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The effects of different genres of music on passersby

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Abstract. Music preferences reflect both experience and societal or cultural influences. The characteristics of the music genre include both structural style and societal connotations. This study investigated reactions to different types of music. The behavior of passersby was observed as music from two stereotypically “opposite” genres, hip-hop and classical, was played by the researcher while jogging past them. It was hypothesized that due to societal stereotypes and reputations of these genres’ participants would react negatively toward hip-hop and favorably toward classical. As the study was conducted, participants were observed during six different outings over a three-week period. The researcher jogged at the same time of day and over the same route with either hip-hop or classical music playing. Passersby were observed on their facial expressions, any changes in behavior, and their body language to determine their overall reaction to the music, as being “positive”, “negative”, or “neutral.” The results indicate that older passersby responded negatively to hip-hop and positively to classical music. Younger age groups often had opposite reactions. This study provides insight into different populations’ responses to opposite genres of music and how societal stereotypes may have affected these responses.

Key words: music, genre, hip-hop, rap, classical, preference, digital music, community-based, outdoor venue.

1. Introduction

Music is an abstract art form that draws upon the ideals and feelings of the artist to elicit strong and powerful emotions in the listener. Throughout history, music has constantly been altered and shifted based on the cultures and traditions prevalent and popular during various time periods. The most popular type of music usually changes every decade, and the perspectives about these genres also often change, creating distinct viewpoints about the genre. Currently, hip-hop is considered the most dominant genre [1].

Over the years, hip-hop has gained a negative reputation, cited as being loud and associated with acts of violence and anger [2]. These beliefs most likely stem from the emergence of hip-hop. Originating in largely African-American and Latino communities, hip-hop evolved from the cultural traditions of these ethnic groups [3]. Jamaican Reggae music, for example, affected the genre, especially in the emphasis both hip-hop and reggae place on drums and percussion. These communities used this form of music as a way to blend their traditional cultures with their new lifestyles. However, many of these neighborhoods were impoverished [3,4], and this poverty, combined with the anger about the injustice they perceived when compared to white communities, often led to crime and violence. As hip-hop grew, the music came to be associated with these activities [3].

Many people continue to view hip-hop as an embodiment of these negative activities even though hip-hop has come to transcend its “gang culture” origins. An important distinction to make is the difference between hip-hop and rap. Hip-hop is the broad genre of music that contains rap, which consists of often fast-paced lyrics

in a staccato rhythm and rhyme scheme. Since rap is a major part of hip-hop, both have identical societal connotations and stereotypes that allow a focus on hip-hop's origins and its stereotypes.

Elements of rap lyrics, such as aggressiveness, sexual misconduct, and violence, may suggest that the musicians and listeners' characters are represented by the lyrics [2,4]. Although these negative connotations are heard in a large majority of hip-hop, the issue lies in the stereotyping of individuals involved in this genre of music, causing many to be unable to separate an art form from the personalities of the artists and audience. The process of making the music may also have a role in its reception, as hip-hop music tends to be made more digitally, using digital synthesizers and effects on a computer, such as autotune, giving it a more artificial, yet modern feel. However, genres, such as classical music, employ strictly tangible, "real" instruments, with little digital musicality, promoting a more authentic sound. Furthermore, stereotyping does not exist solely in hip-hop, as many associate pop music with conformism and a struggle with acceptance, while heavy metal is said to reflect depression, self-harm, and suicidal ideation [2].

Undoubtedly, these stereotypes common in modern society are detrimental to overall attitudes toward music. In recent years, despite the large amount of music available digitally, many listeners limit themselves to two or three genres and have become "unable to tolerate music outside their preferred taste" [5]. Societal identities associated with certain genres have been cited to even impact the way people listen to music; specifically, some people tend to prefer classical because it's associated with intelligence, or rock music because they wish to rebel against the system [2].

The aim of this research was to analyze responses to contrasting genres of music. By conducting this study in real time, the researcher hoped to accurately analyze the responses to vastly contrasting genres when the participants heard the music. The participants had a wide age range, and the genres used—hip-hop (rap) and classical—are considered to have opposite emotions associated with each. The study hoped to determine if presumed stereotypes connected with music types affected participants' responses and behaviors, and if so, how large were these effects.

2. Methods and Data

The research was an observational, qualitative study that examined the reactions of visitors to a local park to contrasting genres of music (Fig.1). The study took place over a three-week period in November 2020 in a neighborhood located southwest of Houston, TX. As the researcher, a 17-year-old male of South Asian descent, jogged around the neighborhood, he played two distinct genres of music out loud: hip-hop and classical orchestral music. Passersby were observed on how they reacted to the music from their facial expressions, changes in behaviors, and body language.

The study was conducted six times over a three-week period on various days of the week between 4:30 and 5:30 p.m. Each type of music, hip-hop and classical music, was played for thirty minutes at a time and the time slot in which they were played was changed each outing to eliminate any bias. For example, if hip-hop were played from 4:30 to 5:00 and classical from 5:00 to 5:30 one day, the next day classical would be played from 4:30 to 5:00 and hip-hop from 5:00 to 5:30. The researcher took the same route each outing to eliminate any discrepancies, and this path included the busiest areas of the neighborhood and the trail around the neighborhood lake (Figure). The route was also chosen so that the researcher could complete two rounds of the path in around thirty minutes, so the distance travelled for both genres of music was the same. Each subject was encountered only once; all encounters included music.

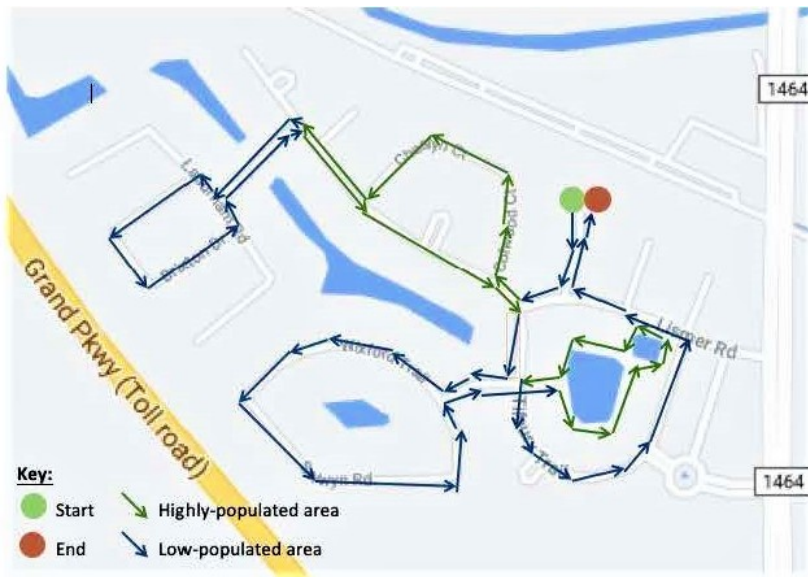


Fig. 1. Jogging route taken by the researcher during study.
 Source: the authors' creation using Google maps (<https://maps.google.com>)

The genres of music chosen were hip-hop and classical due to their contrasting stereotypes and overall societal reputations [2]. However, a distinction had to be made when choosing the specific songs, since both of these genres cover such a vast variety of music. The hip-hop songs chosen was mostly “old-school” type of rap, a subgenre that focuses on lyricism and is more known for its “rapping” (rhythmic talking) when compared to melodic and trap rap that have elements of singing and pop woven in. This rap subgenre is more associated with the aggressive and “grimy” connotation stereotypically given to hip-hop, while the latter subgenres may be confused with pop music and were not used as often as they could change the reactions of the participants. Similarly, the classical music used was chosen for its calm atmosphere as well as its orchestral distinction that is usually associated with orchestral music, such as baroque music [6]. The researcher did not use modern orchestral music such as movie soundtracks due to other musical genres’ potential influence. The researcher played the music through a digital format, using the music software Spotify (<https://www.spotify.com>) and YouTube (<https://youtube.com>) to access the songs. Finally, the volume of the music was kept around the same for both genres at a decibel level of 100 to 115 (a leaf blower operates at around 115 decibels).

The data for this study were collected during each outing. As the researcher jogged by, he took note of the estimated age and ethnicity of the participants as well as their facial expressions, body language, and any changes in behavior, specifically movements. The researcher broke down each passerby interaction with the music as positive, negative, or neutral using uniform criteria, e.g., smiling and eye contact would be a positive response, no eye contact or no change would be a neutral response, and unfriendly body language and frowns would be a negative response. Additional observations included whether the bystanders moved to the side, stopped, or continued walking, and if they moved to the side, how far and how fast. Their facial expressions were also considered, recording movements and variances in their eyebrows, mouths, and noses to gauge their emotions [7]. The researcher attempted to make eye contact to better observe the facial readings of the participants and to keep observation consistent. Last, any change in body language was noted, such as

holding their children tighter or crossing their arms [8]. One important characteristic of body language is positioning; an inviting and open person will often point his or her body and feet toward the other person, while someone more closed will tend to point away [8]. These methods were used to effectively allow the researcher to draw educated guesses about the participants' true reactions to the different genres of music.

The differences between gender, age groups, and ethnic/racial groups were analyzed using Fisher exact tests. P values \leq to 0.05 were considered statistically significant.

3. Results

This study included 39 subjects (22 males and 17 females). The estimated ages included 18 subjects less than 40 years old and 21 subjects older than 40 years. The ethnicities are reported in the Table. Nine passersby had positive responses to music, 13 passersby had neutral responses, and 17 passersby had negative responses.

The response to classical music differed significantly between men and women ($p=0.0162$) (Table 1). About 41.7% men had a positive response to classical music; 0% of women had a positive response ($p=0.040$). The response to classical music differed significantly between passersby < 40 and those ≥ 40 years old. About 41.7% of those ≥ 40 years old had a positive response, while 0% of those < 40 years old had a positive response ($p=0.001$). In addition, people from different ethnic groups differed significantly in response to classical music ($p=0.002$). For example, people from South Asia differed significantly from those in the other groups ($p=0.005$), and only about 6.7% of the people from South Asia had a positive response, while the percentage was 57.1% for the other groups combined ($p=0.021$). There was no evidence that the response to hip-hop (rap) music differed among the age, gender, and ethnicity groups. Table 1 summarizes the responses to classical music and hip-hop music. There are significant differences within the subgroups to classical music but not to hip-hop music.

Table 1. Responses to classical music and hip-hop music

	Classical music responses				Hip-hop music responses			
	Positive	Neutral	Negative	P value	Positive	Neutral	Negative	P value
Gender								
Male	5	5	2	0.0162	4	1	5	0.074
Female	0	3	7		0	4	3	
Age								
<40	0	2	8	0.001	3	1	4	0.320
≥ 40	5	6	1		1	4	4	
Ethnicity								
Caucasian	2	0	0	0.002	0	0	1	0.337
African-American	1	0	0		1	0	0	
South Asian	1	5	9		0	3	3	
East Asian	1	3	0		3	2	4	

Source: Self-development by the authors.

Tables 2 and 3 include more information about individual responses to hearing music in the park. For example, two separate passersby stared at the researcher for a considerable amount of time with a look of wonder, often smiling, when they heard the classical music.

Table 2. Results when hip-hop music played

Description of participant	Changes in behaviors and movements	Facial expressions	Body language	Other factors
40-50-year-old woman of South-Asian descent	Kept walking straight; did not change pace or move	Put head down, avoided eye contact	No significant change in body language	--
30-40-year-old man of African-American descent	Moved to the side, but this can be attributed to the two dogs he was walking	Made eye contact, smiled	No significant change in body language	Was walking two large dogs
20-30-year-old East Asian couple	Moved to other side of the street when researcher approached; after the researcher also crossed the street, the couple once again crossed back	Did not make eye contact	Walked faster	Wearing masks, avoidance could be attributed to COVID-related fears
40-50-year-old woman of South-Asian descent	No significant change	Made eye contact, smiled	No significant change	--
40-50-year-old East-Asian man	No significant change	Glaring eyes	Hands behind his back, uninviting demeanor	--
Mother (40) and daughter (15-18) of South-Asian descent	Stopped walking, moved to the side	Avoided eye contact, no other change	Body language signified avoidance, faced away from researcher	The pair stopped walking and gave way to the researcher around 10 yards in advance
7-12-year-old East-Asian males (2)	Stopped their activity- basketball	Intrigued, curious; staring, open mouths	Stopped activity, but otherwise no significant change	Were playing basketball in their driveway
40-50-year-old woman of East-Asian descent	No significant change	No eye contact, kept looking straight	No significant change	--
40-50-year-old woman of South-Asian descent	No significant change	No significant change (Was looking down before, continued to do so)	No significant change	--
60-70-year-old man of East-Asian descent	Slowed walking down	Made eye contact, smiled	Body language seemed friendlier than most participants, opened up to the researcher	Used a cane and consistently stopped when walking
30-40-year-old Caucasian man	No significant change	Made eye contact, and smile, but very briefly	Unfriendly body language,	Seemed to be in a rush
40-50-year-old South-Asian man	Turned away and moved away from researcher	Disgusted: scowl, wrinkled nose	Crossed arms	Not on the sidewalk, but in his yard with his family (wife, elderly woman, and three children) nearby
40-50-year-old East-Asian man	Slowed walking down	Glaring eyes, frown; continued to stare at researcher after he passed	Unfriendly, pointed away	--
14-18-year-old East-Asian male	No significant change	Brief eye contact	No significant change	Riding electric scooter

Table 2 reports the responses to hearing hip-hop music.

Table 3. Results when classical music was played

Description of Participant	Changes in behaviors/ movements	Facial Expressions	Body language	Other factors
40-50-year-old East-Asian woman	No significant change	Looked down	No significant change	-
40-50-year-old woman with daughter (15-18), South-Asian	Walked closer together, moved to the side	Looked away	Uninviting body language, turned away	-
60-70-year-old man of South-Asian descent	Walked faster	Made eye contact, smiled	No significant change	-
50-60-year-old Caucasian man	Waved	Smiled, made eye contact	Open, friendly body language, waved, positioned towards researcher	Walking small dog
40-50-year-old East-Asian man	Stopped activity (watering plants)	Stared, but facial expressions showed surprise/awe	No significant change	Was watering plants in his garden, stopped as researcher ran by
13-20-year-old South-Asian male group around (5)	Did not move at all, taking up entire sidewalk	Condescending demeanor: smirks, stares, laughter once researcher passed	Seemed to have more confident/arrogant body language: louder, puffed up chest, appeared bigger	--
40-50-year-old South-Asian man	No significant change	No eye contact, or smile	No significant change	Was putting up Christmas decorations
40-50-year-old Caucasian man	Abruptly halted walking	Stared, but facial expressions showed surprise/awe: grinning, made eye contact, smiled	Continued to stare after researcher had passed	--
60-70-year-old African-American Man	No significant change	Smiled, made eye contact, friendly	Open and inviting	Spoke to researcher, "Hi, how are you doing"
40-50-year-old South-Asian woman	Moved to the side	Avoided eye contact, kept talking	No significant change	--
2 40-50-year-old South-Asian men	Moved off the sidewalk to the road	Made eye contact, did not smile	Were not friendly, but also were not rude	--
7-12-year-old East-Asian males (2)	No significant change	No significant change	No significant change	Were riding bikes
30-40-year-old South-Asian man	Moved closer to children, more wary of kids	Smiled, made eye contact	Closed, uninviting body language, but did not seem rude	With wife and 2 children
40-50-year-old woman of South-Asian descent	Walked faster	Put head down, avoiding eye contact	No significant change	--
15-18-year-old South-Asian male	Walked by faster	No eye contact, condescending/snotty facial expression: smirk, slightly squinted eyebrows	No significant change	Using phone

Source: Self-development by the authors.

Table 3 reports the responses to hearing classical music.

4. Discussion

This study included 39 individuals who unexpectedly heard loud music when visiting a local park. These individuals were characterized by gender, estimated age, and assumed ethnicity. They were exposed to either classical music or rap music, and the responses were rated as positive, neutral, or negative. Men and older individuals had positive responses to classical music. South Asian individuals had negative responses to classical music. There was no statistically significant pattern of response to rap music when analyzed by gender, age, or ethnicity. The researcher's hypothesis that rap would elicit more negative responses and classical music more positive responses seemed to hold fairly true for older passersby but not for younger passersby. These contrasting results can best be explained by the time period in which each generation grew up. The music people listen to in their adolescent years probably affects their music tastes throughout life [5]. The younger passersby had very likely grown up with this rap music and were unaffected and even enjoyed it, but they stereotyped classical music as boring and uninteresting [2]. Although the older passersby did not necessarily grow up with classical music, the music of the 70s and 80s more closely resembles this music, and these individuals often have negative reactions to modern rap's vulgarity [2].

The ethnicities of the passersby may have had a significant role in the interpretation of music. The majority of participants were Asian, but the responses to music were not uniform in these 2 groups. The sample size for African-Americans and Caucasians was small, but most of these individuals seemed to have positive responses. In fact, these ethnic groups had the most amicable reactions with one man waving and another talking to the researcher. None of the other participants portrayed this sense of comfort and friendliness to the researcher.

Examining the demographics of the passersby who reacted to the music, there were clear differences in ethnicity. The most common ethnicity was South-Asian, described primarily as people from India, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bhutan, Myanmar, and Bangladesh. The second largest ethnic group was East Asian-China, Mongolia, North and South Korea, Japan and Taiwan. The preponderance of Asians as compared to the number of Caucasian and African-American participants can be attributed to the locality and neighborhood. This area southwest of Houston is quite diverse. The local high school demographics skews 42% Asian students with 21% White students [9].

This difference in neighborhood ethnicity may have altered the results of the study. The Caucasian and African-American participants seemed to have overall more positive responses, and the large majority of Asians may have contributed to the large number of negative and neutral responses seen in the study. This could be because hip-hop/rap originated in America and in countries with a large African population, such as Jamaica, and is widely appreciated in North America. However, this genre has only recently been gaining popularity in Eastern countries, such as India, China, and South Korea. It is still not accepted nor appreciated completely in these countries, potentially contributing to the negative connotation associated with it [10].

Other studies have used somewhat similar methods to investigate responses to music. Susino and Schubert at the University of New South Wales in Sydney (UNSW), Australia, studied emotional responses to genres commonly associated with negative emotions, specifically heavy metal and hip-hop [11]. Their study monitored the emotional responses of 238 participants as the researchers played 8 different excerpts of heavy metal, hip-hop, and a control genre, pop. The participants responded to hip-hop and heavy metal vastly differently from pop, claiming that the former genres incited feelings of anger and disgust while the latter induced happiness as well as sadness [11]. This study used pop music as a control to contrast with hip-hop and heavy metal music; however, pop as a genre itself has similarities to hip-hop,

especially for older adults, thus this comparison may not provide an adequate control for comparing the responses to the music [2]. In addition, the participants in the study were all students of UNSW, resulting in a narrow age range that could possibly skew the data. Last, the participants were not observed or tested in real time; participants reported their own emotional responses, which could be subject to bias, and reported these responses "on their own time" after the music was listened to, creating results that may not be completely accurate [11].

This study demonstrates that ethnicity has a very clear association with music preference. The most obvious explanation for this involves a cultural background of ethnic groups. When individuals have a limited acquaintance with a particular music genre, their attitudes are likely neutral at best. However, if the music genre is associated with certain social activities, then the individual may have a stereotypical uninformed response to the music. These differences in attitude and understanding lead to important social questions.

Rabinowitch and others have discussed the potential for music to effect social change [12]. He notes that music and language co-evolved as methods to communicate emotionally and provide a foundation for social interaction. In addition, he notes that music is often used to resolve conflicts. Consequently, he suggested that groups and communities should use music as a basis to improve social interaction and consequently social cohesiveness. Various approaches to this process could include community events in which music is played and discussed and community events in which participants dance and or create music. The evolution of digital technology has provided excellent methods for processing and storing music; digital devices are extremely convenient for use in social activities, educational programs, and research projects.

This small project demonstrates that there are easily available opportunities to use music as a vehicle for social change. Reactions to rap music and classical music fell into predictable categories based on age: older passersby favored classical music while younger participants reacted positively to rap music. In this case, music served to divide a community rather than providing a shared experience. Constantin Koopman of the Amsterdam School of the Arts suggests (2007) a program of "community music" designed to educate a diverse population on a variety of musical genres [13]. He maintains that community music provides a collective experience, promotes the wellbeing of participants, and allows for personal growth. Koopman points out that although many people in a community may not have experience in music-making, programs and activities can be tailored to appeal to a diverse population. He insists that there is a direct connection between musical values and individual and social development, "Social skills can increase as people collectively collaborate in challenging musical environments...there will be much interaction, exchange of ideas and experiences, [and] substantial and ongoing discussion" [13].

The potential value of music as a method to establish social connections has been considered in film and in literature. "The Visitor", an award-winning movie starring Richard Jenkins (2007), illustrates the effect community-based music has on an introverted professor. Walter Vale is a White, middle-aged widower who teaches in a small college in Connecticut while maintaining an apartment in New York City. Scheduled to speak at a conference in the city, he discovers that his apartment has been clandestinely rented to an immigrant couple. Tarek, a drummer from Syria, and his girlfriend Zaineb, a jewelry designer from Senegal, are in the United States illegally and are understandably concerned that they will be turned over to the police. Walter, however, invites them to stay, at least temporarily. Although from diverse backgrounds, the three settle into an amiable friendship. Tarek teaches Walter to play the drums; they join a multicultural "drum circle" in Central Park where Walter discovers joy in the kind of collective music-making Koopman promotes.

Alexander McCall Smith presents a similar experience in his novel *La's Orchestra Saves the World* (2008). Lavender moves to rural Suffolk to escape the London Blitz but feels unmoored and isolated within her new locale. Her love of music prompts her to organize a community orchestra, bringing together young and old, men and women, from not only her small village but also from several surrounding farms and a nearby military base. "Music was her refuge. There was madness abroad...Reason, beauty, harmony: these were ultimately more real and powerful than any of the demons unleashed by dictators." [14]. She reassures reluctant participants that "Nobody in this one will be any good" and scrounges for instruments. Eventually the motley group gives concerts, prompting a reviewer to gush, "They may be amateurs, but they are determined. And what spirit they have!" [14]. After Victory in Europe Day, La and her orchestra play a Victory Concert to commemorate not only the end of WWII but also to remember the various orchestra members who lost their lives in combat. Years later, one former member tells her that her orchestra "saved the world" by bringing hope and comfort to a community under duress. As Koopman maintains, "...a group of community musicians is more than the sum of the individuals taking part." [13].

5. Limitations

Due to COVID-19 restrictions as well as a lack of resources available to the researcher, only one neighborhood was studied. While this does produce data pertinent to the community and surrounding localities, the results may not reflect human reactions to various genres of music as a whole.

One major shortcoming was the small sample size of participants. Due to the pandemic, the multiple outings by the researcher resulted in only 39 encounters total. The number of people walking outside was lower than normal, and the dropping temperature (the average high was 73°F, the average low was 62°F) further contributed to fewer passersby. A larger sample size would have increased confidence and accuracy in the results. Furthermore, the social distancing standards during the pandemic may have also led to some misrepresentation in the data. A few of the observations showed participants clearly avoiding the researcher multiple times, as in the "young East-Asian couple" in the supplementary tables. Although their avoidance action was interpreted as an adverse reaction to the music, this may have been a precautionary measure taken due to the pandemic.

The timeframe for study observations may have affected the research. The researcher was jogging, and crossing of the paths between the researcher and the participant happened for a few seconds, which may not be enough time for all participants to accurately assess the music and react to it. Furthermore, the participants were not informed about this study to prevent priming of any stereotypes, so many "neutral cases" may have been the participant ignoring the music, or, once again, not completely registering the genre and effectively reacting to it. Another factor that could have affected the research is the researcher himself, a 17-year-old South Asian male. This could have affected the ways in which passersby reacted. The aggressiveness and violence of rap music has a stronger connection to teenage and young adult males more so than to females, potentially contributing to the reactions observed. The responses may have been different if the researcher had been a female or an older male.

6. Conclusions

This study demonstrates the effect that different music genres can have on the public and identifies diversity in music preference. Furthermore, a fundamental result

was the often-contrasting reactions from different age groups. This creates more discussions on how the culture of the participants and the music popular during their adolescence can affect their tastes and reactions to music [5]. The specific differences in various ethnic groups pose intriguing questions about how background and childhood experiences can impact reactions to different music genres.

The study provides a simple approach for identifying music preferences and community perception of music and how culture can affect discernment. Music preferences, in part, reflect cultural diversity, and organizing community events to hear and discuss different music genres could provide an approach to better understand cultural diversity and improve social interactions.

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Aims and Objectives

Published online by Institute of Certified Specialists twice a year, **Journal of Digital Art & Humanities (JDAH)** is an international peer-reviewed journal which **aims** at the latest ideas, innovations, trends, experiences and concerns in the field of the digital arts & humanities. JDAH bridges humanitarian, artistic, and scientific disciplines, allowing author(s) to express the views on the subjects studied using modern digital/information technology. It is a nexus for information exchange among academia and industry addressing theory, criticism, and practice. The effective dissemination of original ideas/results generated by the human brain and presented/reflected in articles created using modern information/digital technology is **the main objective of JDAH**.

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