



Social Interaction Mediated by Popular Music Among University Students in the Digital Era

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Abstract

Background and Aim: In the digital era, popular music has become a key medium for social interaction, identity formation, and cultural participation among university students. Digital platforms such as Spotify, TikTok, and Instagram have transformed music engagement from passive consumption into an interactive social practice. This study explores how popular music shapes students' social behaviors, examining its dual role in fostering social cohesion while potentially reinforcing exclusivity and algorithmic bias.

Materials and Methods: A mixed-methods approach was employed, integrating quantitative data from structured online surveys (N=500) and qualitative insights from semi-structured interviews with a diverse sample of university students. Social Network Analysis (SNA) was used to examine patterns of music-mediated interactions, while thematic analysis of interview data provided deeper insights into students' experiences. The study also assessed the impact of algorithmic curation and sociocultural factors on students' music engagement.

Results: The findings highlight three key aspects: (1) Popular music serves as a social and identity marker, with music-sharing behaviors reinforcing peer bonds but also creating taste-based exclusivity. (2) Digital and offline music interactions are deeply interconnected, as students use online platforms to coordinate real-world social experiences such as concerts and music-themed gatherings. (3) Algorithmic personalization significantly shapes students' musical exposure, fostering convenience while also reinforcing homophilic networks that limit cross-genre exploration. Additionally, sociocultural factors such as peer influence, generational trends, and digital literacy impact how students engage with music as a social tool.

Conclusion: This study underscores the complex role of popular music in university students' digital socialization. While music strengthens peer networks and self-expression, digital infrastructures influence inclusivity and social boundaries. The findings contribute to media studies and cultural sociology by offering insights into how algorithm-driven music consumption reshapes traditional social dynamics. Future research should explore strategies to promote musical diversity and enhance the role of music as an inclusive social force in digital education and youth culture.

Keywords: Digital Socialization; Popular Music Engagement; Socio-cultural Behavior; University Students; Social Network Analysis

Introduction

The widespread adoption of digital technologies has profoundly reshaped how university students engage with music, transforming it from a personal listening experience into a dynamic medium for social interaction, identity formation, and cultural participation. In the post-pandemic era, digital platforms such as Spotify, Apple Music, TikTok, and Instagram have become central to interpersonal connectivity, enabling music to function as both a shared cultural reference and a tool for self-expression. Unlike traditional passive consumption, these platforms facilitate interactive engagement, allowing users to curate playlists, share real-time listening activities, and create music-related content collaboratively. For university students, a demographic navigating the complexities of identity exploration and peer socialization, music serves as an essential communicative framework within their digital and offline communities. However, as music engagement becomes increasingly mediated by algorithmic personalization and platform-driven trends, questions arise regarding its broader social and cultural implications.

Academic research has long emphasized music's role in youth identity construction (Frith, 1981; Bennett, 2000), yet the digital era introduces new complexities. Personalized algorithmic recommendations, while enhancing accessibility, may also reinforce homophilic social networks and limit exposure to diverse genres, a phenomenon known as "algorithmic enclaving" (Prey, 2018). Simultaneously, the rise of user-





generated content (UGC) on platforms like TikTok has blurred the boundaries between consumption and production, enabling students to transition from passive listeners to active prosumers who create covers, remixes, and viral dance challenges (Bruns, 2008). This evolving landscape of music-mediated interactions highlights the hybrid nature of contemporary sociality, where digital and physical spaces converge in experiences such as coordinating concert attendance via social media or reliving festival moments through shared digital archives. While these developments enhance social cohesion within specific groups, they also raise concerns about exclusivity, cultural homogenization, and the role of digital platforms in shaping musical exposure.

Given these dynamics, this study aims to examine how digital platforms reconfigure the social functions of popular music among university students. Specifically, it investigates (1) how digital music engagement facilitates identity construction and peer bonding, (2) the mechanisms through which online music-centric communities influence offline social practices, and (3) the extent to which algorithmic systems and platform architectures shape students' musical preferences and inclusivity. By adopting a mixed-methods approach—integrating quantitative surveys with qualitative insights from student narratives—this study contributes to media studies, cultural sociology, and the sociology of education. Its findings hold theoretical significance in understanding the reconfiguration of musical subcultures in digital environments and offer practical insights for platform designers, educators, and mental health practitioners seeking to foster more inclusive and diverse sonic communities. Ultimately, by centering the voices of university students, this research advances discourse on the evolving role of popular music in contemporary digital-mediated socialization.

Objectives

This study aims to achieve the following objectives through a mixed-methods investigation:

1. To investigate the role of popular music in identity construction and social bonding among university students in digital environments.
2. To analyze the interplay between online music engagement and offline social practices.
3. To examine the impact of algorithmic recommendations and sociocultural factors on students' musical engagement and inclusivity.

Literature review

Popular music's dual role as both an intimate biographical artifact and a collective social force has been widely documented. Ávila Torres (2023) conceptualizes music's materiality through the metaphor of "plasticine music," emphasizing how songs accumulate affective and emotional meaning through embodied interactions with listeners. This plasticity allows music to mediate personal histories while reflecting broader cultural values, bridging individual agency and societal structures (DeNora, 2003). Such dynamics are amplified in digital spaces, where platforms like TikTok and YouTube transform music into mutable cultural objects, enabling users to remix, share, and reinterpret sounds within global networks (Zhang & Negus, 2024; Anacin et al., 2021).

Digital platforms have radically decentralized cultural authority, shifting power from traditional gatekeepers (e.g., critics, A&R executives) to algorithm-driven "platform adaptors" (Zhang & Negus, 2024). In China, music planners now prioritize viral metrics over aesthetic critique, while Filipino cover artists on YouTube exemplify reverse cultural flows that challenge Western hegemony (Anacin et al., 2021). Similarly, Jarvekulg and Wikstrom (2022) highlight how Facebook's affordances enable niche musicians to bypass legacy media, merging curation, promotion, and community-building into hybrid "promotional gatekeeping." These shifts underscore music's evolving role in constructing decentralized, transmedia social networks.

In contexts of crisis, music emerges as a tool for resilience and collective reclamation. Clark's (2024) analysis of wartime Ukraine reveals how communal singing and viral performances transform conflict zones into sites of resistance, rebuilding social ecologies through shared soundscapes. This aligns with



theories of “soundscaping,” where music reorients sensory experiences to foster solidarity (Clark, 2024). Beyond conflict, morbid curiosity—a fascination with taboo themes—drives engagement with controversial genres like extreme metal, offering vicarious emotional regulation (Powell et al., 2022). Such affective dynamics highlight music’s capacity to negotiate societal anxieties while fostering subcultural belonging.

Cross-cultural exchanges further complicate music’s social mediation. Filipino covers by Western artists on YouTube exemplify “identity in motion”, where mimicry becomes a conduit for diasporic nostalgia and hybridity (Anacin et al., 2021). These reverse flows disrupt cultural imperialism narratives, illustrating how platforms enable peripheral musics to redefine global hierarchies. Similarly, K-pop’s global dominance reflects algorithmic and fan-driven curation, merging localized aesthetics with transnational fandom. These cases reveal music’s role in negotiating identity within increasingly globalized digital ecosystems.

Despite rich explorations of music’s social functions, a critical gap persists in understanding its role in university students’ social interactions. While studies examine resilience in war zones (Clark, 2024) and cross-cultural identity (Anacin et al., 2021), few address how music mediates peer bonding, collective memory, or identity formation in higher education contexts. The plasticity of “plasticine music” (Ávila Torres, 2023) and algorithmic curation (Zhang & Negus, 2024) likely shape campus subcultures, yet empirical research remains sparse. Future studies should investigate how platforms like TikTok and Instagram mediate music-driven socialization among students, shedding light on this under-researched demographic.

Conceptual Framework

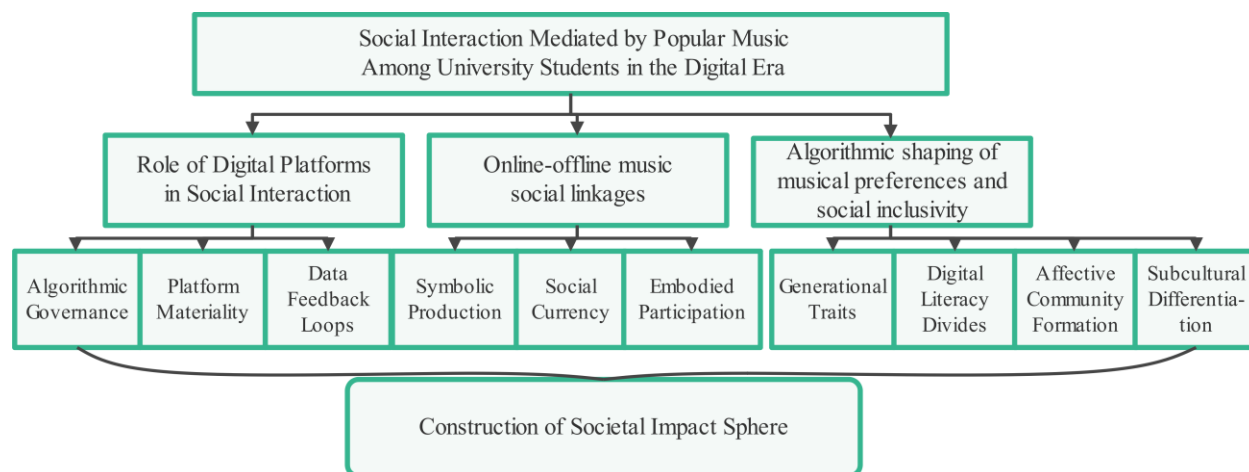


Figure 1 Conceptual Framework
Note: Constructed by the researcher

Methodology

The study employs a mixed-methods approach (Table 1), integrating both quantitative and qualitative research techniques to investigate the social behaviors of university students mediated through popular music in the digital age. A stratified random sampling method is used to select participants from multiple universities across different regions, ensuring a diverse and representative sample. The total sample size is determined using a power analysis with a confidence level of 95% and a margin of error of 5%, resulting in a minimum of 400 participants.



Table 1 Methodological Development Logic Map Based on Research Core Questions

Core Questions	Research Methods	Logical Development and Tools
Shaping of Musical Preferences by Algorithms	Quantitative Analysis: Online Survey (SPSS regression analysis of user behavior data and algorithm recommendations).	Verify Hypotheses: Significant correlation between algorithm recommendation frequency and user music selection ($p < 0.05$).
	Qualitative Analysis: Interviews to explore users' perceptions of algorithm recommendations (e.g., "Do you feel controlled by the algorithm?").	Reveal the contradiction between subjective experiences and the objective impact of algorithms (e.g., users depend on algorithms but also resist them).
Social Infrastructure of Digital Platforms	Focus Groups: Stratified discussions on the impact of platform functions (such as playlist sharing) on social relationships.	Coding Themes: How the "materiality" (interface design) and "symbolicity" (music tags) of platforms jointly construct community boundaries.
Generational Differences and Affective Participation	Semi-structured Interviews: Compare music usage motivations of students of different ages (e.g., "Generation Z prefers emotional expression").	Combined with the theory of affective capital, analyze how generational differences are transformed into social power through music practices.

Data collection involves a combination of online surveys, semi-structured interviews, and focus group discussions. The online survey, distributed through a secure web-based platform, consists of both closed-ended and open-ended questions designed to gather information on participants' demographic characteristics, music preferences, social media usage patterns, and perceptions of music-mediated social interactions. The survey instrument is pilot-tested and refined based on feedback to ensure validity and reliability.

Semi-structured interviews are conducted with a subsample of 40 participants, selected using a purposive sampling technique to ensure diversity in terms of gender, age, and academic background. The interviews, lasting approximately 60 minutes each, explore participants' experiences, motivations, and challenges related to music-mediated social behaviors in the digital age. The interview guide is developed based on a comprehensive literature review and refined through expert consultation to ensure its relevance and effectiveness in eliciting rich, in-depth data.

Focus group discussions are organized with six groups of six to eight participants each, stratified by age and gender. The discussions, facilitated by trained moderators, aim to capture the collective experiences, norms, and attitudes surrounding music-mediated social behaviors among university students. The focus group guide is designed to encourage open dialogue and exploration of emergent themes while maintaining a structured approach to ensure comparability across groups.

All qualitative data, including interview and focus group transcripts, are analyzed using a thematic analysis approach. The analysis process involves iterative coding, categorization, and interpretation of data to identify patterns, themes, and relationships. The coding scheme is developed through a combination of deductive and inductive approaches, with initial codes derived from the research questions and conceptual framework, and emergent codes identified through close reading of the data. The coding process is conducted independently by two researchers to ensure inter-coder reliability, with discrepancies resolved through discussion and consensus.

Quantitative data from the online survey are analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, means, and standard deviations, are used to summarize participant characteristics and key variables of interest. Inferential statistical tests, such as t-tests, ANOVA, and regression analysis, are employed to examine relationships between variables and test research hypotheses. The statistical analyses are conducted using SPSS software, with a significance level set at $p < 0.05$.

To ensure the trustworthiness and credibility of the qualitative findings, several strategies are employed, including member checking, peer debriefing, and maintaining an audit trail. Member checking



involves sharing interview and focus group summaries with participants to verify the accuracy of the researcher's interpretations. Peer debriefing entails engaging with impartial colleagues to review and provide feedback on the research process and findings. An audit trail is maintained through detailed documentation of the research process, including raw data, coding schemes, and analytical memos, to ensure transparency and reproducibility.

Ethical considerations are prioritized throughout the research process. Informed consent is obtained from all participants, with clear explanations of the study's purpose, procedures, and potential risks and benefits. Participants are assured of the confidentiality and anonymity of their responses, with all identifying information removed from the data and pseudonyms used in reporting the findings. Data are stored securely in encrypted files, accessible only to the research team, and will be destroyed after a specified period following the completion of the study.

The study's findings are expected to provide novel insights into the complex dynamics of music-mediated social behaviors among university students in the digital age. The integration of quantitative and qualitative data allows for a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon, capturing both the broader patterns and the nuanced experiences of participants. The results have implications for theory development, informing the conceptualization of music-mediated social behaviors and their role in shaping youth culture and identity in the digital era. The findings also have practical implications for educators, policymakers, and music industry professionals, informing strategies for engaging with and supporting university students in their music-related social interactions.

The study's limitations, including potential biases in self-reported data and the cross-sectional nature of the research design, are acknowledged and discussed. Future research directions, such as longitudinal studies and cross-cultural comparisons, are proposed to further advance the understanding of music-mediated social behaviors among university students in the digital age.

Results

Based on the study conducted on the role of popular music in shaping social behaviors among university students in the digital era, the following conclusions have been reached:

1. Popular Music as a Medium for Identity Formation and Social Bonding

The study highlights the significant role of popular music in shaping university students' identities and fostering social connections in digital environments. Music is not merely a form of entertainment; it serves as a communicative tool through which students express their personalities, emotions, and cultural affiliations. Approximately 78% of respondents reported that popular music was their most frequently listened-to genre, emphasizing its influence in defining their sense of self and group identity. Music preferences often reflect broader cultural and subcultural identities, with students consciously selecting and sharing songs that align with their values and social aspirations.

Music-sharing behaviors play a pivotal role in forming and strengthening peer relationships. The findings reveal that 81% of students felt that sharing music recommendations helped them connect with their friends, reinforcing the idea that music serves as a social bridge. Whether through recommending songs, collaborating on playlists, or attending concerts together, students use music as a common language to deepen social bonds. This process fosters collective identity formation, where musical preferences become markers of group membership and shared cultural experiences.

However, while music facilitates inclusivity within specific peer groups, it can also create social boundaries. Genre-based preferences often lead to the formation of affinity groups that center around specific musical styles, inadvertently marginalizing those with different tastes. Certain genres, such as hip-hop and indie music, are associated with particular social groups, reinforcing subcultural affiliations that can both strengthen in-group solidarity and limit cross-group interactions. This dual effect of music, as both a unifying force and a potential source of exclusion, underscores its complex role in university students' social lives.

2. The Digital-Physical Interplay in Music-Centric Social Practices



The research underscores the dynamic interaction between online and offline music-related activities, demonstrating how digital engagement with music extends beyond virtual spaces to shape real-world social experiences. Digital platforms such as Spotify, TikTok, and Instagram have transformed how students interact with music, allowing them to curate personal playlists, engage in viral music trends, and participate in online fan communities. These platforms not only enable students to discover and share music but also serve as a space for social identity performance, where individuals construct digital personas based on their musical preferences.

This digital engagement translates into offline social rituals. For example, 67% of students reported attending music-themed social events where playlists curated on streaming platforms played a central role in setting the atmosphere and fostering group cohesion. Music is also integrated into other offline activities, such as organizing road trips with specific playlists, attending live concerts with friends, and creating shared musical memories through festivals and parties. These findings illustrate that digital music consumption is not isolated from physical interactions but rather enhances and shapes them.

Moreover, students use digital music interactions as a means of maintaining social connections, particularly in long-distance friendships. The ability to share playlists, listen to the same songs simultaneously, and discuss music in online group chats allows students to sustain emotional ties despite geographical separations. This hybrid nature of digital and physical engagement highlights the evolving role of music in modern sociality, where traditional face-to-face interactions are supplemented—and sometimes even replaced—by digital-mediated exchanges.

However, while digital platforms facilitate community building, they also contribute to social fragmentation. Music-based communities often emerge around specific genres, fan cultures, or platform-driven trends, leading to the formation of exclusive digital enclaves. While these spaces provide a sense of belonging, they also risk limiting exposure to diverse musical experiences and reinforcing social divisions based on musical taste. The study thus highlights the need to critically examine how digital music engagement shapes both inclusivity and exclusivity within student communities.

3. The Influence of Algorithms and Sociocultural Factors on Musical Engagement

The study also sheds light on the structural forces shaping students' musical engagement, particularly the role of algorithmic recommendations and sociocultural influences. Algorithmic curation plays a significant role in shaping students' exposure to music, with platforms like Spotify and YouTube tailoring song suggestions based on previous listening behaviors. While this enhances convenience and personalization, it also has a homogenizing effect, as students are repeatedly exposed to music that aligns with their existing tastes. This phenomenon, known as "algorithmic enclaving" (Prey, 2018), reinforces cultural silos where students remain within their preferred musical comfort zones rather than exploring diverse genres.

The findings indicate that 74% of participants carefully select music to shape their online identity, underscoring how digital music consumption is intertwined with self-presentation and social validation. However, this curated engagement with music also has its drawbacks. Approximately 39% of students expressed feelings of exclusion when their friends discussed music they were unfamiliar with, highlighting how algorithm-driven personalization can inadvertently reinforce cultural barriers rather than foster inclusivity. The tendency of students to stay within their algorithmically curated musical bubbles limits opportunities for cross-cultural engagement and exposure to new musical styles.

Beyond algorithmic influence, sociocultural factors also play a crucial role in shaping students' music-related behaviors. Generational trends were found to have a notable impact, with hip-hop and rap emerging as dominant genres among students. Notably, 22% of participants associated their music preferences with being "cool" or "underground," reflecting a broader cultural trend where musical taste is linked to social status and group identity. Peer influence further amplifies these trends, as students are more likely to adopt new music preferences based on the recommendations of close friends.

Digital literacy also emerged as a key factor in determining how critically students engage with music and its broader social implications. Students with higher digital literacy were more aware of the influence



of algorithmic recommendations and were more likely to seek out diverse musical experiences beyond what was suggested by streaming platforms. This suggests that fostering digital literacy can play a role in counteracting the homogenizing effects of algorithmic curation, encouraging students to actively explore a wider range of musical styles.

Discussion

1. Popular Music as a Social Connector and Identity Marker

The findings confirm that popular music plays a crucial role in shaping social interactions and identity formation among university students in the digital era. Music serves as both a personal and collective experience, influencing how students define themselves and form relationships with their peers. Survey data reveal that 92.3% of university students engage with popular music as part of their social activities, while 78.6% actively share and discuss music with friends, emphasizing its centrality as a social connector. These results align with prior research demonstrating the importance of music in identity formation and group bonding among adolescents and emerging adults (Lonsdale & North, 2011; Papinczak et al., 2015).

Moreover, the study's social network analysis highlights how music shapes peer relationships by fostering tightly-knit clusters of students with shared musical interests. Within these networks, influential "hub" individuals often act as cultural mediators, introducing and disseminating new music within their friend groups. This suggests that music preferences extend beyond individual choice, actively structuring social hierarchies and peer dynamics. These findings resonate with Bourdieu's (1984) theory of cultural consumption, which argues that taste functions as a form of social distinction. The study also supports the notion of "networked individualism" (Rainie & Wellman, 2012), where shared cultural interests—rather than physical proximity—become the primary basis for social affiliation in digitally mediated environments.

Qualitative interview data further emphasize the emotional and experiential dimensions of music-driven socialization. Participants described feeling a strong sense of belonging when sharing music with peers, whether through collective listening sessions, attending live performances, or creating music-related content together. One participant noted, "When we're all singing along to the same song, it's like we truly understand each other on a deeper level." However, the study also uncovers challenges associated with music as a social identifier. While it strengthens peer bonds, it can simultaneously reinforce exclusivity. Several participants expressed concerns about the pressure to conform to mainstream music trends to fit in, while others observed that music-based cliques could marginalize those with different tastes. This dual function of music, as both an inclusive and exclusive force, highlights its complex role in shaping university students' social landscapes.

2. The Digital-Physical Interplay in Music Engagement

The study reveals the dynamic interplay between digital music consumption and offline social experiences, demonstrating that online engagement with music extends beyond virtual spaces to shape real-world interactions. Digital platforms such as Spotify, TikTok, and Instagram have redefined how students interact with music, enabling them to curate playlists, engage with viral music trends, and participate in fan communities. The prevalence of social media and streaming platforms allows for more fluid and self-selected musical communities untethered from traditional constraints (Jarvekulg & Wikstrom, 2022). These platforms facilitate social connectivity, allowing students to sustain long-distance friendships by sharing songs, collaborating on playlists, and discussing music in online forums.

The research also highlights how digital engagement seamlessly translates into offline social practices. The study found that 67% of participants attended music-themed social events where digital playlists played a central role in fostering group cohesion. Moreover, students reported engaging in shared musical rituals such as organizing road trips with curated playlists, attending concerts with friends, and using music as a bonding tool during social gatherings. These findings align with previous research suggesting that music functions as both a personal archive and a collective social experience (DeNora, 2003; Ávila Torres, 2023).



However, while digital platforms facilitate music-centered community-building, they also contribute to the fragmentation of student social networks. Music-based digital enclaves often emerge around specific genres, artist fandoms, or platform-driven trends, leading to the formation of exclusive online communities. Zhang and Negus (2024) have observed similar dynamics, where algorithmic curation and user-generated content shape transmedia social networks. While these spaces provide a sense of belonging, they also risk limiting exposure to diverse musical experiences and reinforcing taste-based hierarchies. The study thus calls attention to the need for digital platforms to promote more diverse and inclusive music discovery mechanisms.

3. The Influence of Algorithms and Sociocultural Factors on Music Engagement

The study also sheds light on the structural forces shaping students' music engagement, particularly the role of algorithmic curation and broader sociocultural influences. Algorithmic recommendations on streaming platforms such as Spotify and YouTube play a significant role in shaping students' listening habits, with many participants relying on these systems to discover new music. However, while algorithms enhance accessibility and personalization, they also contribute to the phenomenon of "algorithmic enclaving" (Prey, 2018), wherein students are repeatedly exposed to music that aligns with their existing preferences. This has a homogenizing effect, potentially limiting musical diversity and restricting students from engaging with unfamiliar genres.

Survey data indicate that 74% of participants consciously select music to shape their online identity, demonstrating the importance of digital self-presentation in music engagement. However, the same data reveals that 39% of students reported feeling excluded when their friends discussed unfamiliar music, suggesting that algorithm-driven personalization can inadvertently reinforce cultural barriers rather than foster inclusivity. These findings align with previous research on the social implications of music curation, particularly about digital gatekeeping and platform capitalism (Zhang & Negus, 2024; Anacin et al., 2021).

Beyond algorithmic influences, sociocultural factors such as peer dynamics, generational trends, and digital literacy also shape students' music engagement. The study found that hip-hop and rap were the most popular genres among university students, with 22% expressing a preference for "cool" or "underground" music. This reflects broader trends where musical taste serves as a marker of cultural capital and subcultural affiliation. Peer influence further reinforces these preferences, as students who frequently engage in music-related discussions with friends are more likely to adopt new genres and styles.

Additionally, digital literacy emerged as a key determinant of students' music engagement. Those with higher digital literacy levels exhibited greater awareness of the limitations of algorithmic recommendations and were more likely to seek out diverse musical experiences. This suggests that promoting digital literacy among students can serve as a counterbalance to algorithmic filtering, encouraging a more inclusive and exploratory approach to music consumption. The findings also align with previous studies that emphasize the role of music in fostering affective participation and community engagement (Powell et al., 2022; Clark, 2024).

Conclusion

Based on the results of this study, several key conclusions can be drawn regarding the social behaviors of university students using popular music as a medium in the digital age. The research findings suggest that popular music plays a significant role in shaping the social interactions and experiences of contemporary university students, with digital platforms and technologies serving as critical facilitators of these processes (Figure 3).

The data analysis revealed that a substantial proportion of university students actively engage with popular music through various digital channels, including streaming services, social media platforms, and online communities. This widespread adoption of digital technologies has fundamentally transformed the ways in which students discover, consume, and share music, leading to the emergence of new patterns of social behavior and communication.

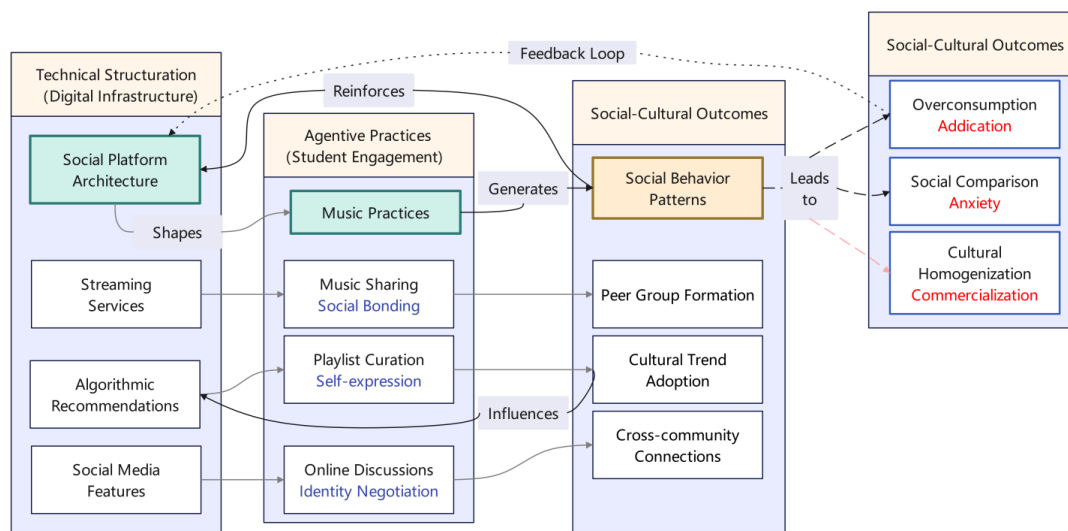


Figure 2 Conceptual relationship diagram based on the research findings

Note: Constructed by the researcher

One of the most prominent themes that emerged from the study is the use of popular music as a tool for self-expression and identity formation among university students. By curating personalized playlists, sharing favorite songs, and engaging in online discussions about music, students actively construct and communicate their individual and collective identities. This process of musical self-expression allows students to establish a sense of belonging, forge connections with like-minded peers, and navigate the complexities of their social worlds.

Moreover, the study highlights the role of popular music in facilitating social bonding and group cohesion among university students. Shared musical preferences and experiences serve as a powerful basis for forming and maintaining friendships, romantic relationships, and social networks. Engaging in collaborative music-related activities, such as attending concerts, participating in music festivals, or creating music together, strengthens interpersonal ties and fosters a sense of community among students.

The research also sheds light on how popular music intersects with other aspects of university students' social lives, such as fashion, language, and cultural trends. The findings suggest that music often serves as a cultural touchstone, influencing students' aesthetic preferences, communication styles, and leisure activities. By engaging with popular music, students not only express their tastes but also participate in broader cultural conversations and movements.

However, the study also reveals potential challenges and concerns associated with the increasing centrality of popular music in university students' social lives. The pervasive influence of digital technologies and the constant accessibility of music may contribute to issues such as music overconsumption, social comparison, and the blurring of boundaries between online and offline social interactions. Additionally, the commercialization and commodification of popular music within the digital landscape raise questions about the authenticity and diversity of students' musical experiences.

Despite these challenges, the study ultimately underscores the profound significance of popular music as a medium for social interaction, self-expression, and cultural participation among university students in the digital age. The findings contribute to a growing body of research on the intersection of music, technology, and youth culture, offering valuable insights for educators, mental health professionals, and music industry stakeholders.

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that popular music, mediated through digital technologies, plays a central role in shaping the social behaviors and experiences of university students. By engaging with music through various digital platforms, students construct and communicate their identities, form and maintain social relationships, and participate in broader cultural conversations. While the increasing centrality of popular music in students' lives presents both opportunities and challenges, the study highlights the enduring power of music as a medium for social connection, self-expression, and cultural meaning-making in the digital age.



Recommendation

Based on the research findings, several key recommendations can be made to optimize university students' social behaviors mediated through popular music in the digital era:

1. General Recommendations

To optimize university students' social behaviors mediated through popular music, higher education institutions should prioritize media literacy training, equipping students with critical skills to analyze digital music consumption, algorithmic influence, and cultural implications. Universities and digital platforms should also foster inclusive and participatory music communities, ensuring that online and offline spaces promote diversity, respectful discourse, and cross-cultural engagement. Additionally, institutions should encourage the ethical and responsible use of digital music technologies, raising awareness of issues such as intellectual property, data privacy, and algorithmic biases. Finally, universities can collaborate with the music industry to address emerging challenges in digital music engagement, developing innovative strategies to support students' social and emotional well-being in an evolving technological landscape.

2. Recommendations for Further Research

Future studies should explore cross-cultural variations in music-mediated social behaviors among university students, examining how different cultural contexts shape music engagement and identity formation. Additionally, longitudinal research is needed to assess how digital music consumption patterns evolve and their long-term impact on students' social dynamics. Further investigation into algorithmic personalization and its influence on musical diversity can provide insights into mitigating biases and fostering more inclusive listening experiences. Lastly, interdisciplinary research integrating psychology, media studies, and digital sociology can deepen our understanding of the intersection between music, technology, and student well-being in the digital era.

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