



Final Report

“The Exploration of Gen Z’s Music Preferences”

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Executive Summary

Significance of Topic

Music plays a significant role in society, shaping experiences across different contexts, from streaming platforms to background audio in social media content such as videos and reels. While music resonates with demographics of all ages, it especially resonates with Gen Z college students. The constant release of music, trending audio, and a wide range of genres has become an integral component of culture today.

Overall & Purpose

PR Unicorns collected data from Gen Z college students to learn more about their music preferences and to explore if music from older generations is resurfacing or not. The purpose of our research was to learn what Gen Z's music habits consist of, what decades students are listening to, their music preferences, etc. PR Unicorns wanted to research this to help music companies best engage college students by their marketing and sales efforts. PR Unicorns completed both qualitative and quantitative research methods including a secondary research report, focus group interview, and survey to best explore our research questions. We gathered research data regarding the amount of time participants spent listening to music, preferred decades, preferred social media platforms, favorite genres, and more.

Major Findings in Secondary Research

PR Unicorns conducted individual secondary research pertaining to our research topic of how music organizations or future music groups successfully regenerate music produced during the Gen X and Millennial decades into Gen Z media. We will be researching Sony Music Group to identify how they incorporate music from Gen X and Millennials into current media. Gen X ranges from 1965-1980, Millennials range from 1981-1996, and Gen X refers to 1997-2012. We used the data we collected from secondary research to inform and assist our other methods of research like the focus group and the

Major Findings in Focus Group Interview

All participants expressed how they thought that music today is not as unique as it once was, and that it does not sound the same as it did in previous generations, due to the trend of TikTok trends and streaming. Some participants think that older country music has more personality, compared to current country music. There was a pattern as most participants expressed that older music has more storytelling as opposed to music today being catchier and trendier. Some participants stated that they listen to music when doing tasks, rather than soothing their moods. Instead of listening to music when sad, participants stated they do not listen to music. Participants said they listen to music when doing something fun or completing work, not when they were sad. When asked what decade participants listened to, there was a variety of different responses ranging from 80s to 90s, country, pop and late 90s early 2000s hits. 80% of participants prefer Apple Music, while only 20% prefer Spotify or Soundcloud.

Major Findings in Survey

The survey results show that music plays a major role in the daily lives of Gen Z students, with almost all respondents reporting that they listen to music most of the time or always. A key finding is that music choice is heavily influenced by mood, as the vast majority of participants agreed or strongly agreed that their emotions determine what they listen to. In addition, most respondents indicated that they listen to music while doing schoolwork, suggesting it is commonly used to help with focus or productivity. The data also reveals a strong preference for modern music, particularly from the 2010s and 2020s, with very few participants regularly listening to older decades. However, the sample is not very diverse, as it consists mostly of 20–21-year-old female students, which may limit how broadly the results can be applied.

Overall Implications

To discover Gen Z's music preferences, PR Unicorns conducted a focus group interview with five to ten Auburn college students who enjoy listening to music. By conducting a focus group interview, we reached the goal of learning what decade, genre, and platforms college students prefer. Knowing more about students' interests helped us refine our research and study specific genres of music. Overall, our findings suggest that while music remains present in the daily lives of Gen Z college students, the way they engage with it is shifting. Music is used as a tool for productivity, entertainment, and enhancing experiences like studying or social activities. Based on our study, there is a clear tension between appreciation for older music's authenticity and a preference for trendy and modern songs shaped by platforms like TikTok. This indicates that although older music is respected, it is not consistently integrated into everyday listening habits. For music companies and PR professionals, this highlights the importance of blending nostalgia with modern trends. Today, re-packaging older music in ways that feel relevant, shareable, and aligned with Gen Z's fast-paced, digital consumption patterns has proven to be successful.

Secondary Research Report

Introduction & Research Questions

PR Unicorns is researching how music organizations or future music groups successfully regenerate music produced during the Gen X and Millennial decades into Gen Z media. We will be researching Sony Music Group to identify how they incorporate music from Gen X and Millennials into current media. Gen X ranges from 1965-1980, Millennials range from 1981-1996, and Gen Z refers to 1997-2012. This is an interesting topic to research because currently, in the media, there is a resurgence of music from previous decades in movies, social media, and TV shows. It is important so PR Unicorns can investigate the reason why songs produced years ago are making a comeback. PR Unicorns hope to learn more about the decade that the majority of Gen Z's music comes from. By knowing more about the decade Gen Z listens to, we hope to investigate how the genre and style of music have changed over time. We aim to learn about what Gen Z thinks about music from varying decades, to gauge their preferences based on different time periods. PR Unicorns also hope to understand what music platform people prefer to find their music on (ex. Spotify, Apple Music, TikTok, etc). Lastly, we want to know how Gen Z's mood affects their music listening habits and what they listen to. It is important to address these questions so we can learn more about Gen Z's music preferences to understand why music trending in Gen X and Millennial decades is resurfacing in Gen Z social media and TV shows.

Key Publics

The external public in this study is Gen Z college students attending Auburn University. We want to learn about the impact that resurfacing music has on college students. We hope to understand if students are aware of this, or not, and hope to investigate their music preferences. Gen Z students' characteristics vary because there are many Gen Z students. However, for this study, we are interested in learning about Gen Z students who love music, love different decades of music, varying varieties, and those who listen to music in general.

Background Research and Literature Review

Ethics

With the resurfacing of music, ethics is a concern. Specifically, most music companies require a song to be purchased or paid for with a subscription. However, illegal downloading and using music on social media platforms without consulting the copyright agreement is common because of the accessibility, but it is not okay. According to the Journal of Business Ethics article, "illegal downloading is thus of serious concern, and it has an impact on society, the economy, and the music industry, by closing stores, slowing innovation, damaging artists' careers, and displacing sales" (Robertson et. al., 2011). Since PR Unicorns are researching music that is resurfacing, we must be mindful that illegal and legal downloading exists. Copyrights are another ethical dilemma because they determine who has licensed access to a song, who can use it, and which mediums have access. According to a journal article by the University of Oklahoma College of Law, "The music industry instead focuses on the exclusive rights that copyright ownership affords, insisting that the law should vigilantly protect those rights and ensure compensation for copyright owners" (Edmondson, 2024). As PR Unicorns conduct research, we must understand

copyright and make sure that we can access music produced in Gen X and Millennial years, without violating copyright laws. This is a huge concern, especially because music can be reproduced in many ways on social media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram Reels, and SoundCloud. With TikTok and Instagram Reels, songs might be altered to fit a specific time frame or a trending audio. Being mindful of copyright issues and ethics regarding songs that are edited and altered from their original sound is important, especially when music is resurfacing today.

Literature Review

The main concerns facing this research have been narrowing down a target genre that is most affected by younger generations. Gen Z listens to every kind of music there is, so this will be our biggest issue. Once we narrow down a more specific genre, everything should flow more smoothly. We gathered in our research from various sources that an overarching theme is Gen Z's self-association with an older generation. There is a clear retro revival that is influencing consumers of all age ranges within Gen-Z. There is also a clear recognition of the cycle of trends in every age and genre. It is well known that trends exist on a cyclical level and continually come back into the cultural zeitgeist. Another source highlighted the importance of identity expression and trend loyalty over brand loyalty. This is a crucial aspect in understanding why and what Gen Z is attracted to music. This article learned that younger people are more motivated by their self-facing identity than choosing a brand that is perfect for them.

Making Edits of Published Works

Copyright laws must be adhered to when creating new music. Making edits of older works that have already been published is an issue that people in the music industry face today. The North Carolina Journal of Law and Technology states that there are at least two main issues with creating remixes; For one, "remixers face innovation-chilling risks even when fair use should apply. Second, it is hard to obtain licenses and to find copyright holders when fair use does not apply." As PR Unicorns conduct research, we must understand the risk that arises when credit is not given where it is due. Since PR Unicorns are researching the reasons why Gen Z is gravitating toward music from older generations, we must be aware of fair use, copyright landscape, and ethics in general. With Gen Z's growing interest for the resurfacing of older genres, protecting the integrity of the original works is essential. According to the North Carolina Journal of Law and Technology, "the remix debate sets an important foundation because it is clear that the digital world will continue to offer gifts of new forms of creativity and that all parties will need to work together to develop a system that compensates copyright holders without hindering these new areas of creativity." In today's digital world, it is important to respect original creators and adhere to the law.

Justification for Primary Research

Moving forward, PR Unicorns are going to conduct a focus group interview with five to ten Auburn college students who enjoy listening to music. By conducting a focus group interview, PR Unicorns will learn what decade, genre, and platforms college students prefer. By knowing more about this, it will help us focus our research on specific generations and genres to focus our study on. PR Unicorns want to get insight from students, to investigate whether they feel that there is a correlation between Gen X and Millennials' time periods into the resurfacing of Gen Z media. A focus group interview is an interactive qualitative research method that will help PR

Unicorns get new ideas and insight about college students' music preferences. By using a focus group interview, PR Unicorns can get interactive feedback from students and learn more about which decade of music they enjoy. This will also help PR Unicorns narrow their research efforts and investigate specific genres that students are listening to, in hopes to learn more about their music tastes and to learn their person opinions about music from previous decades resurfacing into mass media today.

Focus Group Interview Report

Overview & Purpose

The PR Unicorns are researching what Gen Z's preferred music decade is and what social elements impact that preference. This research is targeted largely to Generation Z, upcoming musical arts, and major recording studios. These publics are widely affected by the popularization and consumption of music in the 21st century. The purpose of our focus group interview was to gain more knowledge from our target demographic on what their music listening habits are like. Our focus group consisted of five Auburn students who were all in the Gen Z age demographic. Our questions led to valuable information like where our participants find their music, how much music they listen to, and more. The moderator of our group hosted the questions and allowed participants to freely share their insights on the questions. This focus group provided so much useful information that it can only be provided through this medium. We were able to learn what the participants listen to exactly and what their honest thoughts on music from different generations. The participants were also able to learn more about their own listening habits by comparing their responses with their peers. The information gathered through this focus group is imperative to the PR Unicorn's research but also to large music corporations whose goal is to target Gen Z listeners the most. The PR Unicorn's are aiming to understand how Gen Z's listening is affected by their mood, how they think music has changed overtime, what platforms they use, and more. Through a focus group, participants freely responded to these questions and provided varying responses that informed us of their own personal thoughts and opinions about music. Each participant varied in their music consumption vastly. Some participants shared that they rarely listen to music, while others shared that they listen to different genres every day. This information is crucial to the PR Unicorn's research because it provides an understanding of why these participants feel the way they do about music consumption over time.

Participants & Procedures

The population of interest that PR Unicorn's chose to have participate in the focus group interview are Gen Z college students who listen to music and attend Auburn University. We are determined to research Gen Z's preferred music genre. We gathered a group of five individuals who enjoy music and are full-time students at Auburn. PR Unicorns reached out to each participant by iMessage and asked if they would be willing to contribute to the focus group interview study. PR Unicorns ensured everyone signed and agreed to the focus group interview consent form before starting the interview. PR Unicorns also reminded participants that there are no right or wrong answers and made sure everyone knew that this interview is going to be recorded. This focus group was conducted at Tichenor Hall room 211 in a classroom on March 16. PR Unicorns conducted this focus group interview for 24 minutes. There were five

participants for the duration of the study. By having five participants, PR Unicorns were able to learn more about Gen Z's music preferences and which decades they listen to.

All the participants ranged from age 19-23; most participants knew each other prior to the interview. Before the interview started, PR Unicorns made sure to introduce participants to each other to create a welcoming and comforting environment.

PR Unicorns asked five key questions, followed by a summary question, all things considered questions and lastly offered participants to share any final thoughts they had. Roughly five minutes were spent on each question. The group consisted of three females and two males. All participants were public relations majors. Participants were not given any materials to look at during the interview. As the moderator asked each question, everyone was given a chance to speak as after one person spoke, the person next to them shared their insight. This way, everyone had a chance to share their insight and had a chance to speak. PR Unicorns were able to learn more about each participants music choices and what influences Gen Z's preferences.

Findings

PR Unicorns collected and recorded the data by asking participants questions about their music preferences and to learn more about how they feel about different decades of music. PR Unicorns started by asking questions about which decade they prefer, how they think music has changed over time, and then were asked questions about their own music preferences such as what platform they listen to and how music affects their mood. All participants expressed how they thought that music today is not as unique as it once was, and that it does not sound the same as it did in previous generation, due to the trend of TikTok trends and streaming. Some participants think that older country music has more personality, compared to current country music. There was a pattern as most participants expressed that older music has more storytelling being it, as opposed to music now being catchier and trendier. One participant stated that music now is composed to fit the needs and trends of media, instead of making music they enjoy. When asked how mood affects listening habits, there was a pattern among a few participants that was recognized. Some participants stated that they listen to music when doing tasks, rather than to soothe their moods. Instead of listening to music when sad, participants stated they do not listen to music. Participants said they listen to music when doing something fun or completing work, not when they were sad. One participant stated they prefer more sad, somber and mellow music. One participant stated that music for them is nostalgic and it puts them in a specific mood, especially more older songs. When asked about how participants mood affects their listening habits, participants were honest and shared their true feeling about how music affects them. This question made them think about their music choices and what they listen to in their free time. All participants were engaged and maintained eye contact throughout the interview.

When asked what decade participants listened to, there was a variety of different responses ranging from 80s to 90s, country, pop and late 90s early 2000s hits. 80% of participants prefer Apple Music, while only 20% prefer Spotify or Soundcloud. Everyone had their own music preferences they enjoyed, which helped PR Unicorns learn more about all music preferences Gen Z have, and how music is resurfacing. This information will help PR Unicorns know what music Gen Z is receptive to and will help music businesses increase awareness for music that was produced in previous generations. When participants were asked what they think about music

from varying decades, participants had mixed feelings about it. One participant said they have varying feelings about music from previous decades. Others suggested that older music is unique. Two participants said that music now is more performative, and not for the love for music, but rather an act. Another participant referenced the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame and how most of the nominees were random people, not unified. Some of the musicians did not even sing rock and roll music. The blurred line between genres was also acknowledged in this interview, and how it has an impact on what Gen Z listens to.

Interpretations

Before conducting the focus group interview, PR Unicorns wanted to come up with questions for the participants that would help better analyze Gen Z's music preferences and how they feel about music from other decades. When asking questions, it allowed PR Unicorns to gain insight among others music styles and listen to others concerns about how music is today. Based on the information we gathered during the focus group interview, PR Unicorns found that students agreed that music today is more trendy and not as original as past decades. There was a pattern that music from the 70s and 80s is more unique and is more about the art of music and less about trend and popularity. Each participant had different tastes in music, but it helped PR Unicorns learn more about different genres and what Gen Z is listening to the most right now. PR Unicorns created a supportive and welcoming space for the interview, making participants feel heard and like they can share their true feelings about music. There was a trend that participants felt like music from the 70s, 80s and 90s is more authentic that pop culture right now, which is focused on becoming famous, or winning an award. PR Unicorns asking participants these questions will help them be more aware of their music preferences and how PR Unicorns can raise awareness for music companies who are looking to gain publicity from Gen Z and want to engage with their generation.

After learning more about Gen Z's music choices, PR Unicorns can focus on specific music genres and decades to focus on for our survey. PR Unicorns can narrow down their research to a few genres that music companies can focus on to raise awareness and increase sales. This focus group interview also helped PR Unicorns realize that Gen Z still appreciates older music. Some next steps PR Unicorns have is how to incorporate and bring awareness to these genres so music businesses can target Gen Z most effectively. In order to learn more research about Gen Z, PR Unicorns will complete a quantitative survey to assess what music Gen Z listens to, what platforms and why they listen to music. This survey has closed ended questions and open-ended questions. For the open-ended questions, PR Unicorns hope to learn more honest input about preferences and more about how listening to music makes them feel. By learning this, PR Unicorns will understand more about why Gen Z listens and the emotions that music brings them. In spreading awareness for older music, PR Unicorns hope to use pathos to evoke emotions within music consumers and the campaign so music corporations can learn more about Gen Z and how to evoke emotions within them to spread awareness.

PR Unicorns hope to share the survey and have as many Gen Z students take it as possible, to have a wide range of answers to take into consideration and implement into the campaign. By having a wide range of answers, PR Unicorns can get insight into many colleges' students' preferences and will try to incorporate their thoughts into how music companies can target Gen Z to recognize resurfacing of music from previous generation. This will also help PR Unicorns understand the impact that resurfacing of music either has or does not have on Gen Z.

Primary Research: Survey Report

Overview and Purpose

For The PR Unicorns survey research regarding the research question of what music Gen Z is listening to most, we aimed to collect survey data from the Gen Z demographic primarily. Our survey's specific objective was to learn what Gen Z's music habits consist of. These publics are widely affected by the popularization and consumption of music in the 21st century. The purpose of our survey was to gain more knowledge from our target demographic on what their music listening habits are like. Our survey included nine different questions that asked participants about the different levels of their music listening habits. The questions focused on topics like the amount of time participants spent listening to music, preferred decades, preferred social media platforms, favorite genres, and more. These questions successfully gather diverse data that will be very useful in our research. The Qualtrics survey was a great way to collect our data for this report. This survey allowed us to ask questions in different styles like a Likert scale, ranking system, open-ended questions, and multiple choices. The diversity among our question types and responses provided us with rich data that highlighted many different facets of our participants' music listening habits. The PR Unicorn's are aiming to understand how Gen Z's listening is affected by their mood, how they think music has changed overtime, what platforms they use, and more. Through an anonymous survey, participants freely responded to these questions and provided varying responses that informed us of their own personal thoughts and opinions about music. After completing both secondary research and a focus group interview for our study, we decided it was imperative to gather survey responses that included both quantitative and qualitative data, versatility, standardization, and a larger sample size. Since our survey was anonymous, participants could freely answer the prompts, leading to more accurate data.

Sampling and Data Collection

The survey link was sent to Auburn University college students by either an email or text so participants could complete on their own time. Gen Z students who listen to music were the main subjects PR Unicorns wanted to focus on, so we could explore what music genres, platforms and decade students are listening to, to assist music companies in their outreach and how they can make money. PR Unicorns survey data was based on classmates and friends; therefore, we used the convivence sampling method. Convivence sampling is a nonprobability research method that gathers data from readily available participants. PR Unicorns decided convivence sampling should be used, as it is an excellent way to get college students to do something quickly, and allows PR Unicorns to have access to the results as soon as the survey is completed. Each team member of the PR Unicorns sent it to five people, totaling 20 participants. This sampling technique is appropriate for our survey because of digital age we are in. Mostly everyone is on their phone, answering texts, therefore we found it easiest to send the link over for participants to fill out on their own time and when they have time.

PR Unicorns gathered results from students who listen to music. PR Unicorns recruited 20 participants so we could get valuable insight. PR Unicorns were able to recruit these

participants by using a survey posted online for all our participants to access. PR Unicorns sent the link to friends and classmates. Those who participated in the survey received access to it on April 6 and could take it any time until April 10 online. PR Unicorns conducted the survey online by using Qualtrics which is a program through Auburn University that allows people to create surveys and analyze the data. PR Unicorns survey was a series of different formatted questions that best suited the research to explore Gen Z's music preferences and how this data can be used to help music companies engage Gen Z music listeners. This survey took participants no longer than 3 minutes to complete. The data was collected from Qualtrics and was generated through this program to give PR Unicorns the survey results.

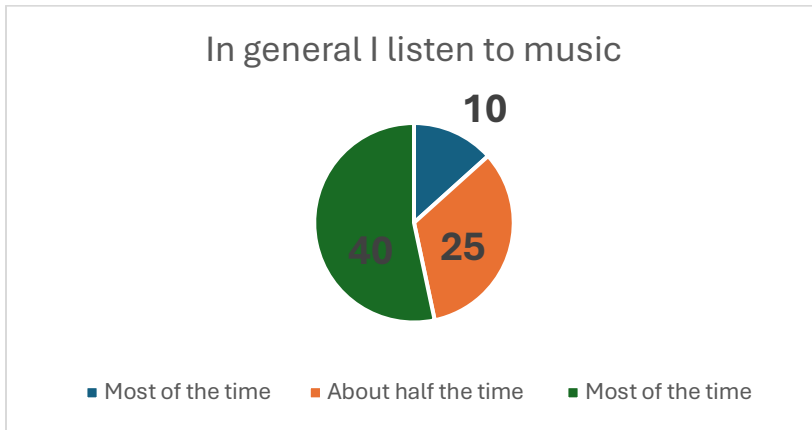
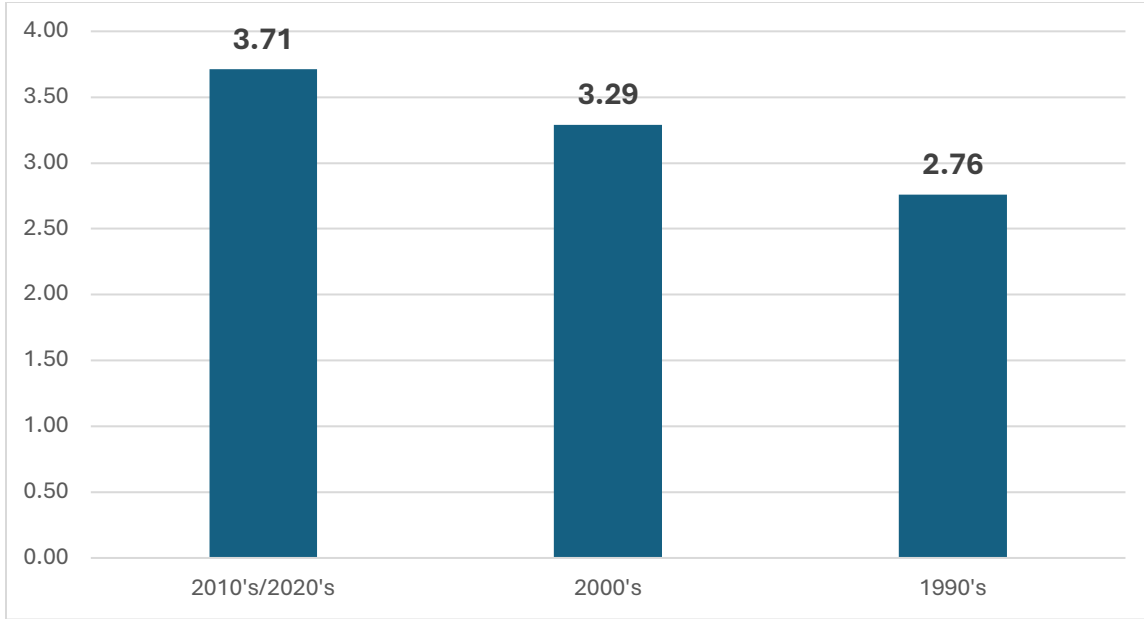
Description of Participants

Our main goal was to collect data from the Gen Z demographic. Of our participants, we had a wide range of ages and lifestyles. At the end of our research, we had 21 responses; 20 of which came from current Auburn students. These students originally come from many different cities, but all currently reside in Auburn. Our participants varied in ages from 19-54. The most common age was 21. The second most common age was 20 years old. Of our 21 participants, 20 were female and 1 was male. For the purpose of this survey, we began by asking participants how much they listen to music in general. 33% said always, 57% said most of the time, and 10% said about half the time. Our participants differed greatly in age, music listening habits, music tastes, and lifestyles. Our target demographic throughout this study is mainly focused on the Gen Z age. We accomplished gathering data for this demographic very well. The information provided by these participants will be very applicable to our studies. If we were to conduct this survey study again, we would aim to collect more male sample to broaden our results.

Results

The survey results show that Gen Z's music tastes are varied and changing, with a strong preference for mainstream genres but still a lot of other interests. 34.7% of people who answered said that pop was their favorite genre. Hip-Hop/Rap came in second with 24.1%. These two genres make up almost 59% of all first-choice responses, showing that they are the most popular among Gen Z listeners. The other answers, on the other hand, were spread across genres like Indie, Rock, R&B, Alternative, Country, EDM, K-Pop, and Latin music. This shows that a lot of people in this generation don't stick to one style and instead try out a lot of different sounds.

The results also show that Gen Z's taste in music is shaped by both what's popular right now and their love of older music. 54.8% of people who answered said they don't usually listen to music from the past, but a large 45.2% said they do enjoy songs from the 1970s, 1980s, or 1990s. This almost even split shows that a lot of Gen Z is open to older music. This is probably because they hear it on social media, from their families, and in curated playlists. The results show that this generation likes both new hits and old favorites, which has led to a music culture that mixes current hits with older ones.



can learn more about why college students are not listening to older genres and can assist music companies who are wanting to engage college students.

To communicate these findings, PR Unicorns will need to implement certain tactics and strategies into the campaign. First, starting with bringing awareness to Auburn students. According to our survey results, Tik-Tok and Instagram are the main channels that students browse each day. To bring awareness of 1970s and 1980s decades to students, PR Unicorns could create an informative and interactive Tik-Tok about popular songs and music genres in the decades, as well as showcase some popular songs within the video that students can listen to. PR Unicorns would provide an interactive caption to engage students. The caption could include something like, “What is your favorite song or genre that was popular in the 1970s or 1980s?” By having a caption that is a call to action, PR Unicorns hope this encourages students to interact and respond to the Tik-Tok. By learning more about what college students feel is most insightful about these decades, then PR Unicorns can report their findings to music companies, as this will help those companies know how to engage and make money off college students. This will also allow the music companies to learn more about what stands out in the 1970s and 1980s, so they can target that in their marketing efforts. A barrier with this awareness campaign idea is that some students might scroll past the video, not watching it. However, by making an engaging cover photo for the Tik-Tok as well as a strong starting statement that makes college students curious, it might reduce the amounts of students who just scroll past.

The next goal of the campaign would be to create ways that students could listen to music within those decade ranges. One idea is to create pop-up experiences where students could listen to songs on record players from the 1970s and 1980s and share their thoughts. It might be cool if there was a photo booth themed around the 1970s or 1980s for students to take pictures in. This pop-up would be located on the Haley Concourse for students to stop by and interact with the table. A limitation for this campaign idea might be that students would not interact or stop by the table, but a way to combat that issue is for PR Unicorns to stand outside the table and give away music magnets to encourage students to stop by. By having an interactive table for students and having them share their thoughts, PR Unicorns can learn more about why students enjoy the music and why they might not. PR Unicorns can brainstorm and learn ways that students would listen to the music more often. These pop-ups and student’s insight can help music companies learn more about what students enjoy about music in 1970s and 1980s and what they did not like.

Survey Questionnaire

PR Unicorns created a Survey Questionnaire consisting of 9 questions and 20 participants. We formed our questions with the intention of gathering insightful data about Gen Z’s music listening habits. Our questions were developed appropriately, using various scales of measurement for increased accuracy. Forming questions that included the Likert scale, ranking system, and multiple choices allowed us to gather tangible data about our audience. We also included an open-ended question so we could capture detailed feedback and have more information aside from solely numbers and analytics. PR Unicorns organized and formatted the questionnaire so it would be easy and accessible for all participants. The survey begins with a statement that introduces PR Unicorns, the purpose behind the research, a statement about privacy, and the contact information of each group member. Participants then decide if they are willing to participate by clicking “Yes” or “No.” Questions are organized with clear headers and

multiple-choice answers based on the scale we embedded into the question. The survey closes with a “Thank you” statement and the option to ask additional questions. PR Unicorns aimed to keep the survey specific, instructional, and easy to complete. Overall, the design, writing, organization, and mechanics of the survey questionnaire were created to reflect PR Unicorns’ clear goals and purpose-driven approach to research.

PR Unicorns used the platform “Qualtrics” to conduct the Survey Questionnaire. By using this platform, our group was able to easily send the survey to participants and organize information as people completed the form. For data and survey results, see the “Results” section of the Survey Report. The chart below includes the introduction statement and questions PR Unicorns developed for the survey.

References

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Appendix I: Focus Group Interview Script, Consent Forms & Transcript

Focus Group Interview Script

Welcome to the focus group interview where we will be discussing your music listening habits. These results will be used in a study the PR Unicorns are conducting that intends to learn what Gen Z's preferred music decade is and their music listening habits. You were selected for this study because you fit in the Gen Z age demographic and have an interest in music.

Guidelines

- There are no right or wrong answers. We appreciate all of you taking the time to participate. Please share your thoughts with us! We are going to be recording this focus group interview, just so you know.

Opening question

- What is everyone's favorite song?

Key Questions

1. What decade does the majority of your music listening come from?
2. How do you think the style of music has changed over time?
3. What do you think about music from varying decades?
4. What platforms and apps do you find your music on?
5. How does your mood affect your music listening habits?

Summary question

- After listening and answering questions, what can you say about your own music listening habits? Is there anything you want to change about these habits?

All things considered, question

After this study, what do you think about your own music taste and how it differs from your peers?

Final Question

- Thank you all for sharing your feedback! Are there any last comments anyone wants to share?

Participant Informed Consent Form

We are conducting focus group interviews to explore what genre of music Gen Z prefers and listens to. Please keep in mind that your participation is completely voluntary. **To participate in this study, you have to be 18 years old or older.** We can supply you with contact information (other than emails below) regarding this study upon request.

Researchers:

Caroline Garner: ceg0104@auburn.edu

Hannah Grisham: hpg0006@auburn.edu

Maddox Young: mey0022@auburn.edu

Bella Mejia: bcm0080@auburn.edu

This interview will be recorded, but the audio file and transcript from the interview will be stored in a secure location. The interview should take 25 minutes. Please know that we will do everything we can to protect your privacy. The information provided will remain strictly confidential and you will not be identified by your answers. Your identity or personal information will not be disclosed in any publication that may result from the study. Data will be compiled as a whole with no individual responses tied to your name or any identifying information about you.

This study is one of group projects in Public Relations Research (PRCM 4400) class. If data is only being collected for class purposes, and it will not be used for publication, or outside of the classroom then an Institutional Review Board (IRB) is not needed.

If you have questions about participants' rights or other concerns, you can contact Myoung-Gi Chon, Ph.D. (334)-844-2721, mzc0113@auburn.edu

Signature of participant: *Katie Hammill*

Print Name: Katie Hammill

Date: 03/16/2026

Participant Informed Consent Form

We are conducting focus group interviews to explore what genre of music Gen Z prefers and listens to. Please keep in mind that your participation is completely voluntary. **To participate in this study, you have to be 18 years old or older.** We can supply you with contact information (other than emails below) regarding this study upon request.

Researchers:

Caroline Garner: ceg0104@auburn.edu

Hannah Grisham: hpg0006@auburn.edu

Maddox Young: mey0022@auburn.edu

Bella Mejia: bcm0080@auburn.edu

This interview will be recorded, but the audio file and transcript from the interview will be stored in a secure location. The interview should take 25 minutes. Please know that we will do everything we can to protect your privacy. The information provided will remain strictly confidential and you will not be identified by your answers. Your identity or personal information will not be disclosed in any publication that may result from the study. Data will be compiled as a whole with no individual responses tied to your name or any identifying information about you.

This study is one of group projects in Public Relations Research (PRCM 4400) class. If data is only being collected for class purposes, and it will not be used for publication, or outside of the classroom then an Institutional Review Board (IRB) is not needed.

If you have questions about participants' rights or other concerns, you can contact Myoung-Gi Chon, Ph.D. (334)-844-2721, mzc0113@auburn.edu

Signature of participant: *Logan Self*

Print Name: Logan Self

Date: 3-16-26

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Signature of participant: *Logan Green*

Print Name: Logan Green

Date 3-26-26

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Signature of participant: *Haley Miller*

Print Name: Haley Miller

Date 3-16-25

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Signature of participant: *Abigail Johnson*

Print Name: Abigail Johnson

Date: 3-16-26__

Focus Group Interview Transcript

Focus Group Interview

00:00:00 Speaker: Hi all. Welcome to our focus Group interview. I hope you all had a lovely spring break and I hope you're all ready to get started. Um, we'll be discussing your music listening habits. These results will be used in the study by the PR unicorns, who are conducting research that intends to learn what Gen Z's preferred music decade is and their listening habits. You are selected for this study because you fit in the Gen Z age demographic, and you have an interest in music. There are no right or wrong answers. We appreciate all of you taking the time to participate. Please share your thoughts with us. We are going to be recording this focus group interview. Just so you know. What is everyone's favorite song? Hayley, you can start. Okay. Uh, take your time. I don't know, I have a lot. Can I go on my leg? Sure. Yeah. Everyone else. My favorite song is Heaven sent by the Steeldrivers. Um, I'm really into Gracie Abrams right now, and I really like blowing smoke. That's good. I'd say Valerie, but the BBC studio version by Amy Winehouse. Um, I like Pearl jam like anything by Pearl jam, really? It's pick one. I like black, but black. What's your favorite song? February snow by flatland cavalry. Oh, you guys are pretty niche. Um, okay, first question. Second question. What decade does the majority of your music listening come from? Um, probably like eighties and 90s. Okay. Um, nineties country. I'm pretty current. I listen to a lot of like, just like, you know, current. Yeah. Current pop and country. I would say mostly late nineties, early two thousand. I would say it depends on the genre. Mhm. Like if you like rock, I would say like eighties, nineties alternative, I would say like twenty tens. Mhm. Country. I would say like nineties or current. Yeah. Very true. Um, how do you think the style of music has changed over time? Just generally in general, pop culture, how, what differences have you seen? I, I like actually a few days ago, I was watching some YouTube video. I forget what it was, but it was like, name a song from each decade. Me and my friends were just watching it and trying to play it. And I was like, oh, listen to how the songs just get worse and worse, which sounds bad. Like I don't, I think I think there's some good music now, like I like, like some pop artists, but I don't know, I just hear it and it's like, it's not as good as it was. I personally agree. Um, I don't think it's as unique anymore. I think it's pretty saturated. Like a lot of country like Luke Bryan, Riley Green, Zac Brown, all those dudes kind of sound similar, but like when you had Travis Tritt and Alan Jackson, everybody kind of had their own personality, but now it kind of seems like everybody's just pushed together. Very true. Yeah, I feel like, like back then it was more like focused on storytelling and like, especially like folk music was very like storytelling heavy. And it was all about like, it was very current. Mhm. Um, to the time, like, I feel like all of the artists were writing about things that were happening then. Um, and now I feel like that is relevant somewhat, but it's just not as prevalent in storytelling as it was. I feel like streaming really changed how people make music. I think like now, compared to before streaming, it's more about like, how many streams can I get with this song? Or how catchy can I make it? Or like that trend on TikTok where it's like, oh, I got this song of the summer, like in their car and playing it. But like before streaming, people just made good music. Yeah. Like wanted, you know, to put it out there. Yeah. Artists.

Well, that and like, I remember like when we were younger and like, didn't have and had like our iPod touches or whatever, like you'd be in the car and like you're listening to the radio with your parent, whoever was driving. And I think I remember like, I remember literally one time listening and they specifically said, like, this song didn't mean like they were talking about a song and they were like, but it doesn't meet the criteria to like be on the radio or something like that. So it's like, I agree with you, like people are making music to fit specific like needs, I guess, and trends instead of just making music. You know, for the for the love of it. I agree that streaming has made a significant difference. And it's also people are like, I don't know if I'm allowed to be contributing. I think people are like becoming popular that don't need to be becoming popular. They don't have talent. They had a hit. So it's not even streaming. It's social media. Yeah. Social media really, you know. Um, next question. What do you think about music from varying decades? Do you have a preference or a bias or about like, I don't know, from all different decades? Um, like. Yeah, I definitely have a preference, but also like I think there could be a bad song from the eighties or 90s, but there can also be a good song. Or like there could be a bad song from the two thousand, twenty ten or whatever. I don't, I don't know. Like, I think it just depends like kind of. Yeah, I definitely have like, I don't like really like sixties, seventies music, but there's a few good, yeah. Good songs. Um, well, the main country, I don't like fifties and sixties and seventies. I think it's just slow, like eighties, nineties. It's fast. And it kind of makes me want to run through a wall. But then you get into the newer stuff and I think it's. Just bad storytelling, just not not unique anymore. Yeah, I think I would say the same with like, especially country music and like folk music too. Um, like indie, like whatever. I feel like then like I'm thinking of like Joni Mitchell and like people like that who had like, such, like a storytelling quality, especially with their performances and like nowadays, I feel like it's more, um, performative. Mhm. Um, and they're doing it for like a show, not just for like she was saying, like the love of music and performing. Totally. Actually, um, I think with like rock, like you go back to like the eighties and 90s and there's bands like Metallica and like guns N roses, like that type of stuff. And then like you get into the two thousand and they're calling bands like Imagine Dragons Rock. And it's like, what? I just feel like that genre is low key. Kind of just died out, which is really the Hall of Fame thing. The most recent, um, people who got initiated into like the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. It was, it was not, it was like random people from completely different genres. Yeah. Some were like, you were like, okay. But it's just like, it just doesn't it's, it doesn't mean the same thing. Yeah. And I feel like that style, like has kind of just kind of gone out of style. But I feel like it's to me, it's like the best. I like interesting. I feel like for me personally, it depends on the day or my mood of what kind of, I guess, decade of music I listen to. Like this weekend I was listening to more like early two thousand pop and like last, uh, last week I was listening to more country music. I don't know, it's just really depends on my mood. And then kind of like what y'all were saying. I think, you know, music nowadays is like less storytelling, less, not all of it. Like it's more saturated with the, the want to be a hit, want to be big on social media and streaming and stuff like that. But there are still like newer artists today that do. They are artists and they do want to put out art. Instead of chasing streams and stuff like

that. Um, but it's more overwhelming that they are chasing this dream like streams and stuff like that. I agree, I think it depends on like the person. I also think with like the bias and preference thing, like I'm the same way. Like I'll listen to anything. Like it just depends on my mood. But like I, what I don't like and what's giving me of a preference, I guess is like people are now like doing like a ton of covers. And like, the one that comes to mind is when Jojo Siwa did the one of Bette Davis eyes. And I can no longer listen to the original version of that song because it has ruined. I can't listen to the song without, like, Jojo Siwa's cover. I thought it was the best thing. Jojo Siwa sampling an Elton John song? No. And. And I can't listen to the actual original song without being like, well, now it's just ruined by somebody who's like, screaming, like hooting and hollering, hooting and hollering. Exactly. Took the words out of my mouth. That's very. So that that gives me that gives me a bias is when someone like goes a little too far with the cover songs. Um, I also think I, I am a fan of like. EDM. I really do like EDM a lot in certain settings, but. I think music from earlier decades where any type of technological additions to, to music is so refreshing. It's so like nice to hear. It feels good. It makes you like, remember what why this is so incredible and what makes these people so talented. Because when you're listening to someone who's entire song, like all they did was lay vocals down, they didn't do anything to put work into this song. But Grateful Dead has fifteen people playing behind them for twenty five minutes. I don't know, I don't know, that's just so much more real and soulful than laying down vocals and making millions. Like just like that. Um, what platforms and apps do you find your music on and listen to your music on? Um, I actually don't, uh, use TikTok, so I don't ever really find that serious. That was genuine. No. Um, like really just Spotify. I use the DJ feature, like the AI DJ guy. And if like, he knows my kind of listening habits, I guess so. Um, he will give me like songs that I haven't played as much or like, haven't listened to and I'll be like, oh, I'll add that to my playlist or something. So really just Spotify. Um, I only ever listen to the steeldrivers for the most part. And then if I'm feeling frisky, I'll throw on a creative station on Apple Music and just let that go. Okay. Um, and then I'm not a real musical person. I'm on the phone a lot whenever I'm driving. Um, but if my buddies who they play in a band, they'll text me or I'll listen to something that they're playing. And if I like it, I'll find it interesting. Yeah, I use Apple Music, um, to like stream just because that's what like my family has the family plan. Um, but like, as far as finding my music goes, I feel like I get a lot from my friends. Like, I'll be in the car and they'll have a song on their playlist and I'll add it to mine. Um, or like, I'll be in public and I'll Shazam. So, um, that I like, so I think I, I find it like not necessarily using a platform, just kind of like, yeah, yeah. Uh, I use Apple music and a little bit of SoundCloud, like just a little bit. Um, and I usually do SoundCloud like to find new music, I guess. Um, but also, yeah. Um, and then on like Apple music, I'll do like one of the stations where it's like new. Interesting. Yeah. Something that it knows my life. Yeah, something like that. But I'll do that to find new music. Uh, I love Apple Music. No one will ever change my mind. And to find new music, I will go and spend hours picking through every single artist and all of the similar artists and every single one of their songs. You just like go through discographies. Yeah, I'll do that too. Um, yeah, I the stations thing, I can't, I can't handle it. Um, it's too overwhelming and I'm a control

freak. So I will do it myself and go through and discover new artists I love. I think Spotify is the greatest thing on earth, and I get a lot of my music from the radios. Like whenever there's like a song I like, I immediately like go to the radio and shuffle it. That's how I get all my music. I think that's one downside to Apple Music is that the radio stations are like, aren't they a little like weirder? Yeah, they're just not good. Like I was in like, I have my, um, like playlist. I have the like song. Like when the playlist is over, it'll just keep playing. Yeah, yeah. And on the playlist, it's all, it's like Gracie Abrams, like Audrey Hepburn and like Noah Khan. And then after that, it'll play like Olivia Rodrigo and like Taylor Swift. I've noticed that like, it'll play like if it's sort of in the same genre, it'll go to like the most popular ones, like Taylor Swift, like it went from like that's yeah, Spotify is the opposite. Spotify finds you like something super niche. Yeah, that's the word I really like. That's the downfall. Yeah. Interesting. Yeah. You have to take the time. That's the one thing I like about Spotify. Yeah. That's like I've fallen in love with bands and like gone to see them purely because I found them through Spotify radio. Anyways. How does your mood affect your listening habits? I mean, I feel like actually a lot of people say like, oh, I'm sad. So I want to listen to sad music. Like, I can't handle listening to sad music unless I'm like really, really just like in the mood for it. And half the time when I am in the mood for it, it's like, I don't know, like I feel like it makes it worse. Yeah, it's kind of crunchy to look up like sad music. Like I have sad playlist. Sad, but I don't know. I mean, I feel like it's not really my mood. I think it's more of like what I'm doing. Like if I'm driving to the beach. I want to listen to, like, fun music. And then if I'm like, I don't know. Sitting in my room, like cleaning all this until like, kind of. I don't really know. Like, I honestly, I don't really have like a mood for my. I just press play and I'll listen to whatever. It's kind of. Yeah, I think if I'm listening to music, I'm in a good mood. Um, if I'm not on a phone call or I'm just not listening to the radio or someone else talk. So yeah, I think yeah, I'm only if I'm listening to music, I have to be in a good mood. I feel like I'm kind of the same way, but like, if I'm in a bad mood, I'm not gonna search up like sad songs and like, put on a playlist. Like, I'll just probably drive in silent silence. Um, but like, if I'm like getting ready to like, go out or like I'm at a party or something, I'll obviously watch like some hype music. Um, but I like have a playlist that's like chill music and like, I'll listen to that if I just like, need some background noise. Um, but I don't really listen to music outside just because like, like I said, I feel like it makes it worse sometimes. Yeah, it definitely does. Yeah. Uh, my mood doesn't really affect, like, the music that I listen to. Uh, some of my friends will say that I tend to listen to more like sad and somber music, like f k. Yeah. And, and like, I, and I like Phoebe Bridgers and stuff, and I listen to them on repeat. And some of sometimes my friends are like, listen, are you like, is something, is something wrong with you? I'm like, no, like, I just like more like somber, mellow music sometimes. My friend is like that. She's like the happiest person I know. And all she listens to us like Mitski. Yeah, yeah, yeah. I don't know. I feel like I agree with the consensus. I'm not gonna. I'd rather listen to nothing than be sad and listen to sad music when you're happy. But when, like, I'm, like, happy or just, I don't know, neutral. Mhm. Um, it's just like, okay, what am I feeling today? You know? Yeah. Just, I mean, what song do I have stuck in my head? Whatever

genre that is, we're going with it. Mhm. So just depends. Yeah. I feel like, uh, like music is, like, kind of like nostalgic to me. Like I'll have like a playlist from like high school, like a specific few months in high school. And I'll listen to that and it'll kind of put me in a mood. Not like a bad mood or good mood or anything. It's just like, oh, like I just kind of think of like the time period that I was listening to the same like twenty songs over and over again. So I feel like whatever music I listen to kind of puts me in a specific needed. It's not really like my mood. I was this, so I'm going to listen to this too. Yeah I agree. Are you guys people that listen to music? Like when you're working. Like if you're doing homework, do you put music on? I can't because I have ADHD. And so I'll start like singing along to the music and not be able to focus on this. It depends. Like for me, I'll, I'll listen to music if I'm like taking notes or like, you know, um, just doing something. Yeah. Yeah. But like, if I'm having to write a paper or something, I kind of get like, yeah, I don't know. So I can't listen to music. Yeah, I have OCD. So, um, if I'm not listening to music, I will get way too caught up in my work and then I will be sitting there doing a discussion post that will last me like five hours. So it's like I yeah, yeah, yeah. Like it doesn't matter what it is. It could be the craziest song. I just, I always need something. Yeah, I have too many thoughts not to. I more, I listen to podcasts, which is like probably worse because it's like a conversation. You have to pay attention to what they're saying. Yeah, I can't do you listen to the conversation. You're just like, is it just like the background noise thing? It's kind of like the background noise. I can't do music, though. And I'm doing like schoolwork because it's. I'll start. Yeah, I just can't do, you know. Um, I for some reason. Yeah. Now I couldn't listen to music, but I can be on the phone talking to somebody and still be like, be in a conversation, a conversation, talking and looking at a computer typing. But if I'm listening to you, I just try to stay on that. That's all the questions. Is there anything else? Yeah, I don't think so. Let's see. After listening and answering questions, what can you say about your own music listening habits? Is there anything you want to change about these habits? Um. No. Yeah. I mean, I like, I listen to music in the car and then when I'm getting ready, that's pretty much it. Or like if I'm like at the pool or at the beach or something, but I'm not like, I don't know, I feel like with Spotify, especially people like the rap at the end of the year, they want to have like a trillion good million freaking minutes on their thing. And I'm like, yo, it's like, it's okay. Yeah. And I used to be like that, like in high school, I would literally have my AirPods, like on me all day long. And like, even I wouldn't even be listening to music and I would just have them in my pockets, just like playing music because I wanted more minutes on my thing. Oh my God, you were committed to the bit. Yeah, I was, but I feel like now it's like, okay, like I don't know. Um, yeah, I wish I was better at listening to music. Like a lot of my buddies are like, have you ever heard this song? Like, no. Um, so yeah, I think now hearing myself, I don't really listen to a ton of music and I think I should probably start finding more stuff that I like, but um, yeah, I guess that's the only thing I'd have to say about my habits. Yeah, I think I would like to branch out and listen to more, um, like niche music and not as like mainstream stuff. Um, I don't know, expand my musical vocabulary. That's good. I don't know, I really like the way I listen to music right now, so I don't think I would change anything. Um, but I'm always open to like

suggestions and like when my friends have like, oh, I really like the song. Like I'll listen to that song and then I'll go through that artist's other songs because I want to branch out, you know? So. Um, after the study, what do you think about your own music taste and how it differs from your peers? Um, I like my music taste. Like I don't really have a specific taste. Like I definitely do like more like rock and alternative rock. Um, but I'll listen to anything. Like if someone wants to go over and play Taylor Swift, I'll jam along to and like I grew up on like really weird music. Like my dad loves Phish and like that, like jam band stuff. So I grew up listening to that all my life and I like it. And then like, I can listen to anything really, like rap, everything. So I kind of, I feel like my music taste is like everything. Yeah. I like listening to just about anything, you know? Um. I can get with anything. Um, I kind of wish someone didn't introduce me to the still drivers my senior year of high school, because then I was like, all right, cool. I want to make this my personality and just like, listen to. have you ever seen them? I've never seen. I mean, like, they're good. They're incredible. Like, I love it. Yeah, I love them. That's not a bad thing. No. Yeah. But like, I mean, if you need suggestions, let me know. Yeah. If I can find like four other bands like them, that'd be like. I'll give you like five identical. Okay, cool. Yeah, but you need to do bluegrass. Yeah. And I think, um, I don't know. Yeah, my buddies all play that, but no, I've just always been with the steel drivers. Um, but, uh, no, I need to branch out. And, uh, no, I do not think I have great music taste. At least you're honest. Yeah, I don't know. Like I said, I think I would like to branch out and listen to more stuff, but I do like the music I listen to. So I'll probably keep listening to that and just like add. That's good. Yeah. Yeah, yeah. I like the stuff that I listen to. Thank you all for sharing your feedback. Are there any last comments anyone wants to share? No. Okay. Thank you all. Thank you guys so much. You're welcome. Thank you guys. You're welcome. Okay.

Appendix II: Survey Questionnaire

Hello, we're a public relations research team enrolled in Public Relations Research at Auburn University. We are currently conducting a survey of music preferences among Gen Z students. Please know that we will do everything we can to protect your privacy. The information provided will remain strictly confidential and you will not be identified by your answers. If you have questions about participants' rights or other concerns, you can contact Myoung-Gi Chon, Ph.D. (334)-844-2721, mzc0113@auburn.edu, Hannah Grisham, hpg0006@auburn.edu, Caroline Garner, ceg0104@auburn.edu, Maddox Young, mey0022@auburn.edu, or Bella Mejia, bcm0080@auburn.edu. Do you want to participate in this survey?

- Yes
- No

The following questions are asking about your perceptions and attitudes regarding music listening habits. Please indicate your level of agreement with each of the following statements on the provided 1-5 scale, 1 representing "Strongly Disagree" and 5 representing "Strongly Agree."

Q1. I listen to music from all different decades

Q2. The music I listen to depends on my mood

Q3. I listen to music when I do work

In general, I listen to music...

- Never
- About half the time
- Most of the time
- Always

How frequently do you listen to music from each genre

2010's/ 2020's	Never	Rarely	About half the time	Most of the time	Always
2000's	Never	Rarely	About half the time	Most of the time	Always
1990's	Never	Rarely	About half the time	Most of the time	Always
1980's	Never	Rarely	About half the time	Most of the time	Always

1970's	Never	Rarely	About half the time	Most of the time	Always
Other	Never	Rarely	About half the time	Most of the time	Always

Please choose the proper amount of time you spend checking different types of social media a day.

Tiktok	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Most of the time	Always
Instagram	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Most of the time	Always
Facebook	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Most of the time	Always
Youtube	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Most of the time	Always
Twitter	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Most of the time	Always

Please describe your favorite kind of music.
(free answer)

What is your gender?

- Male
- Female
- Non-binary/ third gender
- Prefer not to say

What is your age?

(free answer)

Thank you for your time. I really appreciate you to complete this survey. If you have any questions, please free to write me at ceg0104@auburn.edu

(free answer)