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Original Article

The Consumer Experience, Shaped by Emotions: An Exploratory Qualitative Study of Moroccan Generation X and Baby Boomer Listeners

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Abstract

This exploratory qualitative study examines how the emotions evoked by music listening contribute to significant autobiographical memories among Moroccan Generation X and Baby Boomer listeners and how these memories shape their subsequent listening and re-listening practices, understood here as a form of experiential music consumption. We conducted 17 semi-structured interviews (10 in French, 7 in Moroccan Arabic [Darija]) with 13 Generation X and 4 Baby Boomer participants living in nine Moroccan cities, recruited through convenience and snowball sampling. Interviews were transcribed, translated into English using DeepL and checked by bilingual authors. Data were analysed through manual inductive thematic analysis, coded collaboratively by consensus, with a coding log and member checking (13 of 17 participants). Three themes were identified: (1) the daily integration of music into routines for functional or introspective purposes; (2) music as a trigger of autobiographical memory, with emotions that are mostly positive but often ambivalent and tinged with nostalgia; and (3) re-listening guided by the search for emotional comfort, the cathartic search for melancholy or the selective avoidance of painful memories. Four analytical profiles (regulation, memory, catharsis and identity) were also constructed. Several participants described regulating mood and sustaining memories with a partner or family, or through intergenerational transmission, which we interpret tentatively as a relational and shared dimension that Western-based models do not explicitly theorise. Loyalty and purchasing behaviour were not measured; the implications for streaming platforms, brands and event organisers are therefore presented as hypotheses for future research.

Categories: Consumer Behavior, Marketing and Market Issues in Business, Marketing Communication

Keywords: consumer experience, experiential marketing, emotion regulation, autobiographical memory, nostalgia, music re-listening, emotional comfort

Introduction

Context and research gap

Emotions are now recognised as central to consumer behaviour, in contrast with earlier approaches that treated consumption as primarily rational and utilitarian (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982) (Damasio, 1994). The experiential view of consumption holds that consumers seek hedonic, symbolic and aesthetic experiences rather than the mere functional use of goods (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982) (Pine and Gilmore, 1998) (Schmitt, 1999) and that experiences result from the combination of functional and emotional elements (Sandström et al., 2008). Within this perspective, emotions are generally understood as arising from individuals' appraisal of their relationship with their environment (Lazarus, 1991),

and consumption emotions have been linked to outcomes such as satisfaction and word of mouth (Ladhari, 2007). Music is a particularly rich case of experiential consumption. It can awaken, modulate and anchor emotional states; accompany everyday activities and public spaces; and support well-being and emotional connection (Lundqvist et al., 2009) (North and Hargreaves, 2008) (Rouzé, 2004). Yet, the literature on music, emotion and memory has been developed largely in Western contexts, and the research on Moroccan cultural practices (Nouri et al., 2015) has not examined, to our knowledge, how emotions and autobiographical memories shape the way adult listeners return to music. Moroccan Generation X and Baby Boomer listeners are of particular interest: their listening trajectories span several technological shifts (cassette, vinyl, CD, streaming) and unfold within a specific family and community fabric.

Theoretical background

Table *1* summarises the four theoretical strands on which this study relies and which structured both the interview guide and the analysis. The first strand concerns music, emotion and mood regulation: Mood Management Theory holds that individuals select media content, including music, in order to optimise their affective states (Zillmann, 1988), while the episodic memory mechanism described by Juslin and Västfjäll (Juslin and Västfjäll, 2008) explains how music elicits emotions by linking them to the recall of past episodes. The second strand concerns music-evoked autobiographical memories and nostalgia: music is a powerful cue for memories that are typically vivid, emotionally charged and often positive (Baumgartner et al., 1992) (Janata et al., 2007), and nostalgia, a bittersweet emotion (Batcho, 1995), has been associated with the repeated enjoyment of the music of one's youth (Holbrook and Schindler, 1991), musical tastes crystallising in late adolescence and early adulthood (Holbrook and Schindler, 1989). The third strand concerns re-listening, understood as voluntary reconsumption, that is, the deliberate repetition of a hedonic experience as a way of reliving past experiences and deriving meaning from them (Russell and Levy, 2012). The fourth strand situates these processes in their cultural context: Morocco is often described as relatively collectivist (Hofstede, 2001), although such national-level generalisations call for caution; in such settings, music may be tied to family and community practices and to cultural memory (Assmann and Czaplicka, 1995), and consumption can serve as a vehicle for identity (Ruvio and Belk, 2013). These strands are articulated in the conceptual chain presented below

Music, emotion and mood regulation	**Mood Management Theory proposes that individuals select media content, including music, to optimise their affective states (Zillmann, 1988). Music induces emotions through several psychological mechanisms, one of which is episodic memory (Juslin and Västfjäll, 2008), which links emotional responses to the recall of past episodes.**
Music-evoked autobiographical memories and nostalgia	Music is a powerful cue for autobiographical memories, which are typically vivid, emotionally charged and often positive (Janata et al., 2007). The role of affect in autobiographical memories is also documented in consumer research (Baumgartner et al., 1992). Nostalgia, a bittersweet emotion linked to valued past experiences (Batcho, 1995), has been associated with the repeated enjoyment of music from one's youth (Holbrook and Schindler, 1991), and musical tastes appear to crystallise in late adolescence and early adulthood (Holbrook and Schindler, 1989).
Re-listening as reconsumption	Voluntary reconsumption, that is, the deliberate repetition of a hedonic experience, has been described as a way of reliving past experiences and deriving meaning from them (Russell and Levy, 2012).

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Culture, collectivism and cultural memory	Cultural dimension studies often characterise Morocco as relatively collectivist (Hofstede, 2001), although such national-level generalisations should be treated with caution. In such settings, music may be tied to family and community practices and to cultural memory, understood as the practices, narratives and symbols through which a community maintains its identity (Assmann and Czaplicka, 1995). Consumption is also a vehicle for identity (Ruvio and Belk, 2013).

TABLE 1: Theoretical background

Source: Authors' synthesis of the works cited in the table.

Conceptual chain, research question and scope

These strands can be articulated in a simple conceptual chain: the characteristics of music and of the listening context elicit emotions; these emotions activate autobiographical memories; and these memories guide subsequent listening, re-listening or avoidance. Most previous work has examined this chain in Western contexts. We examine it among Moroccan listeners, where the familial and collective dimension of listening may reconfigure these relationships. This chain structured our interview guide and our analysis. The aim of this research is to explore how listening to music, whether experienced in a retail setting, in a digital environment or during a consumption experience, shapes the consumer's relationship to the product or service. Far from being limited to simple background noise, music contributes to the construction of a comprehensive, subjective and memorable experience.

As highlighted in the seminal work of Holbrook and Hirschman, the consumer experience is not limited to a functional evaluation of the product: it involves symbolic, hedonic and aesthetic dimensions (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982). Music, through its immersive and evocative nature, is fully integrated into this experiential dynamic (Rouzé, 2004). Contemporary consumers are no longer simply looking for a useful good or service; they aspire to moments of escape, pleasure and sensory discovery. Music can fulfil this expectation by creating an environment conducive to escapism, stimulating the imagination, reinforcing feelings of well-being or fostering an emotional connection to the consumption environment (Lundqvist et al., 2009). From this perspective, our exploratory study aims to understand how the different dimensions of the musical experience, such as rhythm, melody, timbre, lyrics and familiarity, interact with the emotions felt and, in turn, influence consumer attitudes and behaviours.

The research question is as follows: How do the emotions evoked by music listening contribute to the construction of significant autobiographical memories among Moroccan Generation X and Baby Boomer listeners, and how do these memories, once formed, shape their listening and re-listening practices?

In this study, listening experience refers to the subjective, sensory and emotional responses associated with listening to music (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982); nostalgia refers to a bittersweet emotion linked to the memory of valued past experiences (Batcho, 1995); emotional comfort refers to mood regulation through the active search for soothing musical stimuli (Zillmann, 1988); and re-listening refers to the voluntary reconsumption of the same musical content for memorial or emotional purposes (Russell and Levy, 2012). We treat music listening as an individual, familial and sociocultural lived experience rather than only as an act of commercial purchase. The study does not test product or brand evaluation, purchase decisions or loyalty; its implications for music-market stakeholders are discussed only as hypotheses.

Our contribution thus aims to shed light, through an exploratory approach, on the shift from consumption based on function to consumption oriented towards sensation, escapism and emotion, for which music appears to be a key catalyst.

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Research Method

Design

We adopted an exploratory, inductive qualitative design based on semi-structured interviews, which are well suited to collecting rich, contextualised accounts of lived experience and reminiscence. The report follows the usual qualitative reporting conventions (rationale, sampling, data collection, analysis, rigour and reflexivity).

Participants and sampling

Participants were recruited through convenience sampling combined with snowballing. Inclusion criteria were (1) belonging to Generation X or the Baby Boomer generation, defined here, following the cohort definitions of the Pew Research Center, as born between 1965 and 1980 and between 1946 and 1964, respectively (Dimock, 2019); (2) residing in Morocco; and (3) listening to music regularly. Generational boundaries are conventional and vary across sources (e.g., Strauss and Howe (Strauss and Howe, 1991) locate the corresponding cohort between 1961 and 1981); the Generation X participants in this study, aged 45 to 60 at the time of the interviews, year 2025, all fall within the range adopted here. Recruitment channels were direct contact (n = 5), snowballing (n = 4), associative network (n = 2), university network (n = 2), local network (n = 2) and professional network (n = 2).

The sample comprised 17 participants: 10 men and 7 women; 13 Generation X participants (aged 45 to 60) and 4 Baby Boomers (aged 64 to 74). They lived in nine cities (Marrakech 4, Casablanca 3, Rabat 3, Fès 2 and one each in Tangier, Meknès, Agadir, Tétouan and Oujda). Three participants had secondary education and 14 had university education (6 bachelor's, 6 master's and 2 doctorates). Most held middle- or upper-middle-class professional positions and several were retired. The sample is therefore urban, highly educated and professionally advantaged, which limits the diversity of the perspectives captured. Detailed characteristics are given in Table *2*.

Code	Gender, age (cohort)	City	Education	Profession (recruitment)	Dominant musical preferences	Listening context
R1	Woman, 53 (Gen X)	Marrakech	Master's	Public-sector executive (associative network)	Amazigh (Rouicha, Hadda Ouaaki)	Daily listening; territorial anchoring; seeking soothing
R2	Woman, 48 (Gen X)	Casablanca	Bachelor's	Secondary-school teacher (direct contact)	Classical, Raï (Hasni), Tachlhit	Daily listening during activity; compensation for mental fatigue
R3	Man, 57 (Gen X)	Rabat	Doctorate	Doctoral student (university network)	Eclectic; childhood memories	Introspective, solitary listening; paternal nostalgia

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R4	Woman, 50 (Gen X)	Fès	Master's	Civil engineer (snowball)	Oriental, Sufi, Andalusian (Fairuz)	Daily ritual (coffee); cathartic and spiritual dimension
R5	Man, 64 (Boomer)	Marrakech	Secondary	Independent trader (local network)	Classical Oriental, Amazigh	Concentrated night-time listening; strong memories of conflicts and joys
R6	Man, 50 (Gen X)	Casablanca	Bachelor's	Administrative executive (direct contact)	Pop, Raï, variety (Pierre Bachelet)	Listening while driving; rooted in family and friendship relationships
R7	Woman, 49 (Gen X)	Tangier	Master's	Management consultant (professional network)	Classical Arabic, pop, acoustic/piano	Listening in car and during sport; emotional regulation within the couple
R8	Man, 54 (Gen X)	Meknès	Bachelor's	Territorial civil servant (snowball)	Old Moroccan (Doukkali, Ghiwane)	Intergenerational transmission; daily family ritual
R9	Woman, 60 (Gen X)	Rabat	Master's	Retired banking executive (associative network)	Relaxing, ambient, piano (Einaudi)	Professional stress management; support for meditation
R10	Man, 52 (Gen X)	Agadir	Bachelor's	Local cultural actor (direct contact)	Amazigh (Izenzaren, Ammouri M'barek)	Cultural pride; family evenings; festivals
R11	Man, 68 (Boomer)	Fès	Secondary	Retired craftsman (local network)	Andalusian Tarab (Abdessadeq Cheqara)	Search for authenticity; attachment to family origins

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R12	Woman, 71 (Boomer)	Marrakech	Doctorate	Professor emerita (university network)	Eclectic (rock, pop, classical)	Daily companion; cathartic moments at concerts
R13	Man, 60 (Gen X)	Tétouan	Bachelor's	Chartered accountant (snowball)	Andalusian Tarab, traditional Moroccan	Emotional tribute to the deceased; ritual of quiet evenings
R14	Man, 54 (Gen X)	Oujda	Bachelor's	Senior technician (direct contact)	Old Raï (Hasni, Khaled, Mami)	Listening in car and evenings; strong link with adolescence
R15	Woman, 74 (Boomer)	Casablanca	Secondary	Retired, private sector (snowball)	Moroccan and international variety	Festive nostalgia; memories of travel and outings
R16	Man, 45 (Gen X)	Marrakech	Master's	SME manager (professional network)	Chaâbi, Andalusian	Listening during family gatherings; regulation of anxious states
R17	Man, 52 (Gen X)	Rabat	Master's	Senior executive (direct contact)	Classical pop, instrumental	Reflective listening; personal affective memory

TABLE 2: Characteristics of the 17 participants

Source: Authors' data

Interview guide

The interview guide was structured around three themes derived from the conceptual chain above: (1) the experience of music consumption (listening habits, preferences, relationship with music); (2) emotions aroused and memory dynamics; and (3) re-listening to music in light of memory. The questions associated with each of these themes are presented in Table *3*.

Theme	Questions

1. The experience of music consumption	What types of music do you listen to most often? How often do you listen to music? How does music make you feel? How does music influence your mood and well-being? Are there specific types of music or artists that evoke stronger emotions in you than others? What do you think makes music so emotionally powerful?
2. Emotions aroused and memory dynamics	Are there particular songs or artists that bring back specific memories or emotions? How do these memories or emotions influence your choice of music? Can you describe a moment when you felt a strong emotion while listening to music? How did that emotion influence your subsequent behaviour? Do you think that memories or emotions linked to music make you more likely to listen to specific songs or artists again? Could you tell me about a particular experience you have had with music that was especially positive or negative? Can you describe a memorable experience where a song or piece of music had a profound emotional impact on you, and how it influenced your subsequent relationship with that song or type of music?
3. Re-listening to music in light of memory	What are the main triggers (situations, places, people) that prompt you to listen to a specific song again, and how do these triggers affect your desire to listen again? Under what circumstances (time of day, state of mind, specific events) do you tend to listen again to music that holds emotional significance for you? Are there times when you feel a stronger need to listen again to music linked to emotional memories? What are these periods, and why? Have you noticed any changes in your listening habits over time? What factors contribute to this? What emotions do you typically feel when listening to a song that brings back a specific memory, and how do these emotions influence your choice to listen to certain songs over others? Is there anything else you would like to add about how emotional memory influences your music consumption?

TABLE 3: Interview guide

Source: Authors' creation, derived from the conceptual chain presented in Table 1.

Data collection

The 17 interviews were conducted by the authors, 10 in French and 7 in Moroccan Arabic (Darija), in person or remotely depending on participant availability. They lasted 20 to 30 minutes on average and were audio-recorded. Before each interview, participants received information about the study's objectives, the voluntary nature of participation, the audio recording, the anonymisation of data and the right to withdraw, and gave oral consent.

Transcription and translation

All interviews were automatically transcribed into French, including those conducted in Darija. The transcripts were then translated into English using the DeepL tool. Because emotional expressions and culturally specific meanings may be altered in translation, all verbatim quotes reported in this article were manually reviewed and adjusted by the bilingual

authors, who corrected transcription and translation errors and sought to preserve semantic fidelity and dialectal nuances (e.g., song titles and expressions in Darija are kept in their original form where no faithful equivalent exists). We acknowledge that a chain of automatic transcription and machine translation remains a limitation.

Data analysis, rigour and reflexivity

The analysis followed an inductive thematic approach (Braun and Clarke, 2006) carried out manually in three stages: (1) initial reading of the transcripts; (2) open coding of semantic units; and (3) grouping of the codes into sub-themes and themes. Coding was collaborative: the authors jointly coded the entire set of transcripts, discussing each segment and resolving interpretative disagreements through consensus as the analysis progressed, which produced a single coding framework validated by all authors. No independent double coding and no inter-coder agreement index were used. An audit trail was kept in the form of a coding log and a methodological log documenting interpretative choices (Miles and Huberman, 2003). Member checking was carried out with 13 of the 17 participants, to whom a summary of themes and sub-themes was sent and who were invited to confirm, qualify or refute the interpretations; their feedback confirmed the main findings. Because the codes are not mutually exclusive, the same participant may illustrate several themes and sub-themes.

The three themes mirror the three sections of the interview guide, so they are partly guide-driven; the inductive analysis mainly produced the sub-themes, the codebook (41 codes) and the profiles presented.

The authors are marketing researchers affiliated with a Moroccan business school, fluent in Darija and French, and they conducted all the interviews themselves. Several participants were recruited through the authors' own professional, associative or personal networks (direct contact, snowballing), so prior acquaintance or social desirability may have influenced the accounts, for example by encouraging socially valued narratives about family and heritage. The authors' marketing background may also have oriented the interpretation towards consumption-related readings; the joint coding and member checking were intended to limit this influence.

Thematic saturation

Saturation was assessed by tracking, after each interview, the number of new codes and new themes, in line with Guest et al. (Guest et al., 2006) and Braun and Clarke (Braun and Clarke, 2006). We defined it using three explicit criteria: (1) no more than one new code per interview over three consecutive interviews; (2) no new theme and stability of the relationships between themes and sub-themes; and (3) no new properties within existing sub-themes. What we assess is therefore code saturation; it does not guarantee that every nuance of meaning has been exhausted.

The number of new codes fell steadily, from six in the first interview to two from the eighth interview, then to one for interviews 14, 15 and 16, and none for interview 17. The saturation matrix, showing new and cumulative codes and themes for each interview, is presented in Table *4*. The three themes emerged in the first interview and remained stable. Code yield thus fell to one or none from the 14th interview, when saturation was considered to have been approached; interviews 15 to 17 yielded only two new codes in total (4.9% of the final codebook of 41 codes) and no new theme, which we took as confirmation. We therefore stopped recruitment after the 17th interview. Saturation was assessed for the sample as a whole; with only four Baby Boomers, it cannot be claimed separately for each generational group. The principal codes mobilised in each interview and the related themes are listed in Table *5*.

Interview	New codes	Cumulative codes	New themes	Cumulative themes
R1	6	6	3	3
R2	4	10	0	3
R3	3	13	0	3

R4	4	17	0	3
R5	3	20	0	3
R6	3	23	0	3
R7	3	26	0	3
R8	2	28	0	3
R9	2	30	0	3
R10	2	32	0	3
R11	2	34	0	3
R12	2	36	0	3
R13	2	38	0	3
R14	1	39	0	3
R15	1	40	0	3
R16	1	41	0	3
R17	0	41	0	3

TABLE 4: Thematic saturation matrix

Source: Authors' analysis, following the saturation approach of Guest et al. (Guest et al., 2006).

Interview	Principal codes	Related themes
R1	Daily listening; nostalgia; territorial/identity anchoring; selective avoidance; mood regulation; loyalty to musical style	Listening experience / Emotions-memory / Re-listening
R2	Functional listening (activity); mental-fatigue compensation; transition Raï to Tachlhit; mixed painful and joyful memories	Listening experience / Emotions-memory
R3	Introspective listening; paternal nostalgia; solitary listening	Emotions-memory / Re-listening
R4	Ritual listening (morning/evening); emotional catharsis; childhood family memories; seeking emotional comfort	Emotions-memory / Re-listening

R5	Concentrated nocturnal listening; memories of family conflicts; generational loyalty	Emotions-memory / Re-listening
R6	Listening in the car; memories of deceased loved ones; selective avoidance of painful memories	Emotions-memory / Re-listening
R7	Listening as a couple; engagement memories; relational emotional regulation	Emotions-memory / Re-listening
R8	Intergenerational transmission; cultural heritage	Emotions-memory / Re-listening
R9	Relaxing/meditative listening; professional stress management	Listening experience / Emotions-memory
R10	Amazigh cultural pride; listening with family and at festivals	Listening experience / Emotions-memory
R11	Search for authenticity; Andalusian Tarab as a family bond	Emotions-memory / Re-listening
R12	Eclectic listening; catharsis at concerts; diversification of tastes	Listening experience / Emotions-memory
R13	Emotional tribute to the deceased; ritualisation of quiet evenings	Emotions-memory / Re-listening
R14	Nostalgia for adolescence; "time machine" (old Raï)	Emotions-memory / Re-listening
R15	Festive nostalgia; memories of travel and outings	Emotions-memory / Re-listening
R16	Anxiety regulation; listening during family gatherings	Emotions-memory / Re-listening
R17	Reflective listening; personal affective memory	Emotions-memory / Re-listening

TABLE 5: Principal codes associated with each interview and related themes

The table lists the principal codes mobilised in each interview, including recurrences and refinements of codes first identified earlier.
Source: Authors' analysis, based on the thematic approach of Braun and Clarke (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

The study involved adult volunteers, with no vulnerable population, no health or sensitive personal data and no intervention. Free and informed oral consent was obtained from all participants, and data were anonymised at transcription.

Results And Discussion

Results

Overview

The analysis produced three themes and nine sub-themes, and four analytical profiles, because coding was not mutually exclusive, the same participant may appear under several sub-themes and profiles. Table *6* lists the respondents whose verbatim quotes illustrate each sub-theme; it does not report frequencies, which are not meaningful in a sample of 17 selected by convenience. We distinguish sub-themes that recur across several respondents from single-case sub-themes, which we retain because they qualify the dominant picture.

Manual Analysis of Responses

Horizontal analysis

Theme 1 - **The experience of music consumption:** Many participants described listening to music, and re-listening to familiar pieces, on a daily basis, suggesting that music is embedded in their routines. Two patterns emerged, differentiated by temporal context, listening posture and intended function.

The first is functional, background listening (R2, R6, R7, R14), which occurs during activities such as walking, driving, housework or sport, when music continuously occupies the soundscape. R2 summarised: "I only listen to music when I'm doing something, like walking, driving, or celebrating with my family. Silence is never good." This testimony illustrates a relationship with silence perceived as uncomfortable, music filling a void rather than eliciting focused attention. The second is introspective and contemplative listening (R3, R4, R5, R9, R13), which occurs late in the evening, in moments of solitude or meditation; here silence becomes a sought-after condition fostering deep cognitive and emotional immersion. The two patterns differ not only by time of day but also by the function attributed to silence: an obstacle to overcome for the first, a condition of immersion for the second. They are not mutually exclusive (R9, for example, uses relaxing music both to start the day and to unwind in the evening), and the preference for silence expressed by some participants is not shared by all. Listening in this sample therefore seems organised more around a contrasting relationship to solitude and activity than around stylistic preference.

Theme 2 - **Emotions aroused and memory dynamics:** Most accounts emphasised positive emotions such as calm, serenity, joy and cultural pride. R9 described relaxing music as "a real antidote to stress and anxiety," R10 spoke of "a sense of pride and connection to my roots" and R13 mentioned "serenity" and "well-being." These emotions coexisted, however, with ambivalent ones, notably nostalgia, which blends pleasure and sadness: R15 described "a gentle sadness, because it reminds me of something that was important in my life." Music appeared to evoke specific memories quickly and vividly.

The memory triggers were varied: deceased relatives (R6, R10, R13), the engagement period (R7), early married life (R8), childhood family evenings (R4, R10, R11) and, in one case, past family crises (R5). Several artists were repeatedly cited as emotional catalysts: Cheb Hasni, Fairuz, Oum Kalthoum, Abdelwahab Doukkali, Abdessadeq Cheqara, Izenzaren and Ludovico Einaudi. R6 illustrated the ambivalence of music-evoked memories within a single account: "I feel negative when I hear Majda Abdelohab hta fatelfout; it reminds me of my sister who died. I feel positive when I hear Ensay of Saad Lamjarred; it makes me happy because it reminds me of my beloved daughter." R5 provides a contrasting, isolated case: focused night-time listening reactivates memories of past family crises rather than soothing ones. Although a single case, it cautions against portraying music listening as exclusively a source of comfort.

Theme 3 - **Re-listening to music in light of memory:** Participants did not appear to choose songs at random; they described drawing from a personal repertoire according to the memories they wished to relive or, conversely, to keep at a distance. Three orientations emerged: seeking comfort, cathartic seeking of melancholy and selective avoidance.

Seeking emotional comfort (R4, R8, R12) involved turning to artists and songs as "bridges to happy or significant moments" in life, especially during stressful periods, birthdays, the end of the year or times of transition.

Selective avoidance was described by participants who deliberately steer clear of songs associated with painful memories. R1 stated: "I often listen to music that makes me happy (positive), and I avoid the negative kind." R4 said that songs evoking difficult times are "listened to with greater caution." R6 explained: "Sometimes I feel like listening to that kind of music, but at other times I reject it outright; I no longer listen to that genre because it makes me sad," and he systematically avoids the song associated with his late sister. R16 stops a song when "the emotion becomes too strong."

Cathartic seeking was described by participants who actively look for nostalgic melancholy for its purifying effect. R2 turns to Tachlhit music when her mental health is at its lowest: "it motivates me to be better." R4 described a "cathartic experience" while listening to Oum Kalthoum that "allowed me to reconnect with my emotions." R12 reported a similar experience with Adele in concert, which "reminded me of difficult personal moments." R14 deliberately replays songs that make him sad: "When a song makes me feel something intense, I want to play it again, even if it makes me a bit sad." R15 articulated the ambivalence most clearly: "Even though it sometimes makes me sad, I love that sadness because it is linked to beautiful memories."

Avoidance and cathartic seeking can coexist in the same person, depending on the song: R4 avoids songs that recall difficult times while actively seeking Oum Kalthoum's melancholic pieces. One possible reading, which our data cannot test, is that the choice between avoidance and voluntary re-listening depends less on the valence of the evoked emotion than on the emotional weight of the memory and its proximity in time.

Sub-theme	Respondents quoted	Recurrence	Representative verbatim
1a. Functional listening and mood support	R2, R7, R9	Recurrent	"I listen to relaxing music every day, especially in the morning to start my day well and in the evening to unwind before bed. It helps me manage the stress that accumulates at work and in daily life [...] It's a real antidote to stress and anxiety." (R9)
			"When I'm driving, it keeps me from getting bored; when I'm working out, it gives me rhythm; when I feel lonely, sad, or down, I put on classical, instrumental and sentimental music." (R7)
			"Listening to music during exercise can compensate for mental fatigue." (R2)

1b. Introspective and contemplative listening (nocturnal/solitary)	R3, R4, R5	Recurrent	"We mostly prefer listening to music at night rather than during the day, depending on our feelings and emotions." (R5)
			"I tend to listen to meaningful music again in the evening, when I'm calmer and more introspective." (R4)
			"When I'm alone." (R3)
2a. Memories of deceased loved ones	R6, R3, R10	Recurrent	"When I hear Majda Abdelohab hta fatelfout, it reminds me of my sister who died." (R6)
			"A song from my childhood that deeply marked me, with a beautiful memory of my father who is no longer with us." (R3)
			"The music revived painful memories, but with time, it helped me find a kind of peace." (R10)
2b. Memories of engagement and married life	R7	Single case	"When I listen to a Fadel Shakir song, it reminds me of the emotions I felt when my wife and I were dating during our engagement [...] I have a list of favorites that my wife likes and that we used to listen to together." (R7)

2c. Childhood memories with family	R4, R10, R11	Recurrent	"'Ya Rayah' by Dahmane El Harrachi always reminds me of family evenings from my childhood, when my parents would play this song for dancing." (R4)
			"Izenzaren's songs take me back to my younger years, when we organized family parties where everyone sang and danced." (R10)
			"Tracks like 'In Maqam Hijaz,' performed by Abdessadeq Cheqara, remind me of evenings spent with my family listening to this music together." (R11).
2d. Reminiscences of past family crises	R5	Single case	"A very powerful moment that remembers the argument between my brother and his wife with my mother [...] we seek to listen to [...] music that is linked to very powerful moments, moments of sorrow." (R5)
3a. Actively seeking emotional comfort	R4	Single case	"When I feel nostalgic or need comfort, I turn to these artists and songs. They are like bridges to happy or significant moments in my life." (R4)
3b. Cathartic seeking of melancholy	R2, R4, R12	Recurrent	"It was a cathartic experience that allowed me to reconnect with my emotions." (R4)
			"When my mental health is perhaps at its lowest, I like to listen to Tachlhit music [...] it pushes me to be a better person." (R2)
			"[...] reminded me of difficult personal moments." (R12)

3c. Selective avoidance of painful memories	R1, R4, R6	Recurrent	"I often listen to music that makes me happy (positive), and I avoid negative music." (R1)
			"Songs that evoke positive memories or significant moments are often preferred, while those that recall difficult times are listened to with more caution." (R4)
			"Sometimes I feel like listening to that kind of music, but at other times I reject it outright; I no longer listen to that genre because it makes me sad." (R6)

TABLE 6: Thematic coding structure: themes, sub-themes, respondents quoted and representative verbatim quotes

"Recurrent" means illustrated by at least three respondents in the quotations selected; no prevalence across the 17 participants is claimed.
Source: Authors' analysis

Vertical analysis - Analytical profiles: A complementary, case-oriented reading identified four profiles, distinguished by the function attributed to music, the type of memory engaged and the social dimension of listening. They are not mutually exclusive. Table *7* presents the four profiles, the respondents concerned and their main characteristics. Sixteen participants fit at least one profile; R3, whose account combines introspective, solitary listening and paternal nostalgia, was not assigned to any single profile.

Profile 1 - **Music as a functional emotional regulator (R1, R2, R7, R9, R16):** Participants use music as a tool for mood management, using metaphors such as "thermostat" (R1), "antidote" (R9) and "compensation" (R2) that reveal an instrumental view of listening. Regulation is not only corrective but also preventive: R9 listens to relaxing music "every day, in the morning to start the day right and in the evening to unwind." It is also not always individual: R7 regulates mood within the couple and R16 within the family.

Profile 2 - **Music as a vehicle for autobiographical memory (R4, R6, R8, R10, R11, R13):** Here music reconstructs the spatiotemporal and relational context of a memory. R4 recalls "family evenings from my childhood" with "Ya Rayah" by Dahmane El Harrachi, and R8 recalls the "early years of marriage" with "Ya Bent Ennas" by Abdelwahab Doukkali. These accounts resemble music-evoked autobiographical memories as described by Janata et al. (Janata et al., 2007), with an additional collective and intergenerational dimension: R8 organises musical gatherings to pass on traditions to his grandchildren, and R10 attends Amazigh festivals to preserve heritage.

Profile 3 - **Music as a cathartic catalyst (R4, R12, R14, R15):** These participants actively seek melancholy and intense emotion, a paradox in appearance. Their accounts suggest that music lets sadness be experienced within a controlled setting. This adds complexity to the view of nostalgia as a mainly pleasant, comforting emotion (Batcho, 1995) (Holbrook and Schindler, 1991): nostalgia may also be sought for its painful and purifying quality. We distinguish provisionally between "comfort nostalgia" (Profile 2) and "cathartic nostalgia" (Profile 3).

Profile 4 - **Music as an identity and cultural marker (R1, R5, R8, R10, R11, R13, R17):** Music is described as a vehicle for identity and a bulwark against oblivion. R10 speaks of "cultural pride" and a "connection to my roots," and R11 of "a part of my identity and cultural heritage." This profile involves cultural memory (Assmann and Czaplicka, 1995) rather

than only individual memory.

Profile overlaps are as follows: R1 (Profiles 1 and 4); R4 (2 and 3); and R8, R10, R11 and R13 (2 and 4), confirming that music can fulfil several functions at once.

Profile	Respondents	n	Main function of music	Type of memory engaged	Social dimension
1. Functional emotional regulator	R1, R2, R7, R9, R16	5	Mood regulation (corrective and preventive)	Minimally engaged	Individual and relational (couple, family)
2. Vehicle for autobiographical memory	R4, R6, R8, R10, R11, R13	6	Reconstruction of past episodes	Episodic (spatiotemporal and relational context)	Familial, intergenerational
3. Cathartic catalyst	R4, R12, R14, R15	4	Controlled experience of sadness	Emotional	Individual; concert settings (R12)
4. Identity and cultural marker	R1, R5, R8, R10, R11, R13, R17	7	Belonging, transmission, preservation	Cultural	Collective

TABLE 7: Analytical profiles

Source: Authors' analysis

Generational Comparison

Because generation is central to the study's framing, we examined whether Generation X (n = 13) and Baby Boomer (n = 4) participants differed. The sample is too small and unbalanced to support systematic comparison, so the following observations are exploratory. First, all five participants in Profile 1 (functional regulation) are Generation X, whereas none of the four Baby Boomers is, which may suggest a more instrumental, activity-linked use of music among younger participants (driving, sport, work stress). Second, two of the four Baby Boomers (R12, R15) appear in the cathartic profile, against two of the 13 Generation X participants (R4, R14). Third, the Baby Boomers' memory anchors included family origins (R11), family crises (R5), travel and outings (R15) and concerts (R12), whereas Generation X participants more often mentioned adolescence (R14), childhood family evenings (R4, R10) and the couple or family regulation of mood (R7, R16). Finally, the collective and familial dimension of listening and the use of music as a cultural marker appeared in both cohorts. These patterns should be tested in a larger and more balanced sample.

Discussion

Summary of Findings

Among the 17 Moroccan Generation X and Baby Boomer listeners interviewed, music was embedded in daily routines for functional or introspective purposes; it evoked specific autobiographical memories with emotions that were mostly positive but frequently ambivalent; and these memories seemed to orient re-listening towards comfort, catharsis or avoidance. Several participants also described regulating mood and keeping memories alive with a partner or family, or through intergenerational transmission.

Mood Regulation: Towards a Relational Extension

Zillmann's Mood Management Theory holds that individuals select content to optimise their affective states (Zillmann, 1988). Our results are consistent with this view: R1 described music as a "thermostat," R9 as an "antidote to stress" and R2 as "compensation for mental fatigue." Our data suggest two nuances. First, regulation was not only corrective but also preventive (Profile 1). Second, Mood Management Theory focuses on individual media selection and does not explicitly theorise a relational dimension, whereas several participants regulated mood with others: R7 within the couple, R8 through intergenerational transmission and R16 during family gatherings. In this sample, emotional regulation through music therefore appeared to be partly a shared, relational resource rather than a strictly intrapsychic strategy. We propose this as a possible extension of the model, to be tested with designs that observe shared listening directly rather than through individual accounts.

We also observed that regulation seemed linked to a careful selection of pieces associated with specific autobiographical memories, rather than to a generic choice of soothing content. This is consistent with the mechanism of episodic memory proposed by Juslin and Västfjäll (Juslin and Västfjäll, 2008) and with research on music-evoked autobiographical memories (Janata et al., 2007). For several participants (e.g., R4 with Oum Kalthoum, R6 with the memories of his sister and daughter and R8 with his grandchildren), the piece appeared to reconstruct the spatiotemporal and relational context of the original memory, not merely an emotional tone. Mood regulation and autobiographical memory, usually studied separately, thus appeared closely intertwined in these accounts.

Autobiographical Memory, Nostalgia and Cultural Memory

The accounts of R3 (paternal nostalgia in solitary, introspective listening), R13 (an "emotional tribute" to the deceased through Andalusian Tarab and traditional Moroccan music), R14 (a strong link between old Raï and adolescence, consistent with the crystallisation of tastes in late adolescence and early adulthood described by Holbrook and Schindler (Holbrook and Schindler, 1989)) and R17 (reflective listening anchored in personal affective memory) illustrate the diversity of memory anchors. Profile 3 suggests that nostalgia is not always comforting: it can be sought for its painful and purifying quality, which qualifies the view of nostalgia as essentially pleasant (Batcho, 1995) (Holbrook and Schindler, 1991). Profile 4 shows that, for several participants, musical memory is also cultural memory (Assmann and Czaplicka, 1995): a set of practices and narratives shared with a community, in which music becomes a vehicle of transmission and preservation. Individual-level accounts of musical memory may therefore need to be complemented by a notion of cultural memory when applied to settings such as the one studied here. Consumption is likewise a vehicle for identity (Ruvio and Belk, 2013).

Re-listening and the Collective, Familial Dimension

Research on voluntary reconsumption describes re-listening as a way to relive a past experience and derive personal meaning from it (Russell and Levy, 2012), and research on music-evoked memories mostly relies on individual autobiographical accounts (Baumgartner et al., 1992) (Janata et al., 2007). Our participants also described re-listening in these terms, but many situated it in a family or group context: R7 looks for tracks that "remind us of our best memories"; R8 organised "a music evening at home where I told the stories behind the songs"; R10 attends Amazigh festivals to preserve cultural heritage; R16 uses music during family gatherings to manage anxiety; and R6 described listening while driving as anchored in family and friendship relationships.

This pattern may be interpreted in light of the relatively collectivist character often attributed to Moroccan society (Hofstede, 2001), in which the family and the group play a central role in cultural transmission. Here, musical memory seemed to serve not only to extract personal meaning but also to preserve social bonds and transmit heritage. We stress the limits of this interpretation. Our study did not collect Western comparison data, so we cannot state that our findings differ from those obtained elsewhere; we can only say that the collective and familial dimension was salient in our data and is not the primary focus of the models and studies we draw on. Moreover, the works cited were not designed to compare individualist and collectivist settings, and our own design relies on individual interviews rather than on observation of shared listening. The hypothesis of a distinctive familial dimension therefore requires direct comparative testing.

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Implications for Music Consumption

The way nostalgia and autobiographical memory sustain repeated listening to the same repertoire could, from a market perspective, contribute to lasting attachment to certain artists or platforms. This is a hypothesis only: our study rests on self-reported listening and re-listening habits and includes no direct measure of loyalty, repurchase intention, platform retention or purchasing behaviour. Likewise, the familial and collective dimension of re-listening suggests the possibility of shared loyalty dynamics within the household rather than strictly individual ones, which is an avenue of interpretation rather than a measured result.

Practical Implications (Working Hypotheses)

The following suggestions derive from the exploratory themes identified here. They are not based on any empirical evaluation of platforms, brands, retailers or event organisers and should be tested before any implementation:

• Streaming platforms could explore recommendation features based on autobiographical memory (e.g., "memories" playlists) and shared or family playlists for older listeners.

• Brands could examine whether generational musical references in communication activate positive emotional associations, taking into account that some memories are painful and that nostalgia is not uniformly positive.

• Retailers and venues could examine whether spaces for collective, intergenerational listening reinforce the family dimension observed here.

• Event organisers could consider themed concerts built on culturally specific repertoires, since several participants expressed a wish for cultural reconnection.

Any use of emotion-sensing technologies to personalise such offers raises ethical questions on privacy and informed consent (Pantano and Dennis, 2019), and the risk of re-exposing listeners to painful memories calls for user control over memory-based recommendations.

Limitations and Future Research

This exploratory study should be read as contextual insight rather than generalisable evidence. (1) Sampling and diversity: the sample of 17 was obtained by convenience and snowball sampling through the authors' networks. It is urban, highly educated and professionally advantaged, with only 3 participants with secondary education, and it includes more men (10) than women (7). Rural and lower-income listeners and other Moroccan cultural and linguistic communities are not represented, which limits transferability. (2) Generational balance: the 13 Generation X and 4 Baby Boomer participants do not allow robust comparison between cohorts. (3) Language and translation: interviews in Darija were automatically transcribed into French and then machine-translated into English; although quotes were reviewed by bilingual authors, nuances of emotional expression may have been altered. (4) Analysis: coding was done jointly by consensus without independent double coding or an inter-coder agreement index; the three themes mirror the structure of the interview guide; saturation refers to code saturation in the whole sample; and member checking covered 13 of 17 participants. (5) Researcher influence: the authors conducted the interviews and recruited participants from their own networks. (6) Self-report: data are retrospective statements about listening and re-listening, without behavioural or market measures, and the family dimension was reported by individuals, not observed among family members. (7) Single context: only one cultural setting was studied, so no direct comparison with other contexts is possible.

Future research could (a) compare collectivist and individualist contexts to test the hypothesis of a distinctive familial dimension; (b) use mixed methods, combining interviews and streaming behavioural data, to test the loyalty hypotheses formulated above; (c) include dyadic or family-level designs and more diverse Moroccan samples; and (d) replicate the study with younger generations to determine whether the mechanisms observed are specific to Generation X and Baby Boomers.

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Conclusions

This exploratory study of 17 Moroccan Generation X and Baby Boomer listeners suggests that music listening is a powerful resource for emotional regulation and memory reactivation. Three dynamics emerged: the daily integration of music into routines for functional or introspective purposes; the anchoring of autobiographical memories by music, associated with mostly positive but frequently ambivalent emotions tinged with nostalgia, including cases in which painful memories resurface; and re-listening guided by the search for emotional comfort, the cathartic search for melancholy or the selective avoidance of painful memories.

The study contributes in two ways. Theoretically, it connects mood management theory and the literature on music-evoked autobiographical memory to a relatively collectivist setting that has been little documented, highlighting a familial and shared dimension of emotional regulation through music that existing models do not explicitly theorise; this proposition remains tentative and requires comparative testing. Empirically, it offers one of the first qualitative explorations of the musical experience of Moroccan Generation X and Baby Boomer listeners, paving the way for comparative and quantitative research.

Additional Information

Author Contributions

All authors have reviewed the final version to be published and agreed to be accountable for all aspects of the work.

Concept and design: Kaoutar Khales, Nour Habiba Bensassi , Zineb Elbayed

Acquisition, analysis, or interpretation of data: Kaoutar Khales, Nour Habiba Bensassi , Zineb Elbayed

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Critical review of the manuscript for important intellectual content: Kaoutar Khales, Nour Habiba Bensassi , Zineb Elbayed

Supervision: Kaoutar Khales, Nour Habiba Bensassi , Zineb Elbayed

Disclosures

Human subjects: Consent was obtained from all participants in this study.

Animal subjects: All authors have confirmed that this study did not involve animal subjects or tissue.

Conflicts of interest: In compliance with the ICMJE uniform disclosure form, all authors declare the following:

- **Payment/services info:** All authors have declared that no financial support was received from any organization for the submitted work.
- **Financial relationships:** All authors have declared that they have no financial relationships at present or within the previous three years with any organizations that might have an interest in the submitted work.
- **Other relationships:** All authors have declared that there are no other relationships or activities that could appear to have influenced the submitted work.

Data Availability Statements

The datasets (and/or code) supporting this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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