

EMOTIONAL RESPONSES TO POPULAR HINDI MUSIC: EXPLORING POSITIVE, NEGATIVE, AND MIXED EMOTIONAL EXPERIENCES

¹ Vishesh Malik, ² Meghna

¹*Department of Psychology, University of Delhi, New Delhi India*

²*Department of Applied Psychology, University of Delhi, New Delhi*

ABSTRACT

Music is a significant medium of emotional expression and can evoke a wide range of affective experiences among listeners. The present study examined the emotional responses elicited by popular Hindi songs across four categories: romantic, sad, patriotic, and Sufi music. Undergraduate students from the University of Delhi, aged 19–25 years, listened to selected popular Hindi songs and reported the emotions and perceived personal meanings associated with each song. The songs were selected based on their popularity, with a minimum threshold of five million views during the specified selection period. Participants' responses were organized into positive emotions, negative emotions, and perceived personal meaning/message and were examined using descriptive content analysis. The findings indicated that emotional responses varied across musical categories and were not restricted to a simple positive–negative distinction. Patriotic songs predominantly elicited emotions such as pride, patriotism, respect, determination, belongingness, and devotion, whereas sad songs generally evoked sadness, loss, longing, and emotional distress. However, some songs also elicited positive or soothing responses alongside negative emotions, demonstrating the occurrence of mixed emotional experiences. Romantic songs primarily evoked happiness, affection, attraction, admiration, and romantic feelings, although sadness was also reported for some songs. Overall, the findings suggest that popular Hindi songs can evoke complex and multidimensional emotional experiences, with listeners sometimes experiencing positive and negative emotions simultaneously. The study highlights the value of examining music-related emotional experiences within culturally relevant musical contexts.

Keywords: Music, Emotions, Positive Emotion, Negative Emotion, Popular Hindi Songs, Emotional Responses, Mixed Emotions

INTRODUCTION

Music is a pervasive form of human expression that extends beyond the organization of melody, rhythm, and harmony. Across cultures and generations, it has served as a medium through which individuals communicate, experience, and interpret emotions. Unlike many forms of communication that depend primarily on verbal language, music can convey affective experiences through combinations of lyrics, melody, rhythm, instrumentation, and tempo. Consequently, music occupies an important position in everyday life and has attracted considerable attention from psychologists, neuroscientists, musicologists, and scholars interested in human emotion and behavior (Fitch,

2006; Peretz, 2006; Levitin, 2007; Schäfer & Sedlmeier, 2010). Research in the psychology of

Music has particularly highlighted the close relationship between musical experiences and emotional processes, suggesting that music can contribute to the expression, elicitation, and regulation of affective states.

The emotional capacity of music is one of its most distinctive psychological characteristics. Musical experiences can be associated with a broad range of affective states, including happiness, excitement, calmness, sadness, nostalgia, tenderness, and anxiety. The emotional meaning of music, however, is not necessarily experienced uniformly by all



listeners. Different individuals may interpret or respond to the same musical stimulus differently depending on their personal experiences, expectations, cultural background, and current emotional state. This complexity has contributed to a longstanding theoretical debate concerning whether music merely communicates or represents emotions or whether it can directly evoke corresponding emotional experiences in listeners (Kivy, 2002; Levinson, 1996; Robinson, 1994). Thus, understanding music-induced emotion requires consideration of both the emotional characteristics expressed by a musical stimulus and the subjective responses generated by its listeners. Music may also play an important role in emotional regulation. Mood management perspectives propose that individuals may select types of music according to their existing emotional states and desired mood outcomes (Zillmann, 1988; Knobloch & Zillmann, 2002). People may therefore choose music to maintain pleasurable states, reduce unpleasant feelings, facilitate emotional expression, or engage with particular memories and experiences. Importantly, music associated with negative emotions does not necessarily produce an exclusively negative experience. Individuals may derive comfort, emotional release, reflection, or a sense of connection from sad music. Previous work has suggested that listeners may appreciate negative emotions in music because such experiences can provide opportunities for emotional engagement, nostalgia, catharsis, and perceived emotional communion (Garrido & Schubert, 2011; Levinson, 1990). This indicates that the emotional experience associated with music may be more complex than a simple positive–negative distinction.

The relationship between musical characteristics and emotional responses has received particular attention in research examining tempo. Tempo, commonly expressed in beats per minute (BPM), represents the speed at which a musical piece is performed and constitutes an important perceptual cue in emotional appraisal. Earlier experimental research demonstrated that variations in tempo can influence the affective qualities attributed to music. Slower musical passages have been associated with descriptors such as peacefulness, tenderness,

sadness, and calmness, whereas faster passages have more frequently been associated with characteristics such as cheerfulness, excitement, exuberance, and restlessness (Hevner, 1935). Subsequent research has similarly indicated that tempo interacts with other musical and contextual features in shaping emotional responses (Peretz et al., 1998; Balkwill & Thompson, 1999; Hunter et al., 2010). However, tempo alone cannot fully account for emotional responses because listeners simultaneously process lyrical content, melody, vocal expression, instrumentation, and culturally meaningful associations.

Within popular music, lyrics constitute an especially important source of emotional meaning. Songs can communicate experiences of love, separation, patriotism, loss, hope, belongingness, and personal struggle, thereby providing listeners with material through which they may identify and connect with emotional states. In this context, sentiment analysis provides a useful framework for examining the affective orientation conveyed through textual content. Traditionally, sentiment analysis refers to the identification and classification of expressed opinions or affective orientations within text, commonly into positive, negative, or neutral categories. When applied to song lyrics, however, sentiment classification presents additional challenges because lyrical meaning is often metaphorical, context-dependent, culturally embedded, and capable of expressing multiple emotions simultaneously. Therefore, examining emotional responses to songs requires attention not only to the valence of lyrical content but also to the subjective experiences generated by listeners.

These issues are particularly relevant in the Indian context, where music is closely intertwined with cultural expression and social experience. Hindi popular music encompasses diverse lyrical and musical forms through which emotional and social themes are communicated. In addition to contemporary popular songs, Indian musical traditions have historically recognized relationships between musical structures and emotional experiences. Research on Hindustani classical music, for instance, has provided empirical



evidence that different ragas can be associated with distinct emotional responses, highlighting the relevance of musical structure and cultural context in emotional perception (Mathur et al., 2015). Popular Hindi songs similarly provide an important context for examining how listeners experience emotions through culturally familiar musical material.

Despite extensive theoretical and empirical work on music and emotion, there remains value in examining emotional responses to contemporary Hindi songs from the perspective of listeners themselves. Songs belonging to different thematic categories may elicit not only their expected emotional responses but also combinations of positive and negative affect. A romantic song, for example, may evoke happiness and affection in some listeners while simultaneously producing sadness or nostalgia in others. Likewise, patriotic music may generate pride, enthusiasm, and belongingness while also eliciting sadness when listeners associate national identity with sacrifice and loss. Such mixed emotional experiences suggest that musical emotion may not be adequately represented through a single categorical sentiment. The present study therefore examines the emotional responses associated with selected popular Hindi songs across four broad categories: romantic, sad, patriotic, and Sufi music. The study focuses on the emotions reported by young adult listeners after exposure to the selected songs and considers the positive, negative, and mixed affective experiences associated with them. It additionally considers the potential relevance of tempo as a musical characteristic associated with emotional experience. By examining listeners reported emotional responses within a culturally familiar Hindi-music context, the study aims to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of how lyrical themes and musical characteristics relate to subjective emotional experiences.

METHOD

Participants

The participants were undergraduate students from the University of Delhi between 19 and 25 years of age. Participants were exposed to selected Hindi songs representing four broad thematic categories:

romantic, sad, patriotic, and Sufi music. The study focused on young adults to examine their subjective emotional experiences in response to contemporary Hindi music.

Selection of Songs

Songs were selected from four broad categories: **romantic, sad, patriotic, and Sufi**. To identify popular songs, the study used a minimum popularity criterion of **five million views**. Only songs that had accumulated at least five million views within the specified three-year period were considered for inclusion. The selected songs represented contemporary Hindi popular music and were subsequently presented to the participants for evaluation.

The final set included songs such as *Desh Mere*, *Ae Watan*, *Bharat*, *Vande Mataram*, and *Jann Gann Mann* within the patriotic category; *Filhall*, *Pachtaoge*, *Tera Ghata*, *Dhoka*, and *Woh Chaand Kaha Se Laoge* within the sad category; and selected contemporary romantic songs including *Raataan Lambiyan*, *Dil Ko Karaar Aaya*, *Doobey*, *Chaand Baaliyan*, and *Meri Jaan*. The manuscript reports the corresponding YouTube view counts and approximate time since release for the selected songs.

Procedure

Participants were asked to listen to the selected songs and subsequently report the emotions they experienced while listening to each song. Their responses were recorded in relation to the emotional qualities associated with the songs. The responses were subsequently organized into **positive emotions, negative emotions, and the perceived meaning of the song for life**.

The procedure was designed to capture participants' subjective emotional experiences rather than relying exclusively on the predefined genre of a song. This allowed the study to identify instances in which a single song elicited more than one type of emotional response. For example, participants reported combinations of positive and negative emotions for some songs, indicating that emotional responses to music were not necessarily restricted to a single affective category.

Data Organisation and Analysis



The responses obtained from participants were organized according to the four song categories. For each selected song, participants reported emotional experiences were classified descriptively into positive and negative emotional responses. Participants' interpretations concerning the broader meaning or life-related message associated with each song were also documented.

The analysis primarily followed a **descriptive content-analysis approach**, in which participants' reported emotions and interpretations were examined in relation to the lyrical and thematic characteristics of the songs. Attention was given to recurring emotional responses and to the occurrence of mixed emotional experiences. The analysis also considered the theoretical relevance of musical characteristics, particularly tempo, in understanding differences in emotional responses. The resulting observations were interpreted in relation to existing psychological perspectives on music and emotion, including mood management, emotional expression, catharsis, emotional communion, and research concerning the relationship between musical characteristics and affective experience.

RESULTS

Emotional Responses to Selected Hindi Songs

The analysis indicated that the selected Hindi songs elicited a diverse range of emotional experiences among the participants. Although the songs were organized into romantic, sad, patriotic, and Sufi categories, participants' responses were not consistently restricted to the dominant emotional characteristics associated with each category. Positive, negative, and mixed emotional experiences were reported across the selected songs, suggesting that listeners' responses extended beyond a simple classification of songs as either positive or negative.

Patriotic Songs

The responses to patriotic songs were predominantly characterized by positive and socially oriented emotions. Participants reported feelings of patriotism, pride, respect, determination, happiness, devotion, belongingness, energy, and passion. *Desh Mere*, for example, was associated with respect for soldiers, selflessness, gallantry,

patriotism, and sadness. The combination of pride and sadness appeared to reflect participants' associations between national identity and the sacrifices made by soldiers. Participants also associated the song with belongingness and a sense of fulfilment. Similarly, *Ae Watan* was associated with determination, love, strength, and happiness. Participants interpreted the song as expressing attachment to the nation while simultaneously emphasizing responsibility toward it. *Bharat* was predominantly associated with peace, happiness, patriotism, and a sense of being blessed, whereas *Vande Mataram* elicited happiness, pride, patriotism, and devotion. *Jann Gann Mann* was associated with patriotism, energy, passion, pride, and a sense of duty toward the nation. Overall, patriotic songs generated predominantly positive emotional responses, particularly pride, happiness, devotion, and belongingness. However, sadness was also reported, particularly in relation to themes of sacrifice and loss. Thus, patriotic music appeared capable of combining positive national-identification emotions with negatively valenced affect.

Sad Songs

The selected sad songs primarily elicited negative emotional experiences, including sadness, heartbreak, despair, hopelessness, disappointment, and emotional distress. *Filhall* was associated with sadness, upset, and hopelessness, with participants relating its themes to uncertainty, unfulfilled relationships, and the difficulty of controlling future outcomes. Participants also interpreted the song as encouraging individuals to remain focused on the present rather than becoming excessively preoccupied with the past or future.

Pachtaoge generated emotional, heartbreaking, sad, sorrowful, and despair-related responses. Participants connected these responses with relationship difficulties, separation, regret, and acceptance. The broader interpretation of the song emphasized learning from difficult experiences and moving forward rather than remaining focused on blame.

Interestingly, *Tera Ghata* produced a combination of negative and positive responses. Participants described the song as sad because of its themes of



loss while simultaneously experiencing it as happy, soothing, relaxing, or emotionally satisfying. This response suggests that a song categorized as sad may nevertheless generate positive affective experiences when listeners interpret its themes in terms of acceptance, self-worth, and emotional resolution.

Dhoka was primarily associated with sadness and a diminished sense of satisfaction, reflecting the themes of betrayal and unfulfilled expectations. The responses to the sad-song category therefore demonstrate that negative lyrical themes can evoke strong emotional engagement, while some songs may simultaneously provide reflective or soothing experiences.

Romantic Songs

The romantic-song responses demonstrated considerable emotional diversity. The reported responses included happiness, affection, attraction, romance, admiration, playfulness, and sadness. The responses therefore suggest that romantic music was not associated exclusively with positive emotional experiences. For example, the reported response to *Meri Jaan* included playful and romantic elements alongside sadness.

The available responses further indicate that romantic songs can evoke different affective qualities depending on the emotional content and interpretation of the listener. This pattern is consistent with the broader observation that music can simultaneously communicate and evoke multiple emotions.

Overall Pattern of Emotional Responses

Across the selected categories, the findings indicate that participants experienced music as an emotionally rich stimulus rather than as a source of a single discrete emotion. Patriotic songs were predominantly associated with pride, happiness, patriotism, devotion, and belongingness, whereas sad songs more frequently generated sadness, heartbreak, despair, and emotional reflection. Romantic songs were associated with affection, happiness, attraction, admiration, and, in some cases, sadness.

A notable pattern was the presence of **mixed emotional responses**. Some songs elicited positive and negative emotions simultaneously,

demonstrating that emotional responses to music may involve multiple affective dimensions. The findings therefore provide preliminary descriptive evidence that listeners' experiences of Hindi songs cannot always be adequately represented through a binary positive-versus-negative sentiment classification.

DISCUSSION

The present study examined emotional responses to selected popular Hindi songs across romantic, sad, patriotic, and Sufi categories. Overall, the findings demonstrated that participants experienced a wide range of emotions, including happiness, affection, pride, patriotism, relaxation, sadness, heartbreak, despair, and emotional reflection. These observations are consistent with previous research suggesting that music is capable of eliciting diverse emotional and psychological experiences and can influence affective, cognitive, and social processes (Koelsch, 2014; Västfjäll et al., 2012). Music may therefore function not only as a form of entertainment but also as a medium through which individuals experience and regulate emotional states.

The responses to patriotic songs were predominantly associated with pride, patriotism, belongingness, devotion, happiness, and respect. These findings indicate that music containing strong national themes may evoke emotions related to social attachment and collective identity. Previous research has similarly suggested that musical experiences can contribute to social connectedness and feelings of belongingness (Welch et al., 2014; Elvers et al., 2017). In the present study, participants' responses to *Desh Mere* were particularly noteworthy because the song elicited both patriotic and sad emotions. The combination of pride, respect, and sadness appeared to be associated with participants' awareness of sacrifice and loss in relation to national service. This finding illustrates that music associated with collective identity may generate both positive and negatively valenced emotions simultaneously.

The emotional responses to sad songs further demonstrated that musical experiences cannot necessarily be understood through a simple positive–negative distinction. Songs such as *Filhall*



and *Pachtaoge* were associated primarily with sadness, heartbreak, hopelessness, sorrow, and despair. Such responses are broadly consistent with research indicating that musical characteristics and lyrical content can contribute to the perception and experience of sadness (Balkwill & Thompson, 1999; Hunter et al., 2010). However, the responses to *Tera Ghata* were more complex, with participants describing the song as sad while also experiencing it as happy, soothing, and relaxing. This finding is particularly important because previous research has demonstrated that music can evoke mixed emotional experiences rather than a single discrete affective state (Hunter et al., 2010). The occurrence of positive experiences in response to sad music may also be considered in relation to research on the enjoyment of negative emotions in music. Garrido and Schubert (2011) proposed that individuals may experience and appreciate negative emotions in music under particular psychological circumstances. Similarly, the literature discussed in the present study suggests that sad music may provide opportunities for emotional expression, catharsis, reflection, and emotional communion (Levinson, 1990). Participants' responses to *Pachtaoge*, for instance, reflected sadness and heartbreak but were also accompanied by interpretations emphasizing acceptance, learning from difficult experiences, and moving forward. This suggests that negative emotional content may have psychological significance beyond the immediate experience of unpleasantness. The findings can further be interpreted through **mood management theory**. According to Zillmann (1988), individuals may select media and communication experiences in ways that help maintain or modify their emotional states. Knobloch and Zillmann (2002) similarly emphasized the role of media choices in mood regulation. The present findings are compatible with this perspective because participants sometimes report calming or soothing experiences even when listening to songs characterized by sadness or loss. Nevertheless, because the present study did not directly examine participants' reasons for selecting particular songs or their pre-listening mood states, the findings should not be interpreted

as direct evidence that participants intentionally selected music for mood regulation.

The results also support the importance of considering emotional responses as multidimensional. The traditional distinction between positive and negative emotions may be insufficient to capture the complexity of music-evoked experiences. For example, *Desh Mere* elicited patriotic and positive emotions alongside sadness, while *Tera Ghata* was associated with sadness as well as happiness and relaxation. Such findings are consistent with the broader literature suggesting that music can evoke mixed emotions and that listeners may simultaneously experience seemingly contrasting affective states (Hunter et al., 2010). This has implications for sentiment analysis because assigning a song to a single positive or negative label may overlook important aspects of its emotional meaning.

The findings concerning romantic songs also illustrate this complexity. Romantic music was associated with emotions such as happiness, affection, attraction, admiration, and romance, but sadness was also reported in relation to some songs. This pattern is consistent with the view that musical emotions are influenced not only by the broad genre of a song but also by its specific lyrical themes, musical characteristics, and the personal experiences of listeners. Research on music and emotion has similarly emphasized that emotional responses to music involve interactions among perceptual, cognitive, and contextual processes (Juslin & Sloboda, 2001; Koelsch, 2014).

Tempo represents another potentially important factor in understanding these emotional experiences. Previous research has demonstrated that tempo can influence the affective character attributed to music. Hevner (1935), for example, found that slower musical passages were more frequently associated with descriptors such as peaceful, calm, mournful, and tender, whereas faster passages were associated with characteristics such as cheerful, thrilling, and restless. Subsequent research has also indicated that tempo can influence perceived happiness and sadness in music (Hunter et al., 2010). The present study considered tempo as a relevant characteristic of emotional experience;

however, the available results do not provide sufficient quantitative evidence to establish a statistical relationship between BPM and participants' reported emotions. Therefore, tempo should be regarded as a theoretically relevant factor rather than a confirmed predictor within the present study.

The findings also have relevance within the Indian cultural context. Music is embedded within cultural traditions and may acquire emotional meanings through culturally familiar themes and associations. Research on Hindustani classical music, for example, has demonstrated that different ragas can elicit distinct emotional responses, highlighting the role of musical structure in culturally situated emotional experience (Mathur et al., 2015). The present findings extend this broader perspective to contemporary Hindi popular music by demonstrating how familiar themes such as romantic attachment, separation, patriotism, sacrifice, and belongingness may become associated with diverse emotional experiences among young adult listeners.

From a psychological perspective, the findings suggest that music may serve several functions simultaneously. It can provide emotional expression, facilitate reflection, support social connectedness, and contribute to the regulation of affective states. Previous research has documented relationships between musical engagement and psychological as well as social outcomes, including emotional well-being, social inclusion, and interpersonal connectedness (Biasutti & Concina, 2013; Welch et al., 2014; Elvers et al., 2017). The present findings are consistent with this broader literature while emphasizing the subjective and context-dependent nature of music-evoked emotions.

Overall, the study suggests that popular Hindi songs can evoke complex emotional experiences that extend beyond a straightforward positive or negative sentiment classification. The presence of mixed emotional responses indicates that the emotional meaning of music may emerge from an interaction between lyrical content, musical characteristics, cultural context, and individual interpretation. Consequently, future research

examining sentiment in music may benefit from moving beyond binary sentiment classification toward multidimensional approaches that incorporate emotional valence, arousal, mixed emotions, and listener-specific responses.

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