A Possible Determinant of Musical Preference in Big Five Personality Traits

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Abstract : The increasing availability of music facilitated by new technology and open sourcing has eliminated many traditional limiting factors in musical taste, creating a culture of choice. This study tested 191 international subjects, mostly young adults more decisively shaped by emerging technologies like Facebook, the platform for the study. Using an aggregated Big Five personality test, subjects were asked to self-report on questions related to extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness. Subsequently, subjects listened to five pairs of musical works reflecting opposite extremes of one of five musical qualities: tempo (fast/slow), complexity (simple/complex), degree of dissonance (tonal/atonal), familiarity (familiar/unfamiliar), and extra-musical significance (significant/not significant). Subjects were then asked to record listening times and preferences among the selections. Strikingly, this study shows a relatively high positive correlation between agreeableness and musical preferences (predicting preferences for simple, familiar, and fast music), as compared to extraversion, openness, conscientiousness, and neuroticism. Thus, this research suggests that the not yet well-understood relationship between personality traits and musical qualities merits further study.

Keywords : music perception, psychology, cognition, musical preference
Conference Title : ICSRD 2020 : International Conference on Scientific Research and Development
Conference Location : Chicago, United States
Conference Dates : December 12-13, 2020