

AN EXPLORATORY INVESTIGATION OF AESTHETIC RESPONSE TO MUSIC AND MUSICAL PREFERENCES, BASED ON YOUTUBE MUSIC VIDEOS

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Abstract: *In the 21st century, informal education through the online video environment increasingly influences the training of young people's musical taste. From the age of 13 to 14, young people have a great plasticity in the development of aspirations, options, musical tastes and they experience cultural and social choices, they also form their preferences, passions, beliefs; that is why many of the media products are intended for them and produce significant influence in their lives. Between cultural life and the theoretical approaches, the predominant advertising and commercial logic of the media and the educational logic, there is a tense relationship, which needs to be investigated in order to propose favourable ameliorative solutions in order to make musical education more efficient.*

Through a poll, the research aims to make a correlation between the number of views of YouTube pop music videos and youth preferences, to see if the number of views influences their musical preferences and to explain why certain musical pieces are first places in these charts. In this regard, we will look at the musical, visual and choreographic aspects that are the basis of the prediction for certain pop music videos on YouTube channel.

Our article will address current issues, regarding whether the consumption of modern, commercial music is a method of distinction and individualization among young people in contemporary society.

Keywords: *YouTube; musical preferences; music education; aesthetics;*

1. Introduction

Throughout history, the general purpose of musical education was to provide the students with a set of valid tools for their choice in qualitative music (Rose, Wagner 1995; Finnas, 1989). As North and Hargreaves state in a research from 2007, there is an obvious correlation between the choice of music and lifestyle, between the predilection for the musical genres and the attitude towards life in general. The findings confirm that the young people, who read more, have a predilection for classical music, compared to those who dedicate less of their time to reading, who prefer pop or rock music. The taste for the musical genre also influences the place where the young people spend their free time (the concert hall for the classical music lovers, clubs and bars for pop and rock lovers). These aspects emphasize the need for early and consistent musical education, coordinated by specialists, a subject for a future research.

In what concerns the musical taste, there are three hypotheses, which already constitute the subject of other researches, to be taken into account. First, it was found that the repeated exposure to a musical style favoured the taste for that genre (Bartlett, 1973; Bradley, 1971; Getz, 1966; Heingartner & Hall, 1974), and that the musical preference can be influenced by the authoritative figures in a young person's life (professors, parents, and others) (Greer, Dorow, Wachhaus, & White, 1973; Dorow, 1977; Steele, 1967). Lastly, the

constitutive elements of a musical creation (tempo, rhythm, texture, instrumentation, tonality) can influence the taste of the music lovers (LeBlanc & McCrary, 1983).

The present research brings further arguments to support those hypotheses, in connection with the influence the music channels, especially YouTube, has in promoting the so called “young music”.

If, in a paper from 1974, Asghar Fahti and Carole L. Heath said that “*the largest percentage among the mass culture listeners indicated that their current taste in music was acquired directly from radio*”, in 2018 a shift was noticed: “*the Internet has become more than just a platform to obtain information or make purchases; it has become an “interactive and participatory” arena (Freeman & Chapman, 2007) in which lively debates take place. One of the most visited websites in the world is YouTube, which started in 2005*” (Keskin, 2018). It can be hypothesized that the role of the radio, for the 70s, was gradually taken by the internet nowadays, by sites such as YouTube.

It has been stated, in this regard, that: “*As music educators, we have much to learn by examining successful music communities that lie outside of our ‘regular’ scope of music school and music school genres, and this includes teaching musical skills necessary to be active participants in genres other than those perpetuated by music schools*” (Janice Waldron, 2012). This idea underlies the importance of the internet as an informal method of musical education.

Due to the fact that YouTube is a technology that has provoked and influenced the way we understand the concepts of music, musician and public (Thibeault, 2009), the phenomena deserve to be studied and understood. Thus, by means of a survey, we aim to make a correlation between the number of views on the YouTube of some of the pop songs which made the top of the international charts and the musical preferences of the Romanian youth, observing if the preferences are influenced by the number of views. On the other hand, we will try to analyze the reasons why some songs reach the top and what are the musical, choreographical and visual aspects that enhance the predilection of some of the pop song videos on the YouTube. As a conclusion, suggestions for the musical performance and future studies will be made.

2. YouTube – Background, Motivation, and Challenges

YouTube is “*an intense emotional experience, a social space*” (Strangelove, 2010) or a “*website full of amateurs wasting their time posting poorly made videos, while for others it is their chance at stardom, their most understanding teacher, or their meeting place with closest friends*” (Cayari, 2011). In the same time, it can be a “*global marketplace for music from unconventional regions*”, a “*microcosm of the digital media ecosystem and its competing stakeholders and interests. It is a site of collective expression, collaboration, discussion, and learning for the amateur and semi-professional users who create, share, watch, and comment on videos hosted by the website. It is also a platform for media rights owners to cultivate an audience for their properties, and a window for advertisers to promote products using interactive and viral marketing strategies*” (Mueller, 2014).

Even from its beginnings, in February 2005, as a video sharing website, YouTube has registered, even from the start, great audience, reaching, sixteen months after its broadcasting, 100 million clips viewed by American users by day, according to comScore (2006). In October, 2008, the data confirm the fact that the internet site was visited by 100 million American viewers per day, a number which represents over two thirds of the American internet users (comScore, 2008). According to the statistics made by Alexa in 2010, YouTube is on third place as the most visited website in the world, after Facebook and Google. In 2013, YouTube was garnering nearly 20 percent of all global traffic on the Internet.

If, at the beginnings, YouTube represented a platform where video clips were loaded, of any free song broadcasted on radio or TV, today, YouTube is a highly regarded platform used to inform, connect and inspire people who share their thoughts (in Vlogs mostly), their music, or any other activity. Also, it represents a way of being up to date and it is able to create an amazing bond between a singer and his/her fans and to make a song viral.

Another interesting aspect is that considering your latest search and your interest field, YouTube is able to suggest other videos related or similar to the ones you searched. Users of YouTube can create an account where they can subscribe to other channels and they can even like and comment to the videos they are enjoying or not. In addition to this, advertising became popular too, and the advertisements are presented before the start of the current video; they can be skipped if the user is not interested. The users can load their clips, express their opinions, comment or answer other comments, and express their taste by hitting the like button.

3. Purpose and Issues

Starting from the hypotheses stated in the introduction of the present research, we aim to observe if the musical preferences of the Romanian youth are influenced by the informal education of the online environment and if the number of view on the YouTube is a trigger of the musical choice of the Romanian youngsters. On the other hand, we have attempted to find which are the musical genres preferred by young people and what are the elements of musical construction they are attracted to.

4. Compositional Features

In order to correlate the musical preferences of the youngsters with the number of views on YouTube, five pop songs that reached the international tops and had an impressive number of online views were selected: *Shape of You* – Ed Sheeran, *UpTown Funk* – Mark Ronson ft. Bruno Mars, *See You Again* – Wiz Khalifa ft. Charlie Puth, *Despacito* – Luis Fonsi ft. Daddy Yankee, *Gangnam Style* – Psy.

After a brief analyze of the compositional particularities, Ed Sheeran's *Shape of You* reveals an accompanying musical phrase which constitute the ostinato background for the vocal part – constructed as the melodic recitative. The syncopated rhythm of the repeated accompaniment, polyrhythmic with the vocal part, creates the dance atmosphere, specific to modern pop music. Another significant feature is the complete harmony, encoded as I, IV 7, VI, VII.



Fig. 1. Accompaniment phrase of the song

In what regards the song *UpTown Funk* – Mark Ronson ft. Bruno Mars, the rhythmical structure is also dominant is the accompaniment, a fact which ensures the dancing characteristic. Various rhythmic particularities can be noticed: the anacrusis, the counterpoint

and the syncope. The melodic line belongs to the recitative genres, and the harmony emphasizes the plagal relation D minor 7 – G7. The intro for the song lasts for 17 seconds, longer than usual, and this sets the stage for the rest of the song, introducing the catchy “*doh doh doh*” vocal and the clapping drum sound, which is made using a Linn drum machine (Botta 2015). Belonging to the same musical genre as Michael Jackson’s songs of the 1980s, UpTown Funk is richly orchestrated, including bass, snare drums, cheery guitar, horns and a swishy synthesizer effect, which, together with the upbeat lyrics, give the song its funk feel.

See You Again of Wiz Khalifa ft. Charlie Puth was written as a tribute to actor Paul Walker. The whole musical composition accommodates the lyrics, which makes obvious the lyrical character of the vocal part and the plainness of the piano intro, followed by a discreet instrumental background. The vocal is mixed with hip-hop rhyming, bringing forth the message of the song. The main theme of the song is underlined by the repeated line “*When I see you again*”, and the drums roll that signals the entrance of the drum accompanying the other instruments in the last few eighths of the song brings up the climax to get the message across one last time before it ends. (Chabfe 2015)

The song *Despacito* – Luis Fonsi ft. Daddy Yankee is a reggaeton, a genre borrowing from the rhythms of the Latino dance style. The vocal line combines the recto-tono recitative with the melody, in the Latin style (in Spanish). The dance song registered the most views for a clip on YouTube in January 2018.

The South Korean *Gangnam Style*, sung and composed by Psy, was registered by the Guinness World Records as the most viewed pop song video on YouTube in September, 2012. composed in the K-pop style (Korean pop – having electro influences and powerful audio-visual effects), *Gangnam Style* promotes a colorful video and an original dance style. The vocal line is recitative and the accompaniment involves short, repetitive musical formulas, and electro-dance rhythm.

5. Methodology

The bibliography shows that the studies on the subject of YouTube are constantly increasing in number, and are available on the web, magazines, editorials or blogs. They are focused on various aspects, such as: the network structure of the platform (Cha et al. 2007, Paolillo 2008), user session and behaviour (Halvey, M. and Keane, M. T. 2007), and the improvement of user experience (Coyle et al. 2008, Chatzopoulou et al. 2010, Siersdorfer et al. 2010).

It has been said that there are two types of activities on YouTube, *content sharing and content seeing, and the constant and continuous stream of videos can potentially result in addictive behavior among users* (Haridakis and Hanson, 2009). Other researchers have looked at various activities, as seeing, liking, sharing, and commenting on social media content under the common umbrella term of “*engagement and interaction*” (De Vries, Gensler, & Leeflang, 2012; Khan, 2017).

Matthew Thibeault wrote an article in 2014, called *Media as an Invitation to Rethink Music Education*, where he explores, from a philosophical perspective, the way mass-media and the audio recordings create an environment having different consequences for the musical education. The media, seen as informal education, leads to the idea of the compliance of taste in music with the online song selection.

The importance of the musical taste among youth population was demonstrated in a research on 2,532 participants by Adrian North and David Hargreaves (2007). The researchers found a pattern of musical preference and the choice of lifestyle, where the taste for a specific music genre represents a cause for social discrimination. Thus, the influence of the media on the musical taste becomes an important phenomenon. Burgess and Green (2009) focused their

research on the popular music clips on YouTube, showing which are the most viewed, the most “favourited”, the most commented clips, while others focused on the influence of YouTube on the culture and society (Lange, 2008), or on the educational potential of the site.

The pro-social messages of the music nowadays influence the social attitude of the young population and are a decisive factor of the musical taste, according to Nicholas Ruth’s article, with the title “*They Don’t Really Care...”: Effects of Music on Pro-social Content and Corresponding Media Coverage on Pro-social Behavior* (2017). The consumerist sound art of today aims not only to create the atmosphere, but it is a decisive factor for the social action of the young population. Daniel Albert comes with the proposition to place the musical education into the space where the young people of today “live” their present: the online, in order to create learning experiences. His research, *Social Media in Music Education*, published in 2015, is a plea for the interaction between the social media and music education.

6. Participants

The research instrument for the scientific analyse below is the questionnaire. It was constructed around closed questions with multiple-choice, but semi-closed questions were also included in the questionnaire. It was applied on a sample of 102 respondents, with an average age of 25 years old. Among the 27 men and 75 women included in the survey, 63% have graduated a form of higher education. As the research aimed to collect data about the music taste of young Romanians, the questionnaire was applied to Romanian respondents.

7. Results

Since the survey is focused on musical preferences (as a secondary hypothesis of research), it included questions about the favourite musical genres of the respondents. As the char below reveals, the first positions are occupied by pop (21.9%), jazz and blues (18.6%) and rock (15.7%), followed by the other genres provided as a choice in the questionnaire.

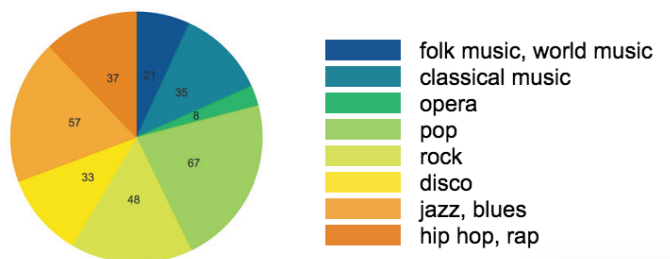


Fig. 2. Musical genres

Among the most viewed music video clips on the YouTube, five international pop songs launched between 2012 – 2017 were chosen, due to their top position in the international charts (in more than 10 countries simultaneously). The choice was made to observe their impact and compare the concordance of selection of the Romanian young people. In what regards the number of views in September, 2018, the classification was as follows (from the most to fewer views):

1. *Despacito* – Luis Fonsi ft. Daddy Yankee
2. *Shape of You* – Ed Sheeran
3. *See You Again* – Wiz Khalifa ft. Charlie Puth
4. *UpTown Funk* – Mark Ronson ft. Bruno Mars
5. *Gangnam Style* - Psy

The young Romanian respondents made the following ranking of the songs (on the first position is the song with the most votes):

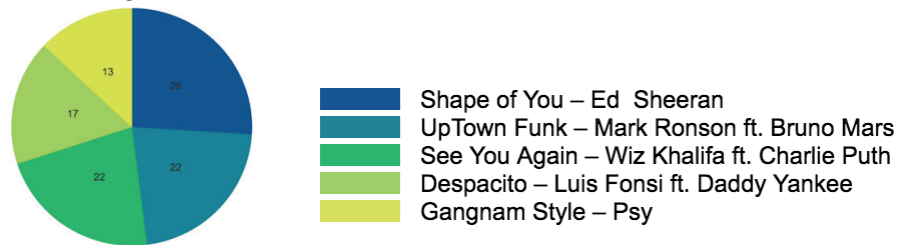


Fig. 3. Ranking of given songs

The following two questions are included in the applied questionnaire aim to verify the premise of the research: *How often do you listen to the song you gave a 1?*

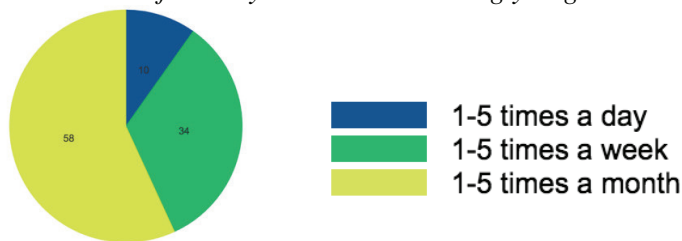


Fig. 4. Frequency of listening given songs

Thus, it can be noticed that the song placed on the first position reached 56.9% at audition, 1 to 5 times a month. The graph below shows that when a respondent has a preference for a certain song, they play it from 1 to 5 times a day (68.6%).

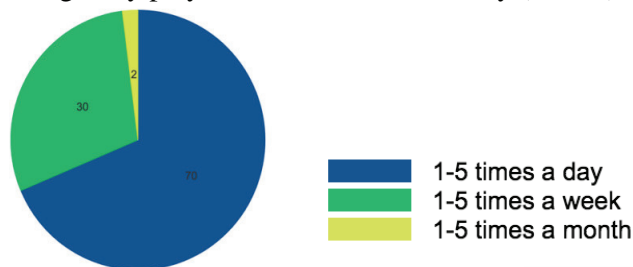


Fig. 5. Frequency of listening preferred songs

It can be inferred that the songs included in the survey (five of the most viewed songs on YouTube) are not included in the daily songs of the respondents, do that they do not reflect the musical taste of the young Romanian segment of population.

Another aim of the research is to reveal what are the constitutive aspects of the recent songs that attract the attention of the respondents at a first glance and in what percent. It can be seen that the songs the respondents place in the first two positions are characterized by dancing rhythm and recitative vocal line.

The results can be seen in the chart below:

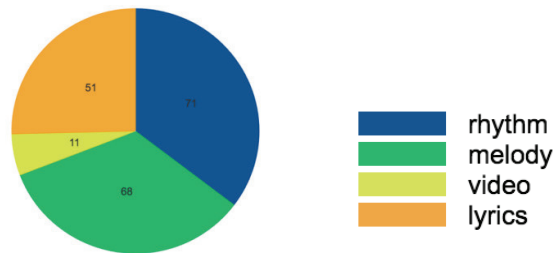


Fig. 6. Importance of constitutive aspects of music

The fact that the hypothesis of the research, regarding the correlation between the number of views on the YouTube and the musical preferences of the Romanian young people, did not prove to be valid does not automatically lead to the annulment of the thesis that the media and the online guides the musical options of the young. This fact is reflected by the chart below, extracted from the results to the question “*What are the main media you visit to listen to music?*”, included in the survey.

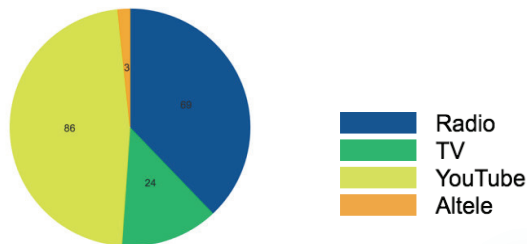


Fig. 7. Ranking of media for music listening

47.3% of the respondents put YouTube on top of the media they use, followed by the radio (37.9%). This demonstrates that the taste of the Romanian young population is, in fact, influenced by the informal online education.

8. Conclusions

Although the hypothesis of the research, about the influence the number of views of the songs on the online YouTube channel has over the musical taste of the Romanian young people, did not verify, the influence of the online on the formation of the musical taste is undeniable. The fact that the songs cannot stay in the charts longer than two years, due to the creative phenomenon that brings forth to the public year many new songs in a short span of time, must be taken into account. The new songs reach the top and captivate the young years fast.

The main media means used for musical auditions is, according to the respondents of the survey, the YouTube channel. This aspect supports the main hypothesis of the research: the young people’s taste in music is influenced by the online media.

As the previous research demonstrated that the consumption of modern, commercial music is a means of individualization and distinction among the young people in the contemporary society, and the online guides their life options, the involvement in the online education of the adults specialized in music education has to be encouraged. As Heidi Westerlund states, “*the profession of education needs to engage more actively in reflecting on how our societies are changing and how these changes challenge*” our world. This survey pursues to raise the awareness about the formation of the musical taste under the influence of the virtual reality, so that the musical education should not ignore it.

If the Romanian respondents declared that YouTube is the main media they use to listen to music, the problem of selection ability is crucial. On the second place is the radio, a media which does not provide the user with the ability to select the audio content, but influence the preference of the listener by repeated exposure to pre-selected musical pieces. In both of these instances, there is serious need of a formal musical education to address to the problem of selecting the quality of today's music in a world of diversity and inflation of audio-visual products.

The findings of the questionnaire above, regarding the elements of musical construction which appeal to the respondents at a first contact and the favoured musical genres lead to future subjects for research, taking into account repertoire proposals for the young people and other musical activities able to fulfil the needs of the contemporary youth.

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