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### MUSIC ABSORPTION AND SERENITY IN MUSIC LISTENERS: INTERVENING ROLE OF SPIRITUALITY

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**Muhammad Faran, Naima Hussan, Amna Khawar, Bisma Ejaz, Nudra Malik, Imran  
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#### ABSTRACT

The current research study investigated the relationship between music absorption, spirituality, and wellbeing in university students. It was hypothesized that there is likely to be a positive relationship between music absorption spirituality and wellbeing, and spirituality will mediate the relationship between music absorption and wellbeing. It was co-relational research with a cross-sectional design. The data from 165 university students (70 men, 95 women) were collected from different universities with the age range of 20-30 ( $M = 21.73$ ,  $SD = 1.73$ ), and a purposive sampling technique was used. Music absorption scale (AIMS) (Sandstrom, Russo, 2011), expression of spirituality inventory (ESI) (MacDonald, 2000), brief wellbeing scale (BSS) (Kreitzer, Mary Jo, et al., 2009), and short test of music preference (STOMP) (Rentfrow & Gosling 2013) were used as measurement tools. The Pearson product-moment correlation analysis revealed music absorption to be significantly positively correlated with wellbeing and spirituality. It was also found to be significantly positively correlated with music absorption and wellbeing. The result of mediation analysis (indirect effect) showed that spirituality as significant a mediator between music absorption and wellbeing. It is concluded that music

along with spirituality or spiritual healing technique, can be very helpful in various psychological treatments.

It has been observed that Music listening became a common practice nowadays, and the use of music listening is seemingly growing. Listening to music has specific outcomes, so as well, spirituality and spiritual practices have merits. The current research study focused on understanding the relation between music absorption, how one gets him or herself engaged in the music, and how music absorption leads to wellbeing. The state of discontinuation of worries and stress can be called a state of wellbeing (Roberts & Cunningham, 1990). Spirituality was, on the other hand, a second component of finding its relation with wellbeing lastly, how spirituality plays its role between music absorption and wellbeing.

### ***Music Absorption***

Music absorption is the term used that explains how one gets so much involved in the music. The deep engagement in music listening, some type of music, creates a connection or discontinuation from one dimension to another. The deep connection with music enables a certain state of mind. A person could feel energetic, sad, depressed, peaceful, and other emotional changes, depending on the type of music, and association one has with that piece of music. According to the type and interest, the outcome of music listening in people results differently (Schäfer, 2016). People with many reasons lean towards music listening. This might either be out of interest in music listening, vocals, vocalist or instrument being played. Some people with a specific background or experience get in touch with the music. There could be several reasons for listening and getting oneself too involved in it. It is said to be one of the defense mechanisms used to neutralize stress and anxiety (Cardeña, 1994).

### ***Spirituality***

In terms of understanding, spirituality is an inclusive perspective and can be seen through different dimensions. It is said to be something that is experienced by humans universally and helps us understand the concept of self and the significance of life (Puchalski, Ferrell, et al., 2009). Spirituality revolves around the understanding that there is a connection of self with something greater, something beyond the human body's approach (Lombard, 2017). Religiosity sometimes associated with spirituality, another way of understanding it through the medium of religious practices. Although it is not just limited to religiosity, different practices can be seen, such as meditation (Miller, 1999), nursing and healthcare (Soeken & Carson, 1986). Spirituality is also not limited to a single religion or race, but it is a universally accepted phenomenon and shared in much popular religion such as Islam, Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Christianity. In conclusion, spirituality is more an individual's beliefs and subjective experiences that connect them to something greater, a higher power out beyond the reach of this world (Miller, 2014).

### ***Wellbeing***

Wellbeing can be called a state of being untroubled, calm, and tranquil (Oxford, 2017). It is also referred to as having internal peace experienced by some

individuals (Roberts & Cunningham, 2006) and being in a place to feel inner peace and comfort (Liebman, 1946).

### *Hypotheses*

1. There is likely to be a relationship between music absorption and spirituality in university students.
2. Music absorption is likely to predict wellbeing.
3. Spirituality is likely to predict wellbeing.
4. Spirituality is likely to mediate the relationship between music absorption and wellbeing.

## **METHOD**

### *Sample*

Non-Probability sampling technique was employed to collect the data ( $N = 165$ ) from different public and private university students (men=70, women=95) with the age range of 20-30 years ( $M = 21.73$ ,  $SD = 1.73$ ).

### *Instruments*

**Absorption in Music Scale (AIMS).** The scale used in the current study is a 34-Item music absorption scale (Sandstrom, Russo, 2011) that measures person's capacity to let the music draw them into personal or emotional experiences. All the questions express a positive trend. Sample Items are "When I listen to music, I can get so caught up in it that I don't notice anything", "Sometimes I almost feel as if a song was written especially for/about me". The items represent the engagement towards music. The one lost the track and often feels that the specific piece of music is or song is made for him or her especially. The responses were made on a 5-point-Likert Type scale, measuring from 1 to 5, from 1=strongly disagree and 5=strongly agree. Scores are summed across the items to find the total score. The total score ranged from 46 to 164. The Cronbach alpha ( $\alpha$ ) ranges from 0.92 to 0.94.

**The Expressions of Spirituality Inventory.** A revised version of the 30-Items scale ESI (MacDonald, 2000) was used for the current study. The scale measures spirituality under six factors. Cognitive orientation towards Spirituality 6-Items, experiential/phenomenological dimension 6-Items. Existential wellbeing under 6-Items, paranormal beliefs and religiousness each under 6-Items. The responses were 4-point-Likert type scale from 0 to 4, under which 0=Strongly disagree, and 4=strongly agree. The total score for each factor ranged from 0 to 24. The Cronbach alpha ( $\alpha$ ) under-five dimension of ESI was 0.97, 0.91, 0.85, 0.91, and 0.91 for Cognitive orientation towards spirituality, experiential/phenomenological dimension, and existential wellbeing paranormal beliefs, and religiousness dimension, respectively.

**Brief Wellbeing Scale (BSS).** The scale used in the current study is the 22-Items self-reporting scale (Kreitzer et al., 2009). Accumulated value measures individuals' wellbeing (a sustain inner peace). Item response was formed 1 to 5,

Never to always, respectively. A higher score represents a higher level of wellbeing. Sample items are "I am aware of an inner source of comfort, strength, and security", "I experience an inner quiet that does not depend on events". The items represent how and an individual feel towards him or herself regarding inner peace and comfort. The total accumulated ranged score is from 39-110. The item response was form 1=never to 5=always. Cronbach alpha ( $\alpha$ ) was 0.95. **Short test of music preference (STOMP).** The questionnaire used for the current research consists of a 14-item scale (Rentfrow & Gosling 2003), asking participants' music preference through different music genres. Sample items are "Classic", "folk", and "Religious". 7-point Likert-type scale was used under which 1= strongly dislike to 7 = like. Cronbach alpha ( $\alpha$ ) value across songs for each attribute was, general = 0.90, lyrics = 0.79, and music = 0.79.

### *Procedure*

Initially, data from 30 students was collected for the pilot study under the participants' permission and willingness to fill the questionnaire. Inform consent was taken from each participant. It took average 15-20 minutes for each student to fill out the questionnaire. Same procedure was used after the Pilot study with the improved questionnaire for collection of the actual data. Total 280 questionnaires were distributed on different days and intervals, out of which 165 responses were correct. Incorrect questionnaires were excluded.

**Table 1**

Variables	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
<b>1 Music Absorption</b>	.46* *	.30* *	.48**	-.36**	.24**	.30**	.37**
<b>2 Spirituality</b>	-	.75* *	.80**	-.69**	.68**	.71**	.45**
3 Cognitive Orientation		-	.66**	-.27**	.37**	.57**	.49**
4 Experiential Dimension			-	-.42**	.47**	.46**	.44**
5 Existential Wellbeing				-	-.40**	-.31**	-.09
6 Paranormal Beliefs					-	.43**	.19*
7 Religiousness						-	.36**
<b>8 Wellbeing</b>							-

Correlation between Music Absorption, Spirituality, and Wellbeing (N=165) Note.

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$

Results presented in Table 2 revealed that reflective and complex, upbeat and conventional music was found to be positively and significantly correlated with wellbeing. Whereas age, gender, music listening, the music playing was found to have not significantly correlated with wellbeing. Music duration, per week and per day was found to have no correlation with wellbeing.

## RESULTS

Pearson Product Moment correlation was carried out to determine the relationship between Music absorption, spirituality and wellbeing.

The results (Table 1) showed that music absorption was positively and significantly correlated with spirituality and its sub-domains, i.e., cognitive orientation, experiential dimension, paranormal beliefs, religiousness, and wellbeing. At the same time, music absorption was found to be significantly negatively associated with existential wellbeing. Spirituality was found to be significantly and positively correlated with wellbeing. The subdomains of spirituality, i.e., cognitive orientation, experiential dimension, paranormal beliefs, and religiousness, were positively significantly correlated with wellbeing. At the same time, existential wellbeing (a subdomain of spirituality) was found to be non-significantly associated with wellbeing.

### *Correlation Among Demographic Variables*

**Table 2** Correlation among Demographic Variables and Wellbeing (N=165).

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1 Age	-	.14	-.00	.05	.04	-.11	.01	-.11	.04	-.03	.09
2 Gender		-	.02	.05	.17*	-.06	.15	-.13	-.04	-.09	.12
3 Per Day			-	.25**	.17*	.07	.05	.14	-.01	.12	-.07
4 Per Week				-	.05	.14	-.07	-.06	-.05	.01	-.09
5 Play Music					-	.39* *	.18 *	.01	.01	-.00	.09
6 Singing						-	.08	.10	.07	.17*	.14
7 Reflective and Complex							-	.39* *	.48**	.32* *	.20*
8 Intense and Rebellious								-	.53**	.50* *	.14
9 Upbeat and conventional									-	.53* *	.21**
10 Energetic Rhythmic										-	.07
11 Wellbeing											-

Note. \*p<.05, \*\*p<.

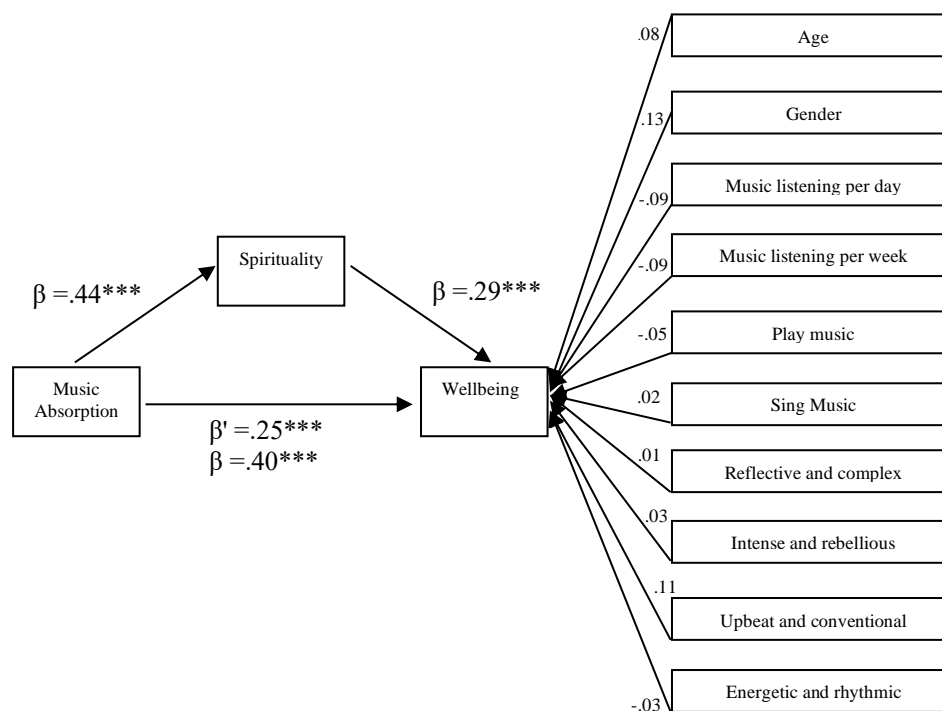
**Table 3** Mediation Analysis between Music Absorption and Wellbeing through Spirituality (N=165)

Antecedent	Consequent					
	Spirituality			Wellbeing		
	<i>Coeff.</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>Coeff</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>
<b>Constant</b>	.00	.07	1.00	.00	.06	1.00
Music absorption	.44	.07	.001	.25	.09	.001
Spirituality	-	-	-	.29	.08	.006
<b>Controls</b>						
Age				.08	.07	.255
Gender				.13	.07	.081
Music listening per day				-.09	.07	.209
Music listening per week				-.09	.07	.201
Play Music				-.05	.08	.479
Sing Music				.02	.07	.126
Reflective and Complex				.01	.08	.907
Intense and Rebellious				.03	.08	.736
Upbeat and Conventional				.11	.09	.237
Energetic and Rhythmic				-.13	.08	.138
	$R^2 = .200$			$R^2 = .289$		
	$F(1,163) = 40.68, p < .001$			$F(12,152) = 5.157, p < .001$		

**Note:** Coeff= standardized regression coefficient

The mediation indicated that music absorption was found to be a significant positive predictor of spirituality and wellbeing. Whereas spirituality was also significantly positively predicted wellbeing. Simultaneously, spirituality was found to be a significant mediator between music absorption and wellbeing (effect= .13 bootLL =0.05, bootUL =1.01). That showed that an increase in music absorption tends to increase spirituality, while increased spirituality in turns increase wellbeing. Furthermore, reflective & complex, upbeat and conventional, intense and rebellious, energetic and rhythmic music, and singing were significant positive predictors of wellbeing.

Figure 1 shows the mediation analysis results. Spirituality was found to be significant mediator of the relationship between music absorption and wellbeing.

**Figure 1** The Statistical Model of Mediation Analysis**Figure 1.** Path model showing spirituality mediating the relationship between music absorption and wellbeing.

## DISCUSSION

Current research study was conducted to investigate if music listening or getting profound engagement in the music listening has any association with spirituality and wellbeing. Moreover, the question that is it just the music absorption that causes spirituality or certain type of music listening leads to spirituality and that type also leads to wellbeing.

The current research study has two folds, in the first fold relationship were investigated. Secondly, the mediatory role of spirituality was discussed in the light of existing literature, theory and background. The results revealed that music absorption had significant positive correlation with cognitive orientation a factor of spirituality. A study in psychological and neuroscientific research reveals that the relationship between musical training with understanding of sound, and development in spoken as well as the reasoning abilities, (Miendlarzewska & Trost, 2013). Thus, the music listening may help in the development of cognitive orientation.

The second factor of spirituality, the experiential dimension, also had a significant positive correlation with music absorption. Experiential dimension is said to one out of the seventh dimensions of religion. It is a very broad perspective and widely studied under the subject of theology. Experiential or emotional dimension, the ritual practices and prayers and all the ways of worship, the divine direct experience and the attachment. Provides protection, inner peace, revelation and libration, (Smart, 1999). Thus, experiential aspect

and music has positive association. So, music or religious music listening provides the window to be familiar with experiential aspects or to somewhat experience it through the medium of music. The experiential dimension can also be achieved through the influential musical experience known as transcendence, (Clayton, Herbert, & Middleton, 2003).

Existential wellbeing is the third factor of spirituality had no significant association with music. In fact, more one gets his/herself involved in the music lesser he/she is going to have the existential wellbeing and vice versa. Existential wellbeing is said to be someone's current state of wellbeing on the surface of existence, (Ownsworth & Nash, 2015). A philosophical theory about existentialism suggests that it is human ideology of self-libration and search of sense and purposefulness, (Yalom, 1980). Music in sense does not provide any grounds for someone to find existential wellbeing. Under this circumstance music is not facilitating the purpose of existential wellbeing though, the ideology of human's self-libration and purposefulness can be attained through some sort of music that energizes them a kind of music that invokes for internal self and the internal freedom of self under some circumstances. Under our cultural perspectives if we look closely to components of existential wellbeing, which are denoted as the purpose of life and the understanding the notion of satisfaction, (Spar & Munoz, 2014). Thus, music may not be the appropriate medium for existential wellbeing keeping in view the existential experiences.

The fourth factor of spirituality is paranormal beliefs, paranormal is described as some events and phenomena that cannot be rationalized or is beyond the basic principles of science, thus could not be justified. According to the Oxford references, it is something apart from normal and cannot be explained by the scientific laws. Music had a positive significant correlation with paranormal beliefs. Some genres of music are associated with paranormal beliefs, studies conducted under Nihilistic adolescents suggests that some specific type of music listening leads to paranormal, (Lawrence, 2016) which include Heavy metal rock music. Music serves as element of social organism, the popular music becomes the sound of the grownups, (Chesebro, Foulger, Nachman, andYannelli, 1985).

Religiousness, the fifth factor in the spirituality scales which appeared to have a significant positive correlation with music. In our cultural perspective religiousness and music apparently have no significant association. Musical instruments have no significant use in our archetypal religio-cultural system, though the diversity in religions around here and its sub divisions are not to be neglected, as this study does not focus the religion from which the respondent belongs to, but it's the lived experience measured through the scale. Religiousness can be demonstrated as the closeness or attachment with some religion through different religious practices. Religiousness is in terms of understanding with different perspective could be a person's approach to have the faith in divine and practices he/she offers towards that certain religion and connectedness towards the high power, (Jordan, Masters, Hooker, Ruiz, & Smith, 2014). Music, a certain type which we sometime refer to as religious or sacred music, differ with respect to the terminology and the way it is played or



performed could be one of the practices of religion. Sufi music is one example of such practices.

Results revealed that spirituality has a positive significant associate with wellbeing. Based on the previous researches and literature review on wellbeing and the related experiences such as inner peace, trance, and tranquility, a research study presented found that spirituality has many dimensional aspects that works on oneness and interdependence. The ultimate goal of the study is to remove the worthlessness and to have spiritual state of calmness and trance, (Chan, Ng, Ho, & Chow, 2006). Some spiritual practices take human experiences at certain level that they feel, relaxed with no stressed and worries. The particular spiritual experience can be denoted as "spiritual transcendence". Results are in line with the existing study conducted to see the relationship between spirituality and affect revealed, spirituality had positive association with wellbeing and other researched variables (Kim, Seidlitz, Ro, Evinger, & Duberstein, 2004).

Spirituality has been measured under five factors; cognitive orientation is the first factor contributing in the measurement of spirituality. Gilet and Jallais, (2011) in a research study under mood arousal and demoted some modes as wellbeing with cognitive process of "word association". The study revealed that arousal in different mood had association with cognition. The result on the current study showed that cognitive orientation had significant positive correlation with wellbeing. Therefore, due to the similarity in the results of both the studies it can be said that cognition or cognitive orientation could become a cause of wellbeing or related experiences such as calmness, peace, tranquility etc.

Theory of Wolff, (1994) suggests, experiences directed by some sort of notion or entity are consciousness and are ordinary. The ordinary consciousness denoted as the features as the feelings, sense and metaphors. The transcendental experience is the state under which one feels the sense of completeness and autonomy, and the freedom from guilt and the absolute contentment, free from any external disturbance. The state is referred to as transcendence and wellbeing. The second factor of spirituality is experiential dimension and had a positive significant correlation with wellbeing. The theory above explains the possible relation between existential dimension, in context of spirituality, and wellbeing. The ritual performed in any religion or any other religious dimension are considered sacred, and by performing such practices one feels the sense of completeness thus the sense of no distress or discomfort and the calmness known as wellbeing. Experientiality, by Fludernik (1996) is "the quasi-mimetic evocation of real-life experience". Experiential dimension refers to as the lived experiences, spirituality or religious, under which the practices one does could be of any nature.

Existential wellbeing, being the third factor of spirituality had no significant association with wellbeing. Existential wellbeing is denoted as essential domain of subjective wellbeing (Ai et al. 2012; Ryff 2014). Altruism, on the other hand, as studies, has been associated with existential wellbeing and has its impacts on one's existential wellbeing (Poloma and Pendleton 1990;

Ryff 2014). Studies show that there could be many factors contributing in one's subjective life experiences, thus could impact their existential wellbeing. So, the cause that existential wellbeing had no correlation with wellbeing could be the factors involved in one's life impacting their wellbeing. Similar research study suggests that existential wellbeing depends upon several other factors such as "helping others" does impact the existential wellbeing of an individual (Xi, et al 2017)

Paranormal belief is the fourth factor of spirituality, found have positive significant association with wellbeing. There was no literature found in line with the results that may suggest that beliefs in occult or related phenomena have any association. Although literature suggests that paranormal beliefs does play a role in increasing the stress and anxiety (Roe & bill 2016). Belief holds significance in people's life, it feeds them well that what they think or heard is reality and the live that reality. Belief gives them comfort and ease. Belief systems are the self-told tales that provide us our very personal understanding of reality (Usó-Doménech & Nescolarde-Selva, 2016). Therefore, the beliefs we hold gives a sense of comfort even of the stories we have heard of self-taught have no meaning yet satisfies our inner-self. Lastly the fifth factor of spirituality is religiousness had positive significant association with wellbeing. The intensity and devotion towards the religion gives personal meaning and inner strength.

Music induced emotions can also cause wellbeing - emotions evoked by music, either the feeling of sadness, happiness, energetic or rhythmic has some sort of association with ones lived experience, a phenomenal connectedness. The nostalgia music creates has its deep impacts. So, the emotions induced by music somehow create the feeling of contentment by any means either by the sound of instruments, vocals or the memories it brings back from the past. The moment sound of music or lyric retrieves, either sad or happy provides inner satisfaction and bond with the event or a person. The strings attached from the past event have association with music or no association still gives significance, gratification, ease or wellbeing. Therefore, it was hypothesized that music has association with wellbeing. Experimental research study conducted revealed that Mozart's music listening leads to ease, peace and self-restored position on the other hand new age music listeners experiences relaxation and low stress (Smith & Joyce, 2004). Music absorption was found to have significant positive correlation with wellbeing as hypothesized. Research study conducted to see the relationship between music, relaxation, a self-report and the degree of liking the music. The results revealed the factor that it's the preference of music, carefully selected enhances the degree of relaxation (Valerie, Stratton, Annette & Zalanowski 1984).

The mediation analysis of the current study revealed that spirituality was significant mediator between music absorption and wellbeing. There was positive significant correlation between music absorption and spirituality also between spirituality and wellbeing. As per the reviewed literature it was suggested that music listening or engaging oneself deep into music leads to spirituality and spirituality itself leads to wellbeing. Literature also suggests that music listening does help creating wellbeing, relaxation, less distress and discomfort. In the current study spirituality is used as mediator to see of it can

increase or decrease the direct effect of music absorption on wellbeing. According to the analysis spirituality was found to play a mediatory role enhancing the effect between music

absorption and wellbeing. There was no research study found in line with the current mediation research analysis. However, spirituality as a mediator has been used on researches and results revealed that it does play a mediatory role enhancing the direct effect between the predictor and the researched variable (Temane & Wissing 2016, Jones 2009)

### ***Limitations and Suggestions***

Following are the limitations of the current study. Research was carried out and the sample of the study was taken only from the university's students, which may not provide external validity of the study. The study could be done with some large sample, and could also include other cities of Pakistan. By doing the same study in multiple cities a comparison could also be done to see the difference among people living in other cities. Only the sample of students were considered to gather the data for current study. Experimental studies should be carried out to investigate the effect of music absorption on spirituality and serenity. Gender differences could also be included. The scales could be translated into indigenous language for better understanding.

### ***Implications***

The present research will be helpful to understand that music along with spiritual healing techniques can be helpful for the treatment of many psychological issues. Music can be helpful for emotional understating and contentment. Music incorporated with therapy can be used to recalling past events from the memory. Music of certain type can be useful for relaxation and comfort, and for clear self-awareness.

### **CONCLUSION**

The current research study was conducted to find out the relationship among music absorption, spirituality and wellbeing and the mediatory role of spirituality between music absorption and wellbeing. The results revealed significant positive correlation between the three studied variables, music, Bonny (2001) suggests that of any type, as long as the listener is deeply involved can lead to spirituality and the genre, the type of music is something that also holds significance. It was also revealed that spirituality does play a mediatory role between the predictor variable, music and dependent variable wellbeing.

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