mood management, why does well-being remain only moderate? One possible explanation lies in the distinction Saarikallio and Erkkilä (2007) drew between adaptive and maladaptive music use — frequent emotional coping through music does not guarantee improved well-being if the listening reinforces rumination rather than facilitating genuine emotional processing. The notably low score on dealing with problems well ($M=2.62$) supports this interpretation, suggesting that music may help participants manage emotions in the moment without necessarily improving their broader capacity to handle difficulties.

The findings of Chamorro-Premuzic and Furnham (2007) are also relevant here. Their work demonstrated that individuals higher in Neuroticism are more likely to use music for emotional regulation — and that this same personality trait is associated with lower well-being. While personality was not measured in the present study, it represents a plausible underlying factor that may explain both the high rates of emotional music use and the moderate well-being scores observed.

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. The sample of 50 students from universities in one city limits generalizability. The reliance on self-report measures introduces the possibility of social desirability bias. Additionally the study is cross-sectional, meaning it captures a snapshot in time and cannot establish whether music use influences well-being or whether lower well-being drives greater music use for coping.

Conclusion:

This study examined the relationship between music listening purposes and emotional well-being among undergraduate students in Urgench, Uzbekistan. Findings revealed that mood management and relaxation are the most common reasons undergraduates listen to music, with the majority reporting using music to cope with negative emotions at least occasionally. Despite this frequent use of music as an emotional regulation tool, overall well-being among participants was moderate rather than high, suggesting that music use alone does not guarantee positive emotional outcomes. This study contributes to the existing literature by providing empirical evidence from a non-Western, Central Asian context that is largely absent from current research on music and well-being. The findings broadly support established theoretical frameworks, particularly Zillmann's (1988) Mood Management Theory and Saarikallio and Erkkilä's (2007) model of music-based mood regulation, while also highlighting the complexity of the relationship between music use and well-being. Future research should examine this relationship with larger and more diverse samples, incorporate personality measures to better understand individual differences, and explore whether the type of emotional coping strategy — rather than frequency alone — predicts well-being outcomes more meaningfully. Longitudinal designs would also help clarify whether music use influences well-being over time or whether lower well-being drives greater reliance on music for emotional coping.

References

1. Zillmann, D. (1988). Mood management through communication choices. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 31(3), 327–340. <https://doi.org/10.1177/000276488031003005>
2. Saarikallio, S., & Erkkilä, J. (2007). The role of music in adolescents' mood regulation. *Psychology of Music*, 35(1), 88–109. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0305735607068889>
3. Chamorro-Premuzic, T., & Furnham, A. (2007). Personality and music: Can traits explain how people use music in everyday life? *British Journal of Psychology*, 98(2), 175–185. <https://doi.org/10.1348/000712606X111177>

4. Rentfrow, P. J., & Gosling, S. D. (2003). The do re mi's of everyday life: The structure and personality correlates of music preferences. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 84(6), 1236–1256. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.84.6.1236>