

Music and Wellbeing in Everyday Life: An Exploratory Study of Music Experience in Ghana

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Abstract: In this paper we highlight the experience of music in everyday contexts in Ghana. Using the Experience Sampling Method (ESM) and semi-structured interviews, we examined how people experience and use music in everyday life in potentially beneficial ways to enhance subjective wellbeing. In contrast to previous research where music's self-regulatory role has been highlighted primarily in the context of solitary music listening, for the participants in our study music also played a crucial role as a form of social and participatory performance practice. This was particularly evident in the strong connection between music, religion, and social dance.

Keywords: Ghana, music experience, wellbeing, everyday life, Experience Sampling Method (ESM)

Music has become a ubiquitous feature of everyday life. From the home to public transportation, commercial spaces, and work music forms an integral part of people's daily experience. In Ghana, sound systems are regularly mounted in public spaces to entertain guests at social functions such as funerals or church programmes. Store owners in the commercial districts of towns use music to lure customers into their shops. Music played from radio and television sets forms a perpetual acoustic background in many offices and private homes. Apart from open sound sources, mobile music technologies and personal stereos are also widespread. Portable MP3 players and radio receivers, which are now integrated into most mobile phones, enable users to exert much greater control over their everyday soundscapes. It is a common way of life to see people walking around while listening to music with their earphones. While we agree with Steingo that we must be cautious "against overly optimistic, technophilic approaches to music and mobility" (Steingo, 2015, p. 103), it is nonetheless true that recorded music has become more accessible and that exposure to music in everyday contexts has significantly increased over the past decades, particularly through the introduction of personal stereos and the greater presence of sound reproduction technology. This enables people to carry their personal music libraries with them wherever they go, empowering them to manipulate their everyday

soundscape. However, due to often very high sound levels, open sound sources can also become a public nuisance that leaves individuals with little or no control over the sonic environment in which they find themselves (Carl & Otchere, 2015).

This pervasive presence of sound technologies and recorded music gives rise to a number of questions which we seek to address in this article. How do people engage with music in their everyday lives? Where and with whom do they experience music? What music do people listen to and why do they choose particular genres in specific circumstances? What are the effects of music exposure, both voluntary and involuntary, and how do people use music in everyday life? Beyond the objective to find answers to these questions, our study also sought to test the suitability of the so-called Experience Sampling Method (ESM), a procedure that was developed to capture everyday experience both qualitatively and quantitatively. ESM has been widely applied in psychological research (Christensen, Feldman Barrett, Bliss-Moreau, Lebo, & Kaschub, 2003). However, as far as everyday music experience is concerned, it has, to the best of our knowledge, not been tested in an African context yet.

For readers unfamiliar with the Ghanaian cultural context, there are a number of recent studies that help situate our research within the context of the popular culture of urban southern Ghana (e.g., Schauert, 2015; Plageman, 2013; Shipley, 2013; Feld, 2012; Osumare, 2012). Since our present study has a much more limited focus, we simply refer readers to this literature and reserve a more thorough discussion of our research findings on Ghanaian popular culture for the future. Studies that have addressed everyday music experience are more generally situated within two broader fields. On the one hand, there are studies on music preferences and everyday music experience within the social psychology of music (e.g., Helsing, 2012; Hanser, 2010; North, 2010; Sloboda, 2010; Juslin, Liljeström, Västfjäll, Barradas, & Silva, 2008; Juslin & Laukka, 2004; North, Hargreaves, & Hargreaves, 2004; North & Hargreaves, 1996). These studies mostly employ quantitative research procedures. On the other hand are studies in ethnomusicology and cultural sociology that deal with the phenomenology of everyday music experience from a predominantly qualitative perspective (e.g., Becker, 2004; Frith, 2002; DeNora, 1999, 2000; Crafts, Cavicchi, & Keil, 1993). The prime focus of both of these strands of research has been on listening (e.g., MacDonald, Kreutz, & Mitchell, 2012; Juslin & Sloboda, 2010; North & Hargreaves, 2008). Also, previous studies of music in everyday life have almost exclusively focused on Western subjects, with very few exceptions (e.g., Rana & North, 2007).

The general assumption that arises from the literature and which forms the basis of our argument as well is that people use music in their everyday lives in potentially beneficial ways—to increase subjective wellbeing. We understand “wellbeing” here beyond its usual but limited meaning as absence of illness and use it in its much broader sense as “the invisible context enabling us to pursue possibilities and engage in projects. It is the condition of possibility enabling us to follow through aims and goals, to act on our desires, to become who we are” (Carel quoted in Ansdell & DeNora, 2012, p. 110). A number of studies have approached everyday music experience from such a perspective. Hargreaves and North (1999), for instance, stressed music’s role in the management of self-identity, interpersonal relationships and mood. DeNora (1999 & 2000), also, highlighted the use of music as a mode of self-regulation and self-modulation, describing it as a “resource for the conduct of emotional work” (1999, p. 31).

A recent review of the body of literature on music and wellbeing in everyday life came to the conclusion that “responses to music occur frequently enough and for a large enough proportion of the population to be of relevance from a public health perspective” (Västfjäll, Juslin, & Hartig, 2012, p. 407). As research has, so far, been dominated by Western perspectives, our study can be understood both as a contribution to this field as well as a counterweight

to the prevailing bias on Western listeners, highlighting the experience of music and its role in the management of subjective wellbeing in a Ghanaian setting. While our own background is in ethnomusicology, in this study, we purposely deviated from an ethnographic approach because we thought it would be interesting to test ESM in a Ghanaian context. We are aware of the limitations of such an approach and, consequently, the findings of this study. It is our hope that our research will be complemented by ethnographic research and more qualitatively-oriented studies in the future. Yet, we generally also see the need for a more integrated approach that moves towards a mixed methods paradigm (Bergman, 2008). We therefore see this study as a contribution to the broader dialogue encompassing psychological, sociological and anthropological perspectives on music, which are, still, too often divided along geographical and methodological lines.

Method

Participants

A total of 20 participants volunteered to take part in the study, responding to a call for participation that was published on notice boards around campus at the University of Cape Coast in Ghana. Seventeen of our volunteers were students, among them four students from the Department of Music and Dance and the rest from other faculties and departments. The three remaining participants were staff of the University, a clerk, a research assistant, and an administrator. Overall, five of the participants were female and the rest male. The majority were in the age range of 20-25 years, two were between 26-30 years and the other two above 30 years. All participants had Christian religious backgrounds.

Since one of the objectives of this study was to test the viability of ESM, it was necessary to find volunteers rather than randomly sample participants. This therefore ensured a high level of motivation and sincere interest in the questions our study sought to address. As an additional incentive to stay focused on the study, which was conducted over a period of two weeks, we gave out scratch cards with call credit worth five Ghanaian cedis to participants at the end of each week. We chose the university campus as location because we needed participants who were sufficiently literate and we also needed to be able to easily communicate with all of them throughout the study. An initial meeting with all participants was held on the day before the study commenced. At the meeting, we explained the details and objectives of the study and familiarised everyone with the response form. After the first week, half-way into the study, we briefly met with participants again to find out whether there were any challenges and to collect the first batch of response forms.

Procedure

ESM was first developed in the 1970s by social psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi together with colleagues at the University of Chicago (Csikszentmihalyi, Larson, & Prescott, 1977; Csikszentmihalyi & LeFevre, 1989). Originally, the method utilized electronic pagers that sent messages at random times, asking respondents to complete self-report forms containing both open-ended and scaled items designed to capture specific aspects of everyday experiences. ESM was part of efforts to overcome the shortcomings of experimental approaches that measure interactions and reactions to stimuli in decontextualized settings. The advantage of ESM over other procedures such as surveys, diaries, or the day reconstruction method is that it does not rely on retrospective verbal data but records people's experience as it actually evolves

in everyday real-life contexts. In contrast to ethnography, which relies on the researcher’s observations, ESM potentially allows glimpses into everyday experience which would otherwise remain hidden, as it actually uses participants’ self-observations.

Since the pager technology was not available to us, we adopted an approach that relied on the Short Messaging Services (SMS) of mobile providers (text messages), a technology that is wide-spread and could conveniently be utilized. On each day of the study, which was conducted over a time period of 14 days, we sent out one text to each participant at a randomly assigned time between 6:00 a.m. and 9:00 p.m., amounting to 20 messages per day and a total of 280 messages over the two-week period. The random time schedule was divided into 15 one-hour time slots for each day and constructed in such a way that the messages would be sent out to each participant in a different time-slot on each of the 14 days, thus achieving an approximately equal distribution of episodes for each participant, as well as, between participants. Table 1 shows the randomly generated texting schedule, the numbers 1-20 in the table representing the individual study participants.

Table 1: Two-week texting schedule

Hours	Fri	Sat	Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu
6-7	5	9 19 4	10	7	6 20 13 15	14 12	11 17 8	1	2	3 18				
7-8	3	14 5 18	15 8	1 19 2	7 17 10	6	11 20 13	9	16					
8-9	2	8	6 17 13	10	15	14 4 18 5 19 9	7	16 3 20 1						
9-10	14 13	15 4	6	9	12 16 8 19 3 20 10	1	2 17 11 7							
10-11	4 19 7	2	1	14 8	10 20 13	16 12	15 6 18 5 17 11							
11-12	12 18 1	3 16 7 19 4	11	6	9	2 15 8	13	12	14 5 17					
12-13	10	11 18 1	5	15 2 16 3	12 20 9	13	4	7 14 6	8 19					
13-14	9 16 2	7	11 20 13	3	17	15 1 18 4	6	5	8 19 10 14					
14-15	11 20 3	12	14 2 17 4 18 1 19 6	7	5 15 9 16 8	10 13								
15-16	13 17 10 6	14 2	9	12	8	1	4	3 19 5 18 11 20 7 16	15					
16-17	1	15 9 19 8 17 3 16 10	5 18 11	13	2 20	14 4	12	6						
17-18	6	10	3	12	13	7	5 16 11 17 1 18 2	9 19	15 4 20					
18-19	8	4 20 13	9 16 5 18 7 17 11	10	6	14 12 19 3	1	2						
19-20	15 12 16 11 20 6	1 19 5	4	2	8 14 7	3 17 10	13 18 9							
20-21	7	5 17 8	12 18 11 20	14 9	3	16 10	15 4	12						

The messages prompted respondents to immediately (or otherwise as soon as practically possible) fill a response form, a copy of which they had to carry along at all times throughout the course of the study. The form itself was adopted from a previous study conducted in the UK (Sloboda et al., 2001) and then modified to meet the demands of our specific context. It comprised two sections. The first section asked respondents whether they heard any music when receiving the text message. It then asked about their location and the main activity in which they were engaged at the time they were texted. In case there was no music, we also inquired whether participants experienced any music since they were last texted.

The second section asked more specific questions as to the nature and context of the music experience, in case there was any. We asked: Whom participants were with when they heard the musical sound? What genre was it? Through what medium? Then there were scaled items asking about respondents’ mood or emotional states immediately before and after hearing the music. We also wanted to know the degree of choice people had over the music being heard, their reasons for choosing a particular song, the impact of the song on them, and the activity in which they were engaged. Finally, the response form included a number of open-ended items

where participants could, in their own words, detail the reasons for listening to a chosen music and the effects of that musical type on them.

The second instrument we used was semi-structured interviews which we conducted with all participants after the two-week period. Each interview took about 20-30 minutes. The major objective for doing this was to gain additional insight into participants' experience with the ESM procedure and to identify possible problems associated with the method. We also wanted to find out whether the study period represented typical weeks with regard to exposure to music. Again, we wanted to determine whether the task of self-monitoring influenced participants' overall perception of music. Additionally, the interviews were meant to give us complementary narrative data about participants' everyday musical experiences. For this purpose, we randomly picked three to four of the completed response forms and asked those who provided the selected responses to elaborate on the exact circumstances and the nature of the reported experience in the respective episodes.

Results and Discussion

Viability of Method

Our participants returned 258 response forms out of a total of 280 time slots that were sampled, representing a response rate of 92.1%. Only 22 text messages (7.9%) remained unaccounted for. There were two respondents who, due to time constraints, returned only five and seven response forms out of the total of 14 assigned to each participant. One of them decided to quit the study after the first week. Nonetheless, the response rate of over 90% was relatively high.

Another indicator for the compliance of respondents was the time that elapsed between receipt of the text messages and the filling in of the response forms. In this analysis, we included a total of 248 forms with valid data (one respondent had problems with the time settings on his phone during the first week and was therefore not able fill in some portions of the forms). Based on the valid data, the average time participants took to respond to our text messages was 49.9 minutes. Cumulatively, 34.4% of the response forms were filled within five minutes after receipt of the text messages, 66.8% of responses occurred within 30 minutes and 80.2% within an hour after receiving the texts. There were significant differences in the response time between the participants, however. Our most committed participant took an average of just about two minutes to complete the response forms while the least committed participant took an average of over four hours to respond.

The authors of two previous ESM studies on everyday music experience who also used text messages instead of pagers reported that they relied on free-of-charge text messaging websites and automated schedules to send out messages to their participants (Rana & North, 2007; North et al., 2004). After pre-testing this method, however, we realized that this technology did not reliably work in the Ghanaian context, due to frequent problems with internet connectivity. We therefore decided to manually send out the text messages, prompted by an hourly alarm. A few problems, relating to technical delays in the communication networks, occurred which distorted our texting schedule. For instance, a few of the messages were not delivered instantly, resulting in a case where a participant received two messages in one day and missed a text on another. There were a few other instances where participants received their messages outside the 15-hour time window that we initially designed. In each case, the response forms were completed based on the time when participants actually received their messages.

Distribution of Episodes

Out of the total of 258 episodes, music was heard at the time when participants received the text message in 137 cases. Statistically, there was a 53.1% likelihood of respondents hearing music at any given time between 6:00 a.m. and 9:00 p.m. over the two weeks of study. By comparison, Sloboda et al. (2001) reported a 44% chance of music being heard within any given two-hour time slot between 8:00 a.m. and 10:00 p.m. and North et al. (2004) found the incidence of music exposure to be 38.6% within a 24-hour period. While both of these studies were conducted in the UK, similar research undertaken in Pakistan found that music exposure over a 24-hour period was on average 47.6% (Rana & North, 2007). Our study thus confirmed the generally high exposure of people to music in everyday life. In our case, participants were surrounded by some kind of music, be it self-chosen or imposed, roughly half of their waking hours.

For the remaining 121 episodes, participants reported that they had heard music since the last time they were texted in 69 cases and then filled in the response form accordingly with respect to that last musical experience. The total number of music episodes included in our final analysis was thus 206. Our data showed no significant differences in the occurrence of music with regard to the time of the day. While we recorded slightly higher numbers of music episodes on weekends (Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays), the lowest number occurred on Mondays.

Table 2: Place of music and non-music episodes

Place of episode	No music	Music	Total valid	%
Home	18	95	113	47.3
Transport	0	12	12	5.0
Work	26	38	64	26.8
Shops/Market	1	3	4	1.7
Entertainment	1	15	16	6.7
Church	1	14	15	6.3
Outdoors	5	7	12	5.0
Other venues	0	3	3	1.2
Total valid	52	187	239	100.0

The question where participants were when they received the text messages was open-ended. We coded responses post hoc into seven categories as shown in Table 2. In 19 cases participants did not specify where they were when receiving the text message. Almost half (47.3%) of the valid episodes took place at participants' home (which included halls of residence and hostels for the students who participated in the study). This was followed by roughly a quarter of episodes (26.8%) that took place at work (which, in our case, included lecture halls, the library, etc.). Other places where episodes occurred included entertainment venues (bars and restaurants) (6.7%), churches (6.3%), public transportation (none of our participants owned a car) (5%), and outdoors (5%). Our analysis showed clear differences with regard to music in relation to place. The mean presence of music was lowest outdoors (58.3%) and at the work place (59.4%) and much higher at home (84.1%), in church (93.3%) and at entertainment venues (93.8%). Most significantly stood out the episodes recorded in public transport, all of which (100%) included music.

The response form also allowed participants to freely specify the main activity they were engaged in when receiving the text messages. When coding the responses post hoc we identified

five broad categories, labelled “time filler”, “personal”, “leisure”, “religion” and “work”. The “personal”, “leisure” and “work” categories were further divided into subcategories such as states of being, personal maintenance and travelling for personal activities, and in the case of “leisure” and “work”, specifying whether the activity was predominantly solitary, involved interaction with others, or was mainly focused on a musical activity such as listening or performing itself (see Table 3). Table 4 shows the distribution of music episodes in relation to both place and the main activity.

Table 3: Categorization of activities

Category	Examples
Time filler	Waiting, sitting idle
Personal	— being
	— maintenance
	— travelling
Leisure	— others
	— solitary
	— music
Religion	Praying, worshipping, morning devotion, in church, connecting with God
Work	— solitary
	— others
	— music

Out of the total 187 music episodes, music itself was the main focus in only 15 episodes (8%) as a leisure activity (mostly concentrated listening) and in 7 cases (3.7%) as part of work (students participating in a music or dance class). Thus, in the vast majority of episodes (88.3%), music accompanied other activities. Looking at the absolute figures, we recorded 36 episodes (19.3%) in which music accompanied solitary work such as studying or typing on a computer, followed by 32 episodes (16.6%) of personal maintenance such as washing and cooking. Music also commonly accompanied other leisure activities, both when people were by themselves (25 episodes or 13.4%) and socializing with others (22 episodes or 11.8%). In relative terms, certain activities stood out with regard to the mean presence of music, though, due to our sampling size and technique, we would again be hesitant to make any claims about the statistical significance of these variations. Nevertheless, there were activities where the presence of music was exceptionally high. Thus, 95.7% of leisure activities that involved socializing with others, 91.2% of the personal maintenance activities and 84.6% of religious activities were accompanied by music. In the mid-range, we have 79% of all travelling episodes, 78.1% of the

solitary leisure activities, 73.5% of solitary work episodes, and 66.7% of personal being episodes that were accompanied by some form of music. Time fillers and work episodes that involved interaction with others were at the lower end, with 50% and 46.4% respectively reportedly involving music.

Table 4: Place of music episodes in relation to main activity

	Time filler		personal		leisure			religion	work		
	being		mainte- nance	travel- ing	others	solitary	music		solitary	others	music
Home	1	10	25	0	14	21	4	1	19	0	0
Transport	0	0	0	11	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Work	1	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	17	11	6
Shops/Market	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Entertainment	0	0	0	0	7	1	5	0	0	1	1
Church	0	0	0	0	1	0	3	10	0	0	0
Outdoors	0	0	0	4	0	2	1	0	0	0	0
Other	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Total	2	10	31	15	22	25	15	11	36	13	7

With regard to the predominant musical styles that participants were exposed to, our research yielded similar results as a previous study on music preferences conducted on Ghanaian university campuses (Otchere & Carl, 2016). In the order of the frequency of their occurrence, the most common styles participants encountered were gospel music (38%), hiplife/hip-hop (21%), R&B, country and “cool” music (pop and rock ballads) (13.1%), highlife (10.7%), classical and choral music (9.3%), reggae (4.9%) and traditional music (including styles like *jama*) (3.9%). Our data did not indicate any significantly higher amount of choice exerted over any of these styles by participants, pointing to the fact that stylistic preferences were situational and context-dependent rather than absolute.

The most common media technologies through which music was played were, in descending order, the phone (MP3 player) (33.7%), laptop computers (17.6%), live performances (15.6%), public sound systems (13.7%), the radio (11.2%) and, at the low end, television sets (4.4%), audio cassettes (2%) and compact discs (2%). Considering that four of our participants were music students, the incidence of live performances might have been slightly higher than one would expect in a sample group excluding active musicians. A closer analysis revealed that less than a third (28.1%) of the live music episodes took place at the work place (music and dance lectures), while the other two thirds were at entertainment venues (34.4%) and in church (37.5%). While technologies like the MP3 player and the computer were very common, they also potentially gave their users a higher amount of listening autonomy. The use of older technologies like audio cassettes and CDs was, on the other hand, expectedly low.

One aspect of everyday music experience that is completely absent from previous research is people’s bodily involvement with music, or, more specifically, dance. There were two items on our response form that asked about the presence of dance during episodes, as well as, the degree to which participants themselves responded to music with dance, rated on a scale from zero to ten. With respect to the total distribution of episodes, people reported that dance was present in almost a third (31.3%) of all music episodes. Interestingly, when asked about the degree to which they were dancing themselves, respondents, 50.7% of all cases, reported to have danced to at least a moderate degree (values of five and higher). This indicates that dancing

might sometimes be present less explicitly during episodes, but the music nonetheless, quite literally, moved participants.

A one-way ANOVA ($F(7) = 4.036, p < 0.0001$) with post hoc Tukey test showed a significant difference between the presence or absence of dance in relation to the place where episodes occurred. The post hoc test singled out particularly the church as a place where dance occurred significantly more often than at any other place, with 84.6% of all church episodes including both music and dance. Again, differences occurred with respect to the mean presence of dance in relation to the main activity in which participants were involved. Dance occurred most often when respondents were engaged in religious activities (70%). Leisure (music) (57.1%), work (music) (57.1%) and leisure with others (54.6%) were in the medium range, while all other activities were only slightly associated with dancing. Our data therefore revealed the specifically social nature of dance and also showed the particularly strong connection between religion and dance.

Listening Autonomy, Emotional Responses, and Wellbeing

If our initial assumption, that people use music in everyday contexts in potentially beneficial ways to increase subjective wellbeing, is correct, then one would expect that the degree of choice over the music that is being heard should have a bearing on the degree to which it contributes to potential mood changes. As Sloboda et al. (2001, p. 19) in their study of the functions of music in everyday life noted, “the degree of choice over the music being heard should affect psychological outcomes. In consequence of this, more beneficial outcomes might be expected when people were on their own”. Our assumption then implies a positive relationship between the level of listening autonomy and participants’ emotional responses to music.

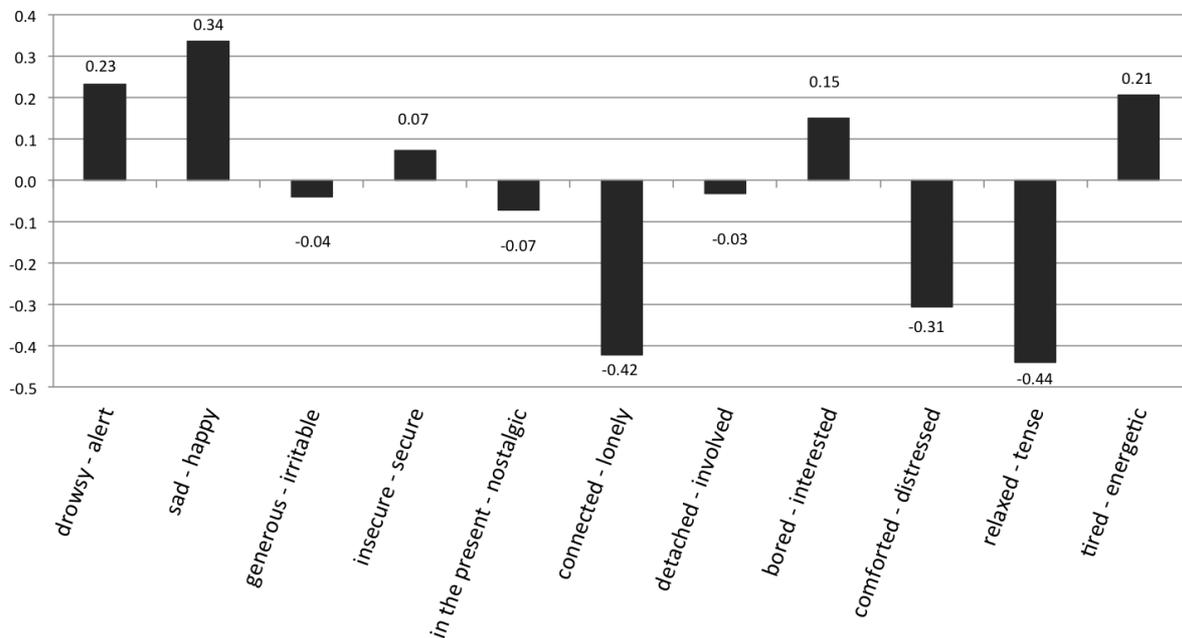


Figure 1: Mean mood changes after hearing music

Changes in mood or state were assessed through eleven bi-polar scales on which participants rated their mood both before and after experiencing music. The scales included pairs like “drowsy – alert”, “sad – happy”, “connected – lonely”, “relaxed – tense” or “tired – energetic”.

To assess changes in mood, we calculated the mean mood factors before and after music exposure. We then subtracted the mean values for the mood states before from those after participants were exposed to music. The thus calculated mean changes were predominantly positive (Figure 1). For instance, our participants, on average, reported to feel more alert, happy, connected, comforted and relaxed after being exposed to music. Our participants also reported to have had higher energy levels and to have felt less bored after hearing music. Overall, our figures indicated more pronounced changes for specific moods and states particularly alertness, happiness, connectedness, comfort, and relaxation. We can, however, not rule out that it was the instrument itself that accounted for some of these differences, as some of the categories might have been more meaningful to participants and therefore triggered stronger responses. Generally, the language bias in data relating to moods and emotions posed specific problems which we will further discuss below.

Looking at the correlation between mean mood changes after hearing music and the presence of other people during episodes, we see clear differences in the extent to which mood factors changed (Figure 2). Mood changes were often much more pronounced when people listened to music alone. The greatest differences occurred with respect to alertness and connectedness and, at the mid-level, with feelings of happiness, comfort, interestedness and participants' state of relaxation. Generally speaking, then, when respondents were listening to music alone they reported a greater increase in alertness, happiness, connectedness, interestedness, relaxation and comfort than when they experienced music in the presence of others. Following the above line of reasoning about the relationship between listening autonomy and people's use of music to increase subjective wellbeing, our data seemed to support this initial assumption.

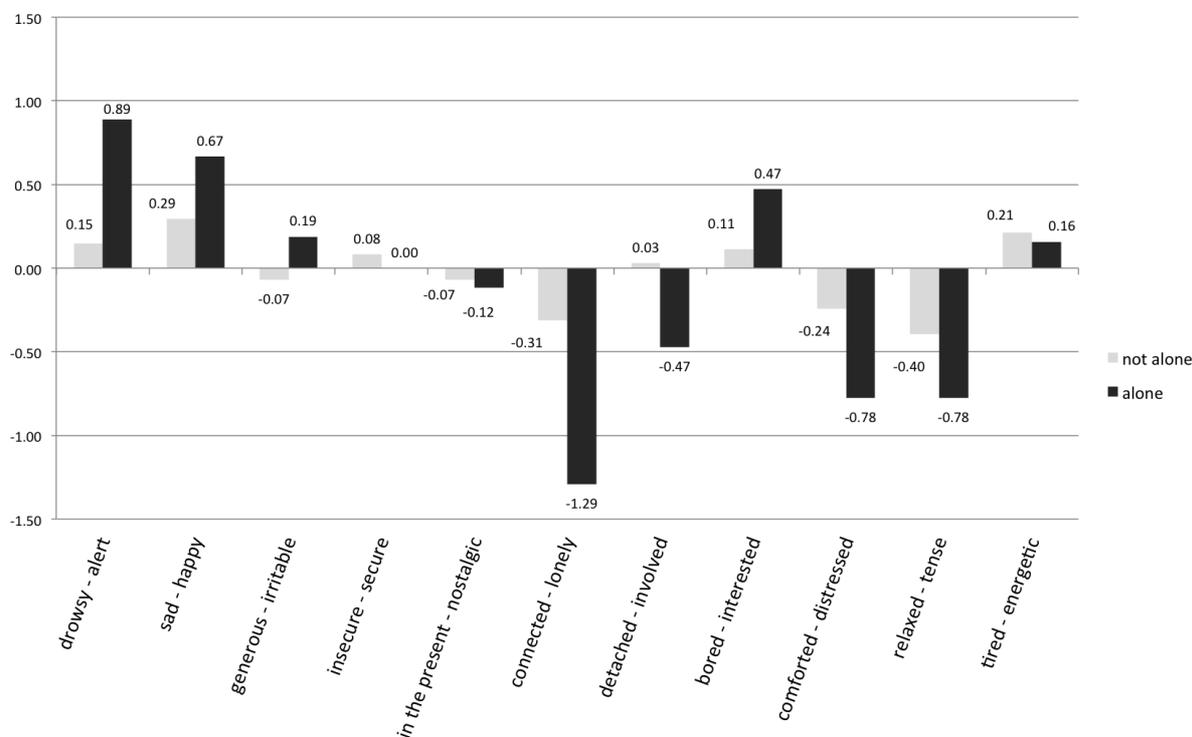


Figure 2: Mean mood changes in the presence and absence of others

To find further evidence, we also analyzed the relationship between the degree of personal choice over the music and the quality of music experience. The degree of choice was

assessed though a separate scaled item ranging from zero to ten (zero indicating no choice at all and ten indicating complete control over the music). For the purpose of our analysis, we rescaled this item to three distinct levels, representing low, medium and high listening autonomy. We then correlated the level of autonomy to a set of scaled questions about the overall quality of the music experience. Embedded in this set were questions about the importance of the music to the activity respondents were involved in, whether it enhanced the activity and also whether the music had any personal associations. Our analysis clearly indicated a positive relationship between the mean level of listening autonomy and the quality of the music experience (Figure 3), even if none of these variations amounted to the level of statistical significance. Nevertheless, it was evident that the higher the degree of choice, the more aware of the music respondents were and the more they also considered it to be important to and an enhancement of the activity or that particular moment.

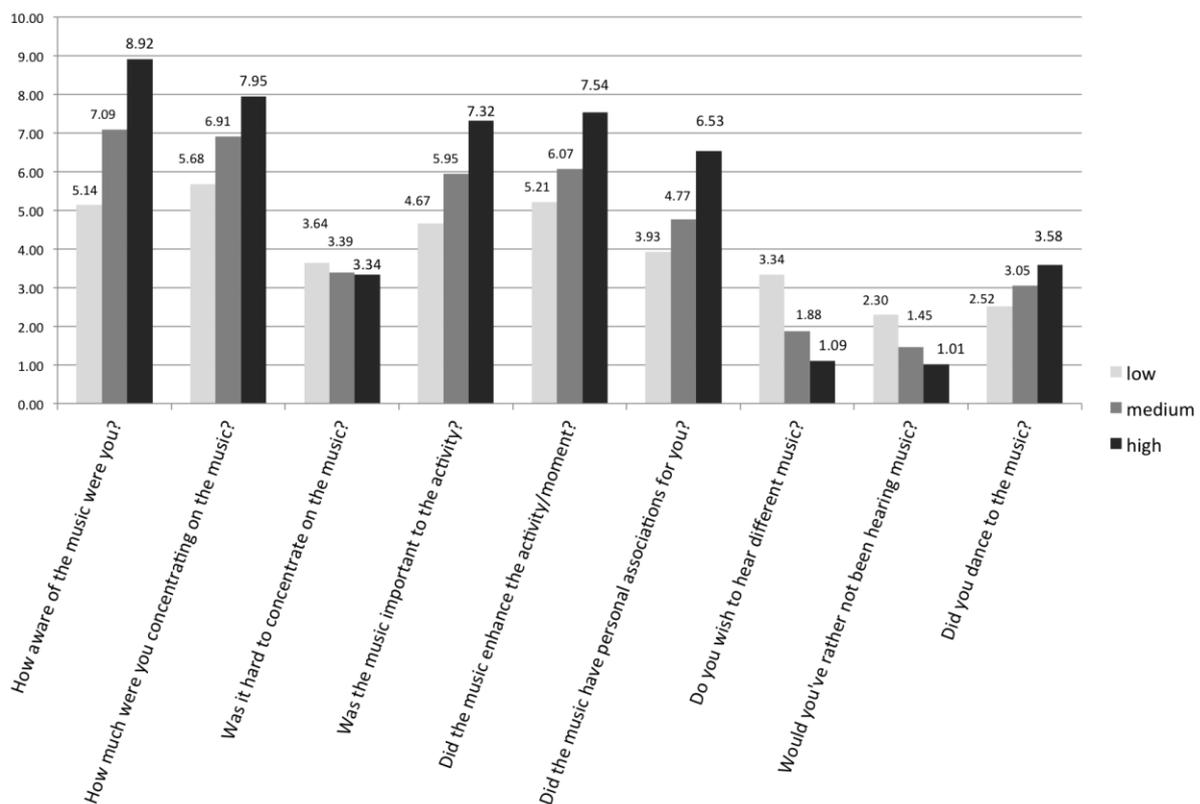


Figure 3: Listening autonomy and quality of music experience

When we correlated the level of listening autonomy to the mean mood changes, however, we got results that were not quite as clear (see Figure 4). The values for the mean changes of happiness, for instance, were high for both low and high listening autonomy. Energy levels increased relatively more when the degree of control over the music was low, even if our prediction would have implied the opposite. In other cases such as the “comforted-distressed” and “bored-interested” scales, listening autonomy did not seem to be a factor that had any impact on the outcome of mood changes. Overall, the values in Figure 4 are more interpretable than those in Figure 2 and do not readily support the hypothesis that listening autonomy and mood regulation are positively related.

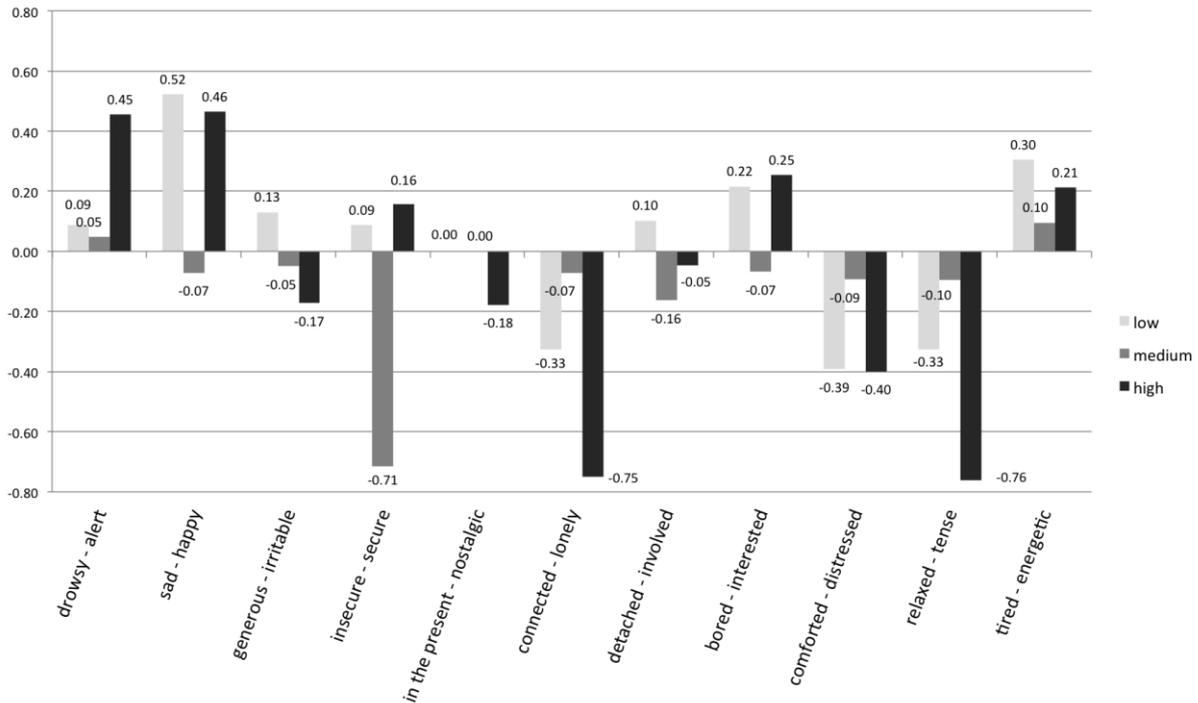


Figure 4: Listening autonomy and mean changes of mood

This brings us back to a few critical remarks with respect to the assessment of emotions. As briefly mentioned above, we cannot completely rule it out that some of our respondents might have found it difficult to relate to the linguistic categories representing emotional states in some of the scaled items. Though no participant explicitly said so, some of the feedback we got in the interviews also pointed to the technical difficulties respondents had with the bi-polar scales. The relatively high amount of missing data for the mood scales seems to confirm this, though the time factor must also be taken into consideration here. In general, capturing emotions in linguistic categories can be problematic, all the more so in a case like ours where we were confronted with a multi-lingual context and the first language of respondents is predominantly not English but a Ghanaian language.

Nonetheless, there were other indicators of listening autonomy and emotional responses to music. The first is the relatively high incidence of personal stereos, particularly MP3 players, which was the medium through which music was listened to in a third (33.7%) of all music episodes. By their very nature, mobile music players give their users almost complete autonomy over the choice of music that is being heard. The technology of personal stereos calls into question the notion of “somebody being alone” as well as the common distinction between the public and the private. Mobile music technologies actually allow users to “travel through any space accompanied by their own ‘individualized’ soundworld” (Bull, 2000, p. 3).

Another, and perhaps more important, point that we need to be mindful of is that it might not always be the degree of choice over the music as such, but the degree of choice over the context in which and with whom people opt to experience music, that yields more beneficial emotional outcomes. Here, we are particularly thinking about the role that music played as part of religious activities. If we look at the data, the degree of personal choice over the music being heard was relatively low with regard to the church and religious activities. However, both were, as we have seen, social contexts in which music and dance played a major role. One would certainly expect positive effects on mood changes when people musically engage in religion.

One indication that this was actually the case is the high incidence of dance within religious contexts. The presence of dance might thus serve as a non-verbal indicator for positive emotional outcomes. Clearly, religious musical experience was not so much about listening autonomy, but more about the overall context in which music was being experienced. Here, the presence rather than absence of others and often a lower rather than higher listening autonomy could still contribute to positive changes.

Listening Choices, Self-Regulation, and Self-Modulation

In an open-ended item on our response form we posed the question, “If you chose to listen to music, what was your MAIN reason?”. To get a better sense of the general tendency of answers, we tried to group them into distinct descriptive categories. Major motives that explained why people reportedly chose to listen to music included spiritual inspiration, relaxation, concentration as well as the need to increase energy levels, turn around negative moods, take away boredom and cancel out ambient noise. Still for others, the motivation was to simply enjoy the music itself and the sheer pleasure of listening to songs. It must be noted that there was often more than a single reason for participants to choose a particular music, which made a simple frequency analysis less appropriate.

Consider, for example, the following episode, which took place on a Sunday evening. The respondent reported that he was in his room in the hostel together with two of his roommates. He was ironing his clothes, which was part of his basic routine. To increase his energy level, as well as, make the ironing easier and more entertaining, he chose to accompany the chore with gospel music playing from his computer. While ironing he was moderately dancing to the music. His alertness and happiness increased, he felt less irritable, more in the present and more relaxed. The music had strong personal association for him and he considered it to be very important to the activity thus enhancing the quality of the moment. As reason for choosing the music he wrote that it made his “faith level grow” and that he listened attentively to the lyrics, which talked about “how to live a righteous life as a Christian.” Overall, the whole experience made him feel “so relaxed and comforted.” This episode illustrates the complexity of everyday experience and the overlapping motives for people’s engagement with music.

Issues relating to self-regulation and self-modulation, which clearly confirm the assumption that people decidedly used music to increase subjective wellbeing, also frequently came up in our interviews with participants. Consider the following excerpts:

Respondent 14: Whenever I’m sad, I tend to listen to more music than when I’m happy. So that I’ll be relaxed and I won’t feel like I’m... I’ll be relaxed. That is one of the significant things that I have learned. The more I’m sad, the more I listen to music.

Respondent 3: Music gives me energy, it boosts me and takes away the tiredness. I don’t feel tired when I’m listening to music and I’m doing my laundry... I become active.

Respondent 18: Music is a way to really enjoy myself without depending on anybody to make me happy. I can concentrate... like, listening to a certain music... and the music just gets me to where I want to be. Music makes me who I am.

Particularly in the last respondent's statement the issue of listening autonomy is explicitly mentioned. For this respondent, a higher degree of listening autonomy translated into greater emotional autonomy. The respondent, who occasionally also worked as a deejay, expanded on music's power to modulate moods at a later point in our interview. He explained that it was not only self-modulation but, at times, also the manipulation of others' moods through music which could be a source of pleasure when a chosen music moved people on the dance floor with particular intensity.

As mentioned above and compared to previous studies, the relatively high incidence of music as part of religious activities among our respondents was striking. While, in general, the reasons to listen to music given by respondents seemed to confirm previous studies that stress the utilitarian nature of music in everyday experience, the spiritual aspect added another dimension of wellbeing which previous studies did not bring out. Clearly, religiosity in everyday life plays a much more important role in the Ghanaian context than, for instance, in the UK (Gifford, 1998, 2004). Speaking about the motives for choosing a particular musical genre, many of our respondents therefore stressed the importance of religious music and particularly their lyrics.

Respondent 1: When I wake up in the morning and I start singing it gives... like, it really sets you into the mood. At times you wake up, you don't feel like doing anything. But when you sing, it gives you the energy. Like, something tells you [that] you must get up and... maybe, the day before your mood was very bad. But then, singing those worship songs ... it washes all those worries away and gives you the encouragement [so] that you can move on.

Respondent 7: Sometimes, listening to gospel music ... the lyrics in that music can shape my life, it gives me encouragement and positive feelings.

Respondent 5: If I want to thank God, I'll start ... like ... singing ... we have worship songs that thank God ... like, the lyrics. So as I sing, I listen to the song in the background... Even some of the lyrics in the song can give you the words to communicate with God.

While the episodes respondents' described here, in contrast to the more sociable dance episodes in religious contexts that we recorded, refer to more solitary situations in which listening autonomy was presumably high, it is interesting to note the frequent references to lyrics as well as singing (along) that keep coming up. These statements are consistent with answers to an open-ended item that was part of our response form, which asked, "Was there anything in the music that you found particularly important or noticeable?". A word count of the string data showed that responses that referenced the "words" and "lyrics" of the music exceeded references to other musical characteristics such as rhythm, harmony or instrumentation.

Conclusion

Our results indicate that the Experience Sampling Method can be successfully adapted in the Ghanaian context, given that the level of commitment and motivation among study participants is high. Apart from a few challenges, the overall response rate of over 90% was, in our estimation, encouraging. Also, considering that roughly two thirds of responses occurred within 30 minutes after respondents received the text messages, the overall compliance rate of participants can be considered high.

Our relatively small sample size may not permit us to make conclusive generalisations beyond our study group. However, with a statistical value of 53.1%, this study confirmed findings of previous research works that found a high incidence of music in people's everyday experience. Our study also showed that music was mostly not the main focus but rather accompanied other activities (88.2% of music episodes). In our study, participants experienced music mostly in the company of others (86.7% of episodes) rather than alone. With regard to the degree of personal choice over the music that was heard, episodes were overall distributed approximately even. There were no significant differences in the degree of personal choice over music with regard to place, activity or musical style. There were, however, clear indications that people used music, when self-chosen, in potentially beneficial ways to increase subjective wellbeing. In this regard, the mobile phone/MP 3 player stood out as a device over which participants exerted significantly greater control in respect of the music that was being played.

The most common reasons why respondents chose to listen to music were spiritual inspiration and the need to increase concentration, release stress, increase energy levels, change, enhance, or maintain emotional states, connect both with themselves and with others, cancel out ambient noise, as well as take away boredom. Overall, positive changes in moods and states were more pronounced when participants were by themselves, which supports the assumption that people decidedly used music to enhance wellbeing. There were a few instances of negative changes in mood associated with music, indicating decreases in subjective wellbeing. These were mostly situations where respondents had little control over the music being heard. For example, negative changes in happiness and/or relaxation and a simultaneous increase in irritability and/or boredom occurred in a few episodes where music had either strong personal associations for respondents or where the music became a source of distraction and annoyance. Negative changes on the "involved-detached" scale were mostly associated with positive feelings and greater autonomy of listening.

Previous research on the functions and uses of music in everyday life has mostly highlighted solitary listening contexts rather than focusing on music as a form of sociability. While we certainly need more studies with more diverse sample groups and also diverse methodological approaches to confirm this trend, one aspect where our results clearly differed from previous research was the strong connection between music experience, wellbeing and religion. It was particularly social dance that was closely associated with religion, indicating that music and wellbeing are not exclusively, and perhaps not even primarily, an individualistic affair, but often a social and interpersonal process. In this regard we agree with Simon Frith who noted that:

[Studies on music and everyday life] tend to refer musical meaning to its emotional function for individuals, but music remains equally important as a means of communication and as a form of sociability. Most academic research on everyday music focuses ... on music listening. But what is equally remarkable is the sheer amount of music making in which people are engaged, and ... that these musical activities are central for their understanding of who they are. (Frith, 2002, p. 46)

We do not necessarily believe that this is an either/or question. Our results actually support the view that everyday music plays a major role both as an agent of individual wellbeing and as a form of sociability and interpersonal communication. Beyond listening, music-making

in the form of singing and dancing was clearly an important aspect of our participants' wellbeing and daily experience, and it was particularly so in the context of religious activities where these more active forms of music participation took the centre stage.

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