

Psychological Impact of Electronic Dance Music, Development of its Culture and its Relation with Recreational Drugs

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Abstract—*Electronic Dance Music also called EDM is one of the most popular and successful music genres in today's time. The increasing inclination of the younger demographic towards the so-called EDM culture propelled us to search how people are exposed to EDM and how they developed a liking towards it. The research focuses on the various psychological impacts that a person undergoes while listening to EDM and what are the triggers that make EDM lovers listen to it again. The usage of drugs and EDM together to achieve a so-called state of trance has gained a lot of recognition in the recent years. The paper also brings out the relationship between drugs and EDM and how the use of recreational drugs have an impact on the experience of listening to EDM.*

1. INTRODUCTION

EDM which stands for “electronic dance and music” is one of the most popular and emerging field of interest in the current age of nightclubs, college fests, and music concerts [1]. It is a 7.4 billion dollar industry and a major source of revenue for the music industry [2].

EDM initially started as an underground movement. During the period 1980-1990, music genre such as disco music, hip-hop music, and dub captivated the youth. These music genres are said to be the precursors of the modern EDM music. However, their popularity eventually declined and EDM was born. It was not until the mid-2000s when the EDM gained significant success when Dutch producer Tiesto made the introduction music for the Olympics 2004 [3]. This event was regarded as one of the 50 most important events in the music industry [4]. Eventually due to the rise of artists like David Guetta, Skrillex etc. the EDM craze reached its zenith and EDM tracks were listed separately in “EDM billboard” (ibid). Following the craze from the west, India too followed the trend and when music jockey David Guetta came in to India in 2012, the concert was sold out [4]. This success is replicated each year by the world's top EDM artists in annual EDM festivals such as Sunburn and VH1 Supersonic [5].

In the new millennium, EDM has gained popularity and exponential rise in the music industry, to such an extent that

DJs are termed as the new rock stars. Sunburn Goa, an annual EDM fest in India, has seen a rise in its footfall from a mere 2000 attendees in 2007 [6] to 3.5 lakh in 2015 [7].

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

With DJs from all over the world like Calvin Harris, David Guetta, and Tiësto heading the pack, EDM's fan following has burgeoned over past few years [8]. EDM artists are attracting a great deal of money and attention by performing in huge concerts, making their name on the internet and collaborating with other famous musicians. The numbers don't lie. The top 10 EDM artists of 2014 have earned a total of \$268 Million, which is an 11% increase from last year [9]. EDM artists say that they owe their success to social media. In this age, they can produce their music and upload it in a click, within minutes, it is accessible to listeners and fans throughout the globe. Several EDM artists collaborate with Pop music artists, which attracts their fan base to EDM.

Eventbrite conducted a study to compare the fans of EDM with the fans other genres of music such as Classical, Pop, R&B, Jazz, among other genres. According to a study, the EDM fans have a high social media usage. The subjects of the study are six times more active on Twitter than the average user. They are more enthusiastic than the genre of EDM than specific artists as compared to fans of other genres. The study also says that EDM fans are willing to share about their personal details on social media platforms, they're open to speaking on subjects that are considered taboo. This high usage of social media by the fans of EDM is helping it grow and EDM artists say they owe their success to social media. [10-11]

Another contributor to the growth is the concerts and festivals organized only for EDM, No other genre has festivals dedicated specifically to them [11].

Raves have existed since the 1960s in the United Kingdom and the USA. Before EDM, DJs used to play disco and pop

music in raves [12]. Ever since raves became popular, they have been associated with drug culture. Today, raves are characterized with drug use, and ecstasy in particular along with EDM [13].

3. OBJECTIVES

The following are the objectives of the research paper:

1. Identifying people who listen to EDM and their triggers.
2. Psychological impact of EDM on a person.
3. Find out if recreational drug use and EDM complement each other.

4. METHODOLOGY

The following methods were used for the research:

4.1. Stimuli Based Tests

These tests were conducted with the objective of revealing the hidden feelings of people about EDM and also what they associate EDM with. This helped us find triggers mentioned in objective 1. 30 responses each were collected of people of age group 18-30.

- Word Association
- Sentence Completion

4.2. Online Survey

An online survey (google form) was circulated to understand and gather quantitative data. The survey was targeted at students of age bracket 18-30. This survey provided us with numerical data pertaining to objective 1, 2 and 3. 100 responses were collected.

4.3. Interviews

15 in-depth interviews of people who listen to EDM were conducted from the age group 18-20. The interviewees were from various parts of India.

4.4. Observation

Instances were recorded in the form of diary entries where people were listening to EDM and/or consuming recreational drugs. The total number of hours of observation accounted to 19, which worked as a platform for us to gather key data and insights about the psychological impact of EDM on a person and fulfilling objective 2 and objective 3.

5. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

5.1. People who listen to EDM

Through our findings, we were able to categorize the people who listen to EDM on the basis of their age group. On interviewing and observing several people, we found out that the EDM is heard by the age group 18-25.

Marcus, who is 20, said that EDM is a thing of our era because he sees people who enjoy listening to EDM are either 2 to 3 years elder or younger to him. He said, "In concerts, the crowd generally comprises of teenagers and people in early 20's. I have hardly seen any middle-aged or elderly people in concerts". Gayatri also claims that EDM caters to 18 to 25-year-old age group in her depth interview.

5.2. Exposure to EDM – First Instance

5.2.1. Friend circle. The friend circle or the social circle has a lot of influence on a person's lifestyle.

Many people in their interviews have stated that they were introduced to EDM by their friends. Srishti in her interview stated that "Listening to EDM started in a group, when as teens we used to discover music with friends"

5.2.2. Media. Many of the respondents have been exposed to EDM greatly through media. Media can be further divided into social media (Facebook, Instagram etc.) and conventional media (radio, television etc.).

Many of our interviewees and people whom we have engaged in short informal talks revealed that they were exposed to EDM as they scrolled down their Facebook feeds or through YouTube suggestions. This is how Shreyasi discovered EDM, as was evident to us from her interview, where she stated, "I was just browsing through music on the net and then come across it, and it then became a bit addictive."

People also discovered EDM through radios and television. KP and Shubh in their interview stated that they got exposed to EDM for the first time while they were changing channels on television and stumbled upon VH1 channel which plays EDM.

5.2.3. Environment/surroundings. Some of the people have also stated that they have been introduced to EDM because of random people playing it. Also, it is heavily being played in bars, gym etc.

On interviewing Ann, she said "the first time I heard EDM was in a pub where I went on my birthday, with my friends."

5.3. Psychological Impact of EDM

EDM causes a certain psychological impact on those who listen to it. We drew out the main themes of these impacts from our findings. These themes are as follows:

5.3.1. Energy Booster. EDM gives its listeners an adrenaline rush when they listen to it and helps them undertake more activities. The high tempo of the music and beats and rhythms makes our respondents match it with their body movements with equal rigor and passion. It improves their productivity, hence they listen to it while working out in the gym, as 52 of the respondents in our survey have said. Shreyasi said in her interview, "It gave me the push to walk that much of distance, especially on a hectic day like today". Similarly, Marcus said, "One of those genres which makes me active when I am

drowsy or tired”. In our stimuli based tests, we received three responses to the sentence “EDM makes me energetic.” (3 responses). In one of the observations, a subject said that EDM made him feel as fresh and energetic, especially after a physical activity as waking up in the early morning did, and in another, we observed that EDM caused an increase in the pace of the subject’s walking.

5.3.2. To Unwind. Listening to EDM is relaxing to many people. Just as in meditation, a calm state is achieved when people listen to EDM, wherein, the voices in their heads are silenced. According to our stimuli based tests, a lot of people associated EDM with words like ‘relaxing and ‘refreshing’. Shreyasi in her interview said, “Listening to EDM is more of a recreational activity for me.” While talking about the sub-genre of EDM, trans-house, Gayatri said, “It puts in a sense of calm and peace within, at the same time you are living your life to the fullest, always dancing, and moving- but deep within you there is no sense of excessive locomotion.”

EDM also acts as a stress buster for its listeners. Shreyasi said, “Whenever she is panicking over an exam or a quiz, listening to EDM for just 5-10 minutes boosts her up and makes her get over that phase.” Srishti said, “EDM is perfect to beat the weekday blues”.

5.3.3. Removal of Social Awkwardness. EDM helps one loosen themselves and forget their social inhibitions. They open up to people, converse with them and dance with unacquainted people freely. In our stimuli based tests, several people responded to the sentence ‘EDM makes me’ with words such as ‘go crazy/insane’, ‘head bang’ and ‘loosen up’. One of the observations described how when EDM is played, people start banging their heads and sync their movements with the beats. A respondent said that EDM helps to bring out the inner you.

5.3.4. Mood Booster – Happiness. Listening to EDM lifts the mood of a person. The beats and the rhythm of the person infuse them with a positive mood. In his interview, KP said, “I associate EDM with happiness”. Isha said, “I feel happy while listening to EDM and that instantly reflects on whatever activity I do afterwards”. Four people in the stimuli based tests responded to ‘EDM makes me...’ with happy. In one of the observations, a respondent said that EDM helps them get away from depressing thoughts.

5.3.5. Motivation. EDM provides motivation to certain listeners. They feel that they exert themselves more both physically and mentally when they listen to EDM. While speaking about upbeat EDM Ann said, “I would listen to EDM if I wanted a pep talk.” and said that she would listen to it before a big event such as a debate or delivering a talk. Shreyasi said, “EDM in a way motivates me to study or do an activity”. In the stimuli based test, we received a response, “I like EDM when I want to feel motivated.”

5.3.6. Focus. EDM helps people to focus on the task at hand by cancelling out surrounding sounds, which is why people

listen to it while studying, as we see in our online survey, wherein 25 respondents answered to the question ‘When do you listen to EDM?’ with the option of studying. Shreyasi said, “I feel like studying while listening to it”. One of the responses in the stimuli based test was “I like EDM when I need to be focused.”

5.3.7. Thrill. Hearing EDM songs fill people with a sense of thrill. Gayatri and Arjun both talk about the bass drop of an EDM song in their interviews. Gayatri describes the bass drop to be when the DJ causes a hype in the music, forming a complex beat, after which there is silence for 2-3 seconds. She said, “The build-up and the bass drop are like falling off a cliff and causes same thrill”. Arjun said, “The best part about EDM is when the beat drops, it gives me a blood rush and that makes me happy.”

5.3.8. Tripping. Tripping means experiencing euphoria under the influence of drugs according to our respondents. The experience of listening to EDM under the influence of drugs is a lot more enjoyable than listening to it when sober and the effect of EDM rises exponentially under the influence of drugs. Ann said, “you are into it, you are not just listening to it you are into it!”, while talking about the experience of listening to EDM while intoxicated. Shivani also expressed a similar opinion, when she said, “You enjoy double when you are high”. We further talk about the effect of EDM under the influence of drugs and alcohol while discussing Objective 3.

5.4. Application of Heider’s Theory

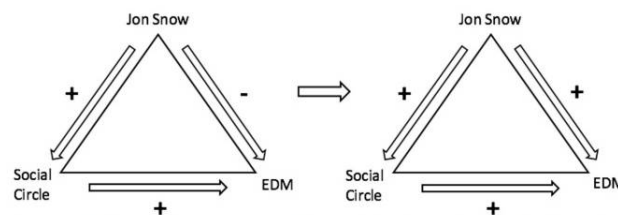


Figure 1. Heider’s Theory

From the raw data collected, there were numerous instances where respondents’ liking towards EDM developed because of continuous and repeated exposure to it, by means of the social circle or the surroundings.

The Heider’s theory fits in well to explain why people tend to start liking EDM.

Figure 1 explains that initially if a person does not like EDM but his social circle likes it, there is an imbalance created. To balance this, a person needs to either start disliking his social circle or start liking EDM. In most of the situations, a person does not dislike his social circle and would rather develop a liking towards it. In the interview with Isha she has stated that before joining the college she was not an EDM listener. But, as she joined the dance society she was repeatedly exposed to

EDM songs. As time passed by she developed a taste for EDM.

5.5 Development of the Culture of EDM

After a thorough analysis of the findings, the following flow chart (Figure 2) is devised, which explains the flow in which the culture of EDM is developed.

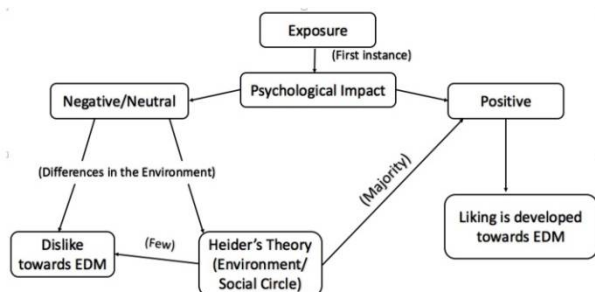


Figure 2. Development of EDM Culture

Figure 2 explains, after the initial exposure to EDM, people undergo a psychological impact which can be positive, negative or neutral. Based on the differences in the environment, people who have experienced negative or neutral psychological impact are divided into two groups. Here, differences in the environment account to the social circle and surroundings. One of the group dislikes EDM because of lack of exposure, as the social circle and surroundings which are itself not exposed/influenced by EDM. The majority of the other group end up liking EDM and very few continue to dislike it. This happens in order to balance out the scenario which is explained earlier using the Heider's theory. This unequal distribution takes place because for a majority of the people it is difficult to neglect the surroundings and social circle with is already exposed to EDM. This is how the liking towards EDM is developed amongst the youth.

5.6. Why People Who Like EDM Listen to it regularly

Liking towards EDM is developed because of the positive psychological impact experienced by people on listening to it. Basis the raw data collected we can say that the thought of experiencing the same psychological impact acts as a stimulus/trigger and motivates people to listen to EDM on a regular basis.

We can term this stimulus or trigger as 'habitual trigger', because these triggers act repeatedly and in a cyclic manner.

We further define habitual triggers as the desire to re-attain the positive psychological state.

Note – Habitual trigger is a term that we have coined on our own. It is not stated anywhere else.

5.7. Other Triggers

5.7.1 Escaping Boredom. Some people listen to EDM when they are bored and want an interesting way to pass time. Shubh in his interview has stated that he listens to EDM when he is doing some boring activity like writing a lab sheet. Similarly, Marcus has also stated that he associates EDM with a person who helps him overcome boredom.

5.7.2 Socializing. A lot of people have stated that they listen to EDM while they are socializing with their friends and peers. In our online survey, 64 respondents have claimed that they listen to EDM while "hanging out" or "chilling with friends". Adding to that, Srishti in her interview has stated that EDM is a genre in which people enjoy more when surrounded by people. In stimuli based test, people have said that they like EDM when they are with their friends.

5.8. EDM and Intoxication

The relations between EDM and intoxication amongst our interviewees and other research methodologies revealed that the effect of both cannabis and alcohol is enhanced and the obtained 'high' is more pleasurable. It makes them feel "out of the world" and experience a wave of emotions. In case of marijuana, the respondents felt that their senses were sharp and their perception of time slowed down and therefore they could enjoy EDM more as they could feel the layers of beats, drums, and vocals neatly wrapped in the complete package of EDM. It was as if they could savor every emotion that EDM had to offer.

Gayatri describes the experience of listening to EDM intoxicated with psychoactive drugs as, "The experience (of listening to EDM) while I am intoxicated is almost epiphanic. When intoxicated – everything is exaggerated, 10 times more intense than it happens to be. You tend to listen to every single motion, layer, beat, movement and get to navigate through the song and listen to what the idea of that might have been. The crux of the song gets you when you're intoxicated." Through multiple observations that amounted to about 16.5 hours, we found that there is a heavy increase in the level of involvement and enjoyment of listening to EDM when a person is intoxicated.

5.9. EDM and Psycho-Active Drugs (Mainly Marijuana)

From our interviews and observations, the respondents felt that the effect of EDM enhances their 'high' and makes their perception sharp. The beats per minute of the EDM is almost synchronized with their heartbeat and thus, creating a distinct level of 'high'. They also tend to focus more on the beats of the music and even the people of the parties fade away. One of our respondents Gayathri said that "Music is always playing in the background, but once the marijuana has been consumed, the background noise of say, chatter and banter between the multiple people at the party tend to like, fade out, at least this is for me, it is my personal opinion, I tend to focus on the music and it tends to be a one-man party almost. "Even

Shreyasi feels that same way and says “the background fades away, enabling the listener to concentrate on the music.” Shubh goes even further and would go to an EDM concert only when he would be ‘high’.

Here, the theory of Figure and Ground comes into play.

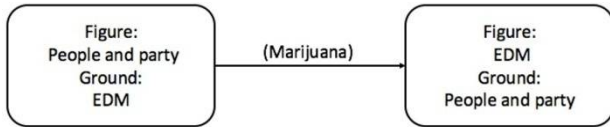


Figure 3: Figure and Ground

‘Figure’ is defined as the highlighted part (i.e. primary focus) whereas ‘ground’ is defined as the surroundings [14]. Figure 3 explains that before the consumption of marijuana, the surrounding in a social gathering i.e. people and party are the focus and EDM is the background. But after its consumption, EDM becomes the primary focus and the gathering becomes the background.

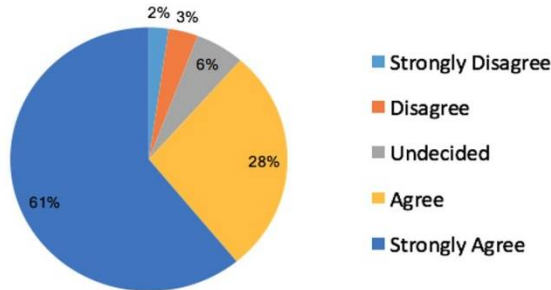


Figure 4: The desire of listening to EDM after marijuana consumption

From our survey analysis in Figure 4, after subtracting people who do not consume drugs, we found that 89% of the people agree that they would like to listen to EDM after consuming cannabis because it increases the level of the ‘high’. Only 5% of the respondents disagreed with fact that that EDM and cannabis do not complement each other.

5.10. EDM and Alcohol

We found conflicting opinions when we were finding data about the relation between EDM and alcohol. On one hand, certain people liked the effect of alcohol, as is evident from our stimuli based test, wherein four people responded to the question ‘I like EDM when’ with ‘I’m drunk’. Marcus said, “Usually I listen to EDM when I am with friends hanging out and having a beer”. Isha is also of a similar opinion, and on a feel-good scale of 10, she rated EDM + Weed as a 5 and EDM + Alcohol as an 8. There was another counter opinion with respect to the relation between the effects of alcohol on EDM. These people felt that they couldn’t concentrate or connect with the music under the influence of alcohol. Voicing such an opinion, Gayatri said, “It is very nice when you’re completely intoxicated by alcohol, but you can’t connect with it (EDM)”.

Shreyasi also said in her interview, “There was a day when I was drunk and listened to EDM. At that time, I did not really like it, I felt like I was going to have a headache”.

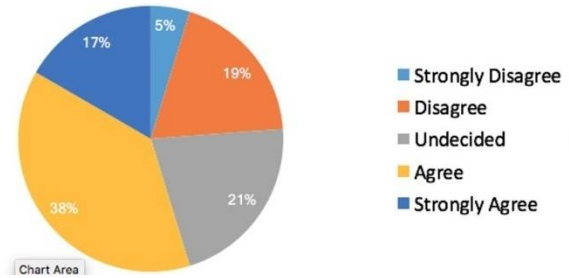


Figure 5: Effect of EDM enhanced by Alcohol

We removed the responses of the people who answered the question ‘How often do you consume alcohol?’ with the option never. Then we constructed a pie chart with the rest of the responses. (Figure 5) The resultant pie charts show that 23% of the respondents did not agree with the statement ‘The effect of EDM is enhanced under the effect of alcohol’ and 21% were undecided. Only 59% agreed with this statement, as opposed to the 89% respondents who agreed to the similar question with respect to psychoactive drugs.

6. CONCLUSION

Through the research, we found that the dominant age group who listens to EDM is in the age group 18-25. Initially, people are exposed to EDM through social circle, media (social media, radio, television mainly) and environment after which liking is developed gradually or instantaneously.

The various psychological impact of EDM are energy boosting, refreshing and relaxing, relieving stress, removing social awkwardness, boosting of mood, motivating, increase in focus of doing a particular task, causing thrill, tripping (experiencing euphoria under influence of drugs).

It was found that once the liking gets developed, the desire to re-attain the positive psychological state after listening to EDM becomes a habitual trigger for a person who listens to EDM.

There is a strong correlation between EDM and intoxication. We found that there is a positive relation of EDM with marijuana. There is an enhancement in the experience of listening to EDM while one is intoxicated with marijuana. Although, there are conflicting opinions on the relation of EDM and alcohol and it is subjective to say whether alcohol enhances the experience of listening to EDM or not.

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