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“I value music so much more”: The impact of COVID-19 on the value of music listening

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ABSTRACT

This study explores people’s contemporary (and technologically-mediated) listening practices while accounting for the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. It extends our previous work (Krause et al., 2021) which explored young adults’ consideration of the value of music listening. Previously, almost one-third of participants stated that music listening was an activity they valued and appreciated because of its beauty and/or the enjoyment they received from listening, suggesting respondents placed value in music listening as a ‘means in and of itself’ – a phrase supported by philosophical and ethical considerations of intrinsic value. Our previous data acknowledged music’s intrinsic value, irrespective of tandem extrinsic motivations they may have had for using music to fulfill various functions. Recent studies have found that during the COVID-19 pandemic, young adults consumed more media content (music listening, television, social media, video games) as a coping mechanism due to significant restrictions on movement. Therefore, in this study we interrogate whether the value young adults attribute to music listening has changed during the pandemic, and if so, how? We asked participants (N = 153; Mage = 19.74, SDage = 3.01) to complete an online survey. A thematic analysis of open-text survey responses is currently underway. These findings will advance our understanding not only of the impact of the pandemic, but also on how individual music listening practices and experiences are valued.

Krause, A. E., Glasser, S., & Osborne, M. (2021). Augmenting function with value. An exploration of reasons to engage in and disengage from music listening. *Music & Science*, 4: 1-13. <https://doi.org/10.1177/20592043211022535>

“I value music so much more”: The impact of COVID-19 on the value of music listening

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BACKGROUND

Globally, people spend up to 18.4 hours listening to music per week.¹ Approximately 75% of people used music to provide a sense of normality, and despite routine changing could always listen to music when need. Eighty-five percent of 16-19yo said music had a positive impact on their wellbeing during the pandemic.¹ Compared to 54% of IFPI's (2019) participants who said they “love” or are “fanatical” about music, only 2.5% of participants said that music was “unimportant” to them.²

When a sample of young adults were asked to consider the value of music listening, almost one-third stated they valued and appreciated it because of its beauty and/or the enjoyment they received from listening, suggesting respondents placed value in music listening as a “means in and of itself” – a phrase supported by philosophical and ethical considerations of intrinsic value.³ This acknowledge music’s intrinsic value, irrespective of tandem extrinsic motivations they may have had for using music to fulfill various functions.

The COVID-19 pandemic has adversely affected many lives.⁴ In response to the restriction on movement, young adults are consuming more media content during the pandemic (television, music listening, social media, video games).^{5,6}

Aim and Research Question

We interrogated whether the value young adults attribute to music listening changed during the pandemic. We asked:

Has the value you place in music listening changed during the pandemic? If so, how?

METHOD

University of Melbourne ethical approval 23129

Sample:

N = 153 Australian residents, 71.9% female, aged 18-33yrs (*M* = 19.84yrs, *SD* = 3.01yrs)

Online questionnaire (Qualtrics):

- Voluntary and University research participation scheme course credit.

Measures:

- Demographics (age, gender, country of residence)
- Average daily hours spent listening to music (*M* = 2.99)
- 1-7 rating of the importance of music in their life (*M* = 6.14)
- Level of musicianship⁷
- The open-ended, short response question listed above

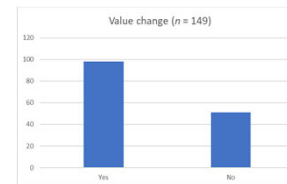
Data Analysis:

- Thematic analysis⁸

PRELIMINARY RESULTS

Has the value placed in music listening changed?

Most participants expressed that their perceived value of music listening had changed. Of the people who said yes, 96 (98%) expressed that the value had increased and no one said that it had decreased (the remaining responses did not elaborate).



Of the people who said *no*, 21 (41%) explained that it had not changed because it was already highly valued. Additionally, 5 (10%) expressed that the pandemic wasn’t an issue for them, so the question of value change was irrelevant.

How has the value placed in music listening changed?

% cases	Theme	Sub-theme	Exemplar quotation
28.6	Emotion regulation	Emotional support Emotional expression Mental health	<p>“Music listening has become more valuable as a form of healing and way to calm or distract from stressful situations or thoughts about future events.”</p> <p>“I valued music a lot more during the pandemic as it was almost a source of remedy. One that can help to put me at ease and experience a surge of different positive emotions.”</p>
28.6	Exploration	New genres New situations	<p>“I’ve begun exploring new genres that were unfamiliar”</p> <p>“I have broadened my music taste and delved into more types of music since the pandemic and also felt connected to more types of music”</p>
26.5	Social connection	Enhancing relationships Live performance Social surrogacy	<p>“I place greater value in music now than before the pandemic because in the absence of normal levels of social interaction, both music listening and music making have provided a great emotional outlet.”</p> <p>“...during the epidemic, music became a kind of company and reduced my sense of loneliness.”</p>

Themes of Escapism (9.2%), Uses (7.1%), Reliance on music (3.1%) and Self-connection (2%) were also noted. Seven participants provided no additional information on how value had changed.

DISCUSSION

Taking a macroscopic view, the three main themes speak to emotion regulation, exploration, and social connection.

The use of music as an easily accessible coping mechanism for emotional support, to remedy distress and increase positive emotion, is in line with other work on music listening during COVID-19 which has shown that listening time has typically increased as people use music to cope with stress and connect with others during the pandemic.^{9, 10, 11}

Of interest is the assertion that the value placed in music listening during the pandemic is often due to the discovery and exploration of new ways of engaging with music, such as the exploration of new genres of music⁹ as well as experiencing listening as a social surrogate.¹²

Overarching, these responses suggest that the pandemic provided more time for participants to explore their personal relationships with music, as well as relationships with others through music, ultimately enhancing the value of music listening in their lives.

These findings advance our understanding not only of the impact of the pandemic, but also on how individual music listening practices and experiences are valued.

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