

Breaking the Gender Gap in Rap/Hip-Hop Consumption



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1 Introduction

Although music has been around for thousands of years, we are still far from knowing what exactly attracts us to it, as Schäfer and Sedlmeier (2010) stated. Literature has recently shown abundant research into the issue of music consumption and preferences, and this has been complemented by official reports about participation in both live and recorded music.

In this regard, live concert attendance for rap/hip-hop music, which is one of the non-mainstream music genres, has increased in recent years, specifically by 1.3% since 2010, according to the 2018–2019 Survey of Cultural Habits and Practices (SCHP) conducted by the Spanish Ministry of Culture and Sport. This is followed by electronic, hard rock and jazz music, although attendance in these genres decreased slightly between 2014 and 2018. According to the same survey and in relation to gender, alternative music genres, especially rap/hip-hop, electronic and hard rock, seem to attract more male spectators to live music concerts. Specifically, over 5% of men and over 3% of women attend rap concerts.

When it comes to recorded music, listening to alternative genres is higher than concert attendance and figures are similar across these alternative genres (over 12%), namely electronic music, blues, jazz and rap/hip-hop. In this case, more men listen to non-mainstream music genres than women. Men prefer electronic music, rap/hip-hop, blues, soul and jazz while women prefer blues, soul, jazz, reggae, electronic music and rap/hip-hop. Figures for the latter increased for both genders from 2014 to 2018, by 6% for men and 3% for women.

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In 2018, 25.8% of free downloads were rap/hip-hop music versus 20% and 15% of electronic music and reggae, respectively. In terms of gender, 31.8% of men downloaded rap/hip-hop as opposed to 18.4% of women. This last figure is higher than other downloads made by women such as reggae (15.5%) and electronic music (13.8%) but is considerably lower than blues and soul (63.3%) and jazz (58.7%).

Finally, in digital service subscriptions, the same survey (SCHP, 2018–2019) shows that 23% of subscribers listen to rap/hip-hop, very closely followed by electronic music with 22.6%, and other genres (under 18%). A breakdown of rap/hip-hop listeners on these platforms shows that the 23% total was made up of 28.5% of men and 17.4% of women. However, female subscribers listening to this type of music was the highest percentage in comparison with other minority genres such as blues (17.2%), electronic music (16.2%) and reggae (14.6%).

Previous data show different gender-related consumption patterns in the case of minority music genres. Music consumption, including differences by gender, has been studied in different academic disciplines. In psychological research, some studies have analysed the influence of gender on music preferences. In this regard, men seem to prefer rebellious music (i.e. heavy metal and punk music) while women choose easy listening music (i.e. pop and country music) (Colley, 2008; George et al., 2007; Zweigenhaft, 2008). Similarly, following North (2010) and Herrera et al. (2018), men show greater preferences towards more aggressive, exciting music styles, linked to behavioural disconformity with social rules. Conversely, women prefer softer music, with more emotional content, made to dance to and with clear dependence on social media patterns (Colley, 2008). Although Colley (2008) stated that the underlying structure of music preferences is not necessarily the same, women show higher preferences for unpretentious music (Bonneville-Roussy et al., 2013). In this regard, Langmeyer et al. (2012) also found gender differences: men are mutually exclusive in their music preferences, whereas women are more likely to overlap. This is in line with what Crowther and Durkin (1982) stated in relation to greater musical eclecticism in the female gender. Finally, when analysing social identity and gender, Tipa (2015) noted that women usually listen to music in many of their daily activities, while for men, music plays a major role in social and affective relationships between peer groups.

The sociological approach highlights that women participate more than men in highbrow cultural activities (Bihagen & Katz-Gerro, 2000; Dimaggio, 1982; Lizardo, 2006), which is linked to early socialisation in arts and socioeconomic status (Bourdieu, 1984; Collins, 1988; Lizardo, 2004), the labour market and marital status. In addition, omnivorous consumer behaviour is associated with individuals that possess higher levels of human, economic and cultural capital, regardless of gender (Christin, 2012; García-Álvarez et al., 2007; Katz-Gerro & Osullivan, 2010; Peterson, 1992; Peterson & Kern, 1996). In the economic literature, Prieto-Rodriguez and Fernández-Blanco (2000) showed that gender (being female) and education (upper secondary or university degree) are predictors of omnivorous music consumption. However, this has a negative effect in the case of popular music (Favaro & Frateschi, 2007; Montoro-Pons & Cuadrado-García, 2011).

This paper, focused on rap/hip-hop consumption, aims to gain a deeper insight into the role of gender participation in this popular music genre. Specifically, we aim to test the existence of gender differences in its consumption and appreciation. In doing so, we first summarise the literature review on music consumption in relation to rap/hip-hop. Then, the exploratory research undertaken is described. This is followed by a results and comments section and ends with a discussion.

2 Rap/Hip-Hop Consumption Literature

The consumption of rap/hip-hop has been discussed, both directly and indirectly, from different standpoints. These mainly centre on three academic disciplines: psychology, sociology and marketing (consumer behaviour). The psychological perspective has dealt with social identity, personality and perceptions, among other variables. In terms of social identity, Dixon et al. (2009, p. 355) focused on an ethnic group (black people and immigrants), analysing their collective self-esteem within the community. Three findings can be noted from this work. First, “African American audience members’ collective self-esteem was positively related to their consumption of rap music (viewers who consumed more rap videos also had a higher sense of collective self-esteem)”. Second, black consumers with strong Afro-centric features, viewing videos with Afro-centric standards of beauty instead of Euro-centric ones, increased their identification. Finally, they stated that: “participants are able to use their cultural lens and ethnic identification to identify rap content which can potentially empower them”. These findings are consistent with prior research focused on black audiences (Allen, 2001; Appiah, 2004). These studies point to the importance of race in relation to the rap music genre with theories possibly differing for white individuals. This is in line with what others think of hip-hop music because of its connection to race, class, sexism and black culture (Jacobson, 2015; Rose, 2008). While rap may be used to create new identities for relatively small numbers of white and Asian urban music enthusiasts, for most black urban music enthusiasts, this music is more likely to reflect and consolidate already existing racial identities (Tanner et al., 2009). In this sense, “hip-hop contributes to the understanding and construction of race, thereby contributing to racial formation theory that maintains the stratification with whites privileged above nonwhites” (Jacobson, 2015, p. 847).

Personality has also been related to music. Several theories support the link between personality and music preferences, specifically its uses and the gratification approach (Rosengreen et al., 1985). In this regard, people prefer styles of music that reinforce and reflect aspects of their personalities and personal identities (Rentfrow & Gosling, 2007). In addition, according to the model of optimal stimulation (Eysenck, 1990; Zuckerman, 1979), people tend to choose the type of music that moves them towards their optimal arousal level. In particular, Rentfrow and Gosling (2003) found that people who enjoy intense styles of music, such as rock, heavy metal and punk (rap/hip-hop could also be included) score high on psychological measures of thrill-seeking and openness. They also value freedom and independence. These authors,

who determined the major dimensions of music preferences and their association with the Big-Five personality factors, also found that the fourth dimension (energetic and rhythmic), defined by rap/hip-hop, soul/funk and electronic/dance music, was positively related to extraversion and agreeableness, flirtatiousness, liberalism, self-perceived attractiveness and athleticism but negatively related to social dominance, orientation and conservatism. Bonneville-Roussy et al. (2013) also found that preferences for rap/hip-hop were positively associated with sociability, status orientation and physical attractiveness.

Music preferences and interpersonal perceptions have also been studied, bringing relevant findings. For instance, MacNamara and Ballard (1999) found that individuals with high resting arousal and antisocial characteristics preferred arousing styles of music that centred on a rebellious theme such as heavy metal, rock and rap. On the other hand, Rentfrow and Gosling (2006, p. 239) showed that “extraversion was positively related to music attributes such as energy, enthusiasm, and amount of singing and the genres country and hip-hop”. In summary, the relationship between music preferences and personality may vary for different groups based on factors such as geography and age (Zweigenhaft, 2008).

Delsing et al. (2008, p. 128) focused their research on teenagers’ music preferences revealing that adolescents who liked urban music (which includes rap/hip-hop), as well as pop and dance music, tended to score relatively high on extraversion and agreeableness. This was related to extravert desires to mingle with peers and to have fun. The authors stated that this could be explained by the model of optimal stimulation. This study also provides support for the generalisability of Rentfrow and Gosling’s (2003) four-factor structure of music preferences across cultures and age groups. In later studies, Rentfrow et al. (2011) provided a model of musical preferences based on listeners’ affective reactions to excerpts of music from a wide variety of musical genres, based on five factors. Urban music was largely defined by rhythmic and percussive music (rap, funk and acid jazz) in this case. They concluded that the music model was free of genre and reflected emotional/affective responses to music. Preferences were influenced by both social connotations and specific auditory features of music. A new study by Rentfrow et al. (2012) confirmed that preferences for music are also determined by specific musical attributes.

The sociological perspective states that rap/hip-hop is dominated by male artists and focuses mainly on a male audience, which commonly drives to hypermasculinity, misogyny, demeaning women, and violence and homophobia in lyrics (Adams & Fuller, 2006; Conrad et al., 2009; Cundiff, 2013; Damien, 2006; Monk-Turner & Sylvertooth, 2008; Rebollo-Gil & Moras, 2012; Rose, 2008; Wester et al., 1997). These topics are predominant in commercial and mainstream rap, which is performed by artists who work with major record companies (Harkness, 2013). However, the predominant topics among popular, successful underground rappers are also misogyny and hypermasculinity but include politically charged and anti-establishment lyrics to a lesser degree (Oware, 2014, p. 61). Another study (Weitzer & Kubrin, 2009) suggested that rappers whose songs portray women negatively are influenced by three major social forces: larger gender relations, local neighbourhood conditions and the music industry. In response to corporate pressures, many rappers

abandon political and social messages and focus instead on material wealth and sexual exploits in order to sell records. In other words, according to Oware (2014, p. 77), “some underground rap artists intentionally obscure the boundaries between the restricted and large-scale field of production, due to hegemonic market forces”. This author concluded that the distinction between bad rap (mainstream rap) and good rap (underground rap) should not be made, nuancing Bourdieu’s (1993, 1996) field of cultural production, as they are not mutually exclusive. However, the target group of rap/hip-hop listeners differs, according to Elafros (2013), with non-commercial rap music being positioned among hip-hop fans and rap music producers. Accordingly, whereas mainstream rap demands black ghetto centrality, underground rap endorses inter-raciality and multiculturalism (Rodriquez, 2006).

Other studies note that female rappers are not always against misogyny and male domination (Oware, 2009). In fact, the majority of female rapper lyrics talk of women who are self-objectified, self-exploited and use derogatory lyrics when referring to other women. The author found that these contradictory messages invalidate the empowering messages that are transmitted, instead of reproducing and defending male hegemonic notions of femininity. The fact they offered such little resistance is probably a reflection of industry norms at that time (Weitzer & Kubrin, 2009), though it would seem that resistance was stronger in the beginnings (Rose, 1994).

Some authors have focused on people’s perception of rap/hip-hop as well as its influence. For instance, “hip-hop was rated lowest on showing relationships being committed, nurturing, romantic, responsible, using polite language and implicit” (Agbo-Quaye & Robertson, 2010, p. 362). These authors also pointed out that “female characters within hip-hop and rock are predominantly represented as powerless and yearning for male authority”. This is in line with what Berry (1995) stated a quarter of century ago when expressing that hip-hop displays sexuality, misogynistic lyrics and apparent pornographic elements, reinforcing its image of a “morally corrupted genre”. In this regard, it has been said that controversial rap music has had a negative influence on adolescent development (Tanner et al., 2009). However, young people seem to be unaware of the impact that this music has on their lives (Agbo-Quaye & Robertson, 2010). For instance, cultural images of sexual stereotypes in rap music videos can influence the sexual attitudes and behaviour of female adolescents (Peterson et al., 2007). Other negative effects from a sociological point of view refer to greater acceptance of male domination and violence (Oliver, 2006).

Finally, from the consumer perspective, specifically in relation to music genre choices, Cuadrado-García et al. (2018) found, in a survey conducted among young consumers, that rap/hip-hop was one of their favourite music genres. They also showed that having studied music made a difference in terms of genre preferences. Those with a music background preferred electronic, house, dance, jazz and classical music. On the other hand, those with no musical studies preferred rap, hip-hop and Latin pop-rock to a greater extent. Other authors have highlighted that the rap consumer profile has evolved, from black young men belonging to a low social class to middle class white young men with a university degree. This has occurred all over the world (Rodriquez, 2006; Youzman, 2003). In addition, research has shown that hip-hop serves as an avenue for interaction with black culture and a proxy for

interpersonal interaction with black Americans (Jacobson, 2015; Rose, 2008). Non-black fans are perceived as cultural tourists looking for a way to understand black culture (Jacobson, 2015). In summary, rap acts as an interracial socialiser, enabling white fans to learn about the effects of racism and discrimination through this music (Sullivan, 2003).

In this context, public engagement with hip-hop, due to the appearance of gangsta rap, has shifted its consumption as a commodity, following the change that began with mass marketing to larger white audiences all over the world. Specifically, this has been achieved by elites imitating the behavioural and aesthetic patterns of poor people, setting hip-hop consumption standards and fashion trends, and inverting Veblen's theory of conspicuous consumption (Hunter, 2011). This is in line with Baudrillard's (1988) theory of object relations, which captures hip-hop's consumption trend. Thus, rap music is a product that sells as a lifestyle, being reinforced by lyrics, music videos and online fan gossip (Hunter, 2011). In Europe, rap is especially linked to male migrant descendants, being a multicultural genre (Bennet, 1999; Elafros, 2013; Green, 2013; Laidlaw, 2011; Reitsamer & Prokop, 2018). It focuses on social problems and minorities' living conditions, reinforcing values as opposed to American rap (Androutsopoulos & Scholz, 2003; Beau, 1996).

More recent studies have focused on female rap audiences. Zickerman (2013) found an increasingly large female audience who appreciate its aesthetics and music, including rhythmic flow, melodic structure and the general appeal of the artist. Lyrics do not seem to be as relevant as Sullivan (2003) found years ago, when white people did not pay attention to the words of the songs as they were more attracted to the beat of the music, particularly young women. However, some of the previous issues regarding gender and the consumption of alternative music genres, specifically rap/hip-hop, still lack empirical research and need more specific analysis.

3 Research: Objectives and Methodology

Based on the above, exploratory research was conducted to find out whether there were any gender differences regarding consumption and opinions of rap/hip-hop as a music genre. Specifically, we aimed to answer the following research questions. RQ1: rap/hip-hop concert attendance habits; RQ2: degree of knowledge of this music genre; RQ3: satisfaction and interest in rap/hip-hop; RQ4: differences in habits and attitudes according to gender; RQ5: segmentation of rap/hip-hop consumers based on knowledge, interest and satisfaction levels.

The research was conducted in the form of an online survey using a structured questionnaire divided into three sections (rap/hip-hop consumption habits, attitudes towards rap/hip-hop and classification variables). Different scales of measurement were used accordingly, with questions regarding attitudes and opinions being drawn up using five-point Likert scales. Convenience sampling was chosen to select respondents from a population made up of people between 15 and 65 years of age. The questionnaire was sent to minors after requesting and receiving authorisation from

their parents. A total of 150 participants answered the questionnaire. Data collection took place in March 2019. Then, after producing a dataset, univariate and multivariate analyses (ANOVA tests, cluster analysis and cross-tabulations) were calculated to statistically process the information gathered in order to answer the aforementioned research questions. For operational and logical reasons, the results shown only relate to differences in gender. The research method is summarised in Table 1.

The sample of this survey (Table 2) was comprised of 45.3% women and 54.7% men. Most of them, 72.0%, were between 15 and 24 years of age. In terms of level of studies, half were graduates (50.0%) while 86.7% were single, and 63.3% were students.

Table 1 Research methodology

Information-Gathering Technique	Online survey administered via a structured questionnaire
Questionnaire	Three parts: concert attendance habits, appreciation and sociodemographic profile Different measurement scales
Population	People between 15 and 65 years of age
Sampling Method & Sample Size	Convenience sampling: 150 respondents
Fieldwork	March 2019
Data Analysis	Univariate and multivariate using SPSS

Source Authors' own

Table 2 Sample distribution

Gender	45.3% Women 54.7% Men
Age	28.7% (15–19) 43.3% (20–24) 11.3% (25–34) 8.0% (35–44) 8.7% (>44)
Level Of Studies	26.7% Undergraduates 50.0% Graduates 23.4% Secondary education
Personal Situation	86.7% Single 13.3% Married
Occupation	63.3% Students 25.3% Employees 6.2% Self-employed 5.3% Non-active

Source Authors' own

4 Results

In relation to concert attendance habits, specifically social ones (Table 3), respondents mainly attended rap/hip-hop music concerts with their friends (80.0%). Partners were much less considered and were selected by just 11.0% of the sample. Finally, relatives had residual importance with only 2.7% of participants choosing this option. To ascertain the role of gender in relation to this habit, a cross-tabulation analysis by chi-square was calculated. Results showed that gender influences for people attending concerts with friends were more relevant for men (86.6%) than for women (72.1%). Conversely, partners were more important as companions for women (65.4%) compared to men (25.0%).

In addition, participants in the study mostly chose social networks (82.7%) to find out about rap artists/bands and concerts, followed way behind by websites (9.3%). However, no statistically significant differences regarding gender showed up in relation to this consumption habit.

Knowledge, interest and satisfaction with this music genre were measured using five-point Likert scales. The results in Table 4 show that rap/hip-hop music concert attendees were extremely satisfied with the experience (4.39 out of 5). Interest in this music genre was also high (4.06) but knowledge of this alternative genre was lower, although greater than the midpoint of the scale (3.51). ANOVA tests show that men and women only had a significantly different knowledge of this music genre, with men scoring higher than women, 3.66 and 3.32, respectively.

Participants were grouped using a double cluster analysis: hierarchical and non-hierarchical. By interpreting the resulting dendrogram, the first method showed that three was the optimal solution. The non-hierarchical k-means method helped to describe these three clusters, as summarised in Table 5. Cluster 1 was comprised of individuals' satisfaction, knowledge and interest in rap to a greater extent. In

Table 3 Social attendance habits in rap/hip-hop by gender

I go with	Total %	Men %	Women %
Friends	80.0	86.6	72.1
Partner	11.0	25.0	65.4
Relatives	2.7	2.4	2.9

Chi-Square Test Sig. (0.072)

Source Authors' own

Table 4 Knowledge, interest and satisfaction

Items	Min	Max	Total	Std. D	Men	Women	Sig. (ANOVA)
Knowledge	1	5	3.51	1.060	3.66	3.32	0.054*
Interest	1	5	4.06	1.018	4.12	3.99	0.415
Satisfaction	1	5	4.39	0.933	4.34	4.44	0.516

Source Authors' own

Table 5 Clusters

Clusters	Knowledge	Interest	Satisfaction	Sig	Number
1: Involved	4	4	5	0.000	78
2: Apathetic	2	2	3	0.000	20
3: Hedonists	3	3	5	0.000	52

Source Authors' own

cluster 2, the three previous variables obtained the lowest scores. Finally, those in cluster 3 valued satisfaction highly but not the other variables. As a result, clusters were respectively labelled: involved (cluster 1), apathetic (cluster 2) and hedonists (cluster 3).

Although there were no significative differences between groups according to gender, women were more numerous in cluster 2. Significant differences arose when the variable belonging to a cluster with sociodemographic variables such as age (Sig. 0.001), level of studies (Sig. 0.000), marital status (Sig. 0.000) and occupation was cross-tabulated. In this sense, those in cluster 1 were the youngest while cluster 2 members were older. In addition, in segment 1, the percentages of respondents with primary, secondary and bachelor studies were higher, while the percentage of respondents with university studies was similar in clusters 1 and 3. Regarding marital status, there were more single and married people in cluster 1, while divorced people were the majority in segment 2. The percentage of students was higher in cluster 3 while in cluster 2 the percentage of employees was higher.

Similarly, differences were also found when cross-tabulating cluster membership and behavioural variables, specifically, the frequency of attendance at rap music concerts (Sig. 0.000) and the last time people attended a concert (Sig. 0.001). Individuals in cluster 1 were frequent attendees, obtaining higher percentages in almost all the options except once a year, which was slightly higher for those in cluster 3. Likewise, cluster 1 members scored higher in attending rap concerts more recently than the other two groups, followed by those in cluster 3. All these traits confirmed the labels assigned to the three clusters based on their relationship with knowledge, interest and satisfaction with rap/hip-hop.

5 Discussion

Music consumption has been studied in different academic disciplines, such as psychology, sociology, economics and marketing. These disciplines have dealt both directly and indirectly with the issues of gender and alternative music genres, specifically rap/hip-hop participation. In doing so, literature has shown major differences in relation to music preferences, social identity, social demographics, perceptions, cultural capital and consumption patterns. An exploratory survey was conducted to obtain a deeper insight into rap/hip-hop consumption by gender, trying to overcome a

certain gap in the literature. Specifically, the aim was to analyse rap music consumption habits and how they were evaluated as well as to segment participants based on satisfaction, interest and knowledge about rap/hip-hop.

Results show that rap is a minority music genre whose main audience is single men under 24, who are mainly students taking upper secondary or graduate studies. However, the increasing participation of women in this music genre is worth noting. These findings corroborate previous studies. Specifically, Rodriguez (2006) pointed out that young men were predominant in rap consumption independently of their race. Likewise, the results confirm that rap has become part of global popular culture (Laidlaw, 2011). The findings are also in line with Herrera et al. (2018) who declared a greater male preference towards styles considered to be “hard”, such as rap. The increasing participation of women also coincides with the findings indicated by Langmeyer et al. (2012) who stated that men were more mutually exclusive in their music preferences, while women allowed a greater overlap.

In addition, gender influences some social attendance habits in relation to rap/hip-hop music concerts. In this regard, men attend this sort of cultural events mostly with friends, reinforcing their identity as a group. Conversely, women usually go to rap concerts with their partners. This could be indicative of an indirect interest in this music genre. These results confirm Tipa's (2015) statement that the use of music by men plays a major role in social and affective relationships established between peer groups. Similarly, North (2010) pointed out that while men listen to music in the search for social membership with their peer group, women listen to music as a way to satisfy their emotional needs and for moments of pleasure.

The existence of high levels of knowledge, interest and satisfaction among consumers of this music genre is also noteworthy, being greater in men, though significant differences only arose between men and women in terms of rap knowledge. This enables us to state that there could be a reduction in the gender gap in rap/hip-hop consumption. This can also be confirmed by the existence of three segments after conducting a double cluster analysis, in which gender did not lead to significant differences. In other words, the involved, apathetic and hedonist segments were made up of both men and women.

In parallel, according to secondary data, digital technologies, such as social networks and music platforms, have also played an important role in rap/hip-hop consumption and have contributed to closing the gender gap. These technologies have fostered greater production, better accessibility, higher visibility and enhanced knowledge as well as broader music audiences, as shown in the study by Simoes and Campos (2017). This is the case of women increasingly consuming both live and recorded rap music in spite of their mostly controversial lyrics. Not paying attention to the words of rap songs and being more attracted to the rhythm of the music, as pointed out by Sullivan (2003), or being unaware of the impact of this music in their lives (Agbo-Quaye & Robertson, 2010) could explain this phenomenon. To sum up, the increasing female rap/hip-hop audience seems to be based on its appreciation of its aesthetics and music, rhythmic flow, melodic structure and the appeal of the artist, as Zickerman (2013) confirmed.

This research, although novel in its aim and offering relevant results in terms of live rap consumption and gender, has certain limitations. Its exploratory nature and the non-probability sampling method selected to choose a limited sample make it difficult to generalise the results. Finally, not having used more precise measurement scales hinders a more accurate interpretation of results. However, the study could be duplicated via a new line of research.

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