

We also show that many “melancholy” lyrics are found in songs assigned to a more cheerful mood by listeners, again suggesting that for such songs, the extent to which listeners focus on the lyrics may influence how sad they view a song to be. We analyzed the mood assignments of participants on rock and hip-hop/rap songs. We see that people tend to agree much more to the mood of a hip-hop/rap song when they are made to listen to the song. We found that for rebellious/negative rock songs lyrics leads to more agreement in music mood but audio is better for positive songs. In both the genres we found that hearing audio while reading lyrics lead to less agreement on music mood of songs.

Our results suggest that music mood is so dependent on cultural and experiential context to make it difficult to claim it as a true concept. With the classification accuracy of mood classification systems reaching a plateau with no significant improvements we suggest that we need to re-define the term “music mood” and change our approach toward music mood classification problem.

A possible extension to our work could be running a similar study using a larger set of songs and more participants, possibly from more diverse cultures than the ones we studied. Future studies could focus on multi-modal music mood classification where a song could belong to more than one mood, to see if even in this more robust domain there is a stable way to assign songs to clusters of moods when they are experienced in different contexts. We also wonder if other contextual experiments can show other effects about mood: for example, if hearing music while in a car or on public transit, or in stores, makes the “mood” of a song more uncertain.

We fundamentally also wonder if “mood” as an MIR concept needs to be reconsidered. If listeners disagree more or less about the mood of a song when it is presented alongside its lyrics, that suggests a general uncertainty in the concept of “mood”. We leave more evidence gathering about this concept to future work as well.

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