

Youths get by on CDs and commercial radio

A new study by the Australian Broadcasting Authority sets out to find the bonds between youth and music

It seems that today's young people buy an average of 16 CDs a year, are hung up on rock, dance, techno and trance music and listen to commercial FM radio, if the results of the Australian Broadcasting Authority's (ABA) study "Headbanging or dancing? Youth and music in Australia" are to be believed.

The study, a joint initiative of the ABA, the Australia Council and the Australian Record Industry Association, was researched during 1997. It comprised four stages using different methodology.

- In June 1997, the ABA published results of the first stage in "Youth and Music in Australia - A Review". Juliet London and Jenny Hearder of Juliet London Research and Consultancy prepared this summary and review of research.
- Interviews with at least 15 key stakeholders representing the radio and record industries, youth organisations, academics and musicians.
- Some 14 focus groups were then conducted by ABA researchers with 114 people aged 12 to 24 years in various locations around Australia.
- Quadrant Research Services was commissioned to conduct a national survey of 1,085 people aged 12 to 24 years, the results of which provided estimates of the youth population as a whole.

The national survey asked participants about the role of music in their lives, their attitudes to Australian music, the ways they accessed music, their views on music on radio and television, what sort of live music events they attended, whether they played music, how they purchased music, and their use of the Internet for music related activities.

The results highlighted the diversity of young people's preferences and interests in different types of music, with these being influenced by age, gender and geography, friends, family and different media. The study found that music is very important to young people and they spend significant amounts of leisure time on music related activities. They experience it through media such as radio and television, recorded music, and through attending live events and nightclubs. Many are also active in playing, singing or composing music themselves.

Role of music

The study uncovered a wide variation in tastes with favourite types ranging from rock to rap, classical, country and western, and heavy metal to dance. Some 18 per cent named rock music as their favourite type, followed by dance, techno and trance (11 per cent each), pop (nine per cent), heavy metal and thrash (eight per cent), and alternative music (eight per cent).

Friends were mentioned by 85 per cent of respondents as an influence on their music, 72 per cent mentioned radio and 51 per cent television.

Attitudes to Australian music

A majority of people said that Australian music or artists were as good as those from countries such as the U.S. and U.K. Some 71 per cent of respondents preferred music or performers from certain countries. The U.S. was named by 73 per cent of these respondents.

Some 61 per cent agreed with the proposition that Australian singers and groups have a different sound from performers from other countries. The reasons given for this were Australian accent, a different sound or style, and that Australian music was relaxed.

While one in two respondents said there was enough music by Australian performers on radio, 38 per cent said there was not enough and only five per cent said there was too much.

Accessing music

Almost all young people have access to a radio or television in their home and the majority have access to a video recorder, stereo system or CD player. A quarter of all respondents had Internet access in their home and one in five had access to pay television.

Half of those interviewed said that the main way they listen to music is on CD, while a third listened to radio. The majority said they acquired music by buying it from music stores. When asked to nominate all options they used, 89 per cent said they bought music from music stores and 67 per cent said they recorded or borrowed music from friends.

The survey found that 43 per cent of young people spent between one and three hours on an average weekday listening to music on radio, 23 per cent spent less than an hour, 15 per cent spent between three and five hours and 14 per cent more than five hours. More than 40 per cent of those surveyed said they also spent one to three hours each listening to recorded music and watching television. On an average weekday, 76 per cent of them spent no time accessing music on the Internet and no time going out to nightclubs or to see live music.

Music on radio

The survey discovered that 57 per cent of respondents nominated a commercial FM service as their favourite station, followed by 26 per cent who named Triple J. When asked what they particularly liked about their favourite radio station, the main reasons related to music: "variety or good mix of music", "better music or music that I like", and "the new or latest music".

The majority of teenage and young adult radio listeners tuned into commercial FM stations in the five capital city markets in 1997. More than 20 per cent of listeners aged 13 to 17 years and 18 to 24 years listened to Triple J in Brisbane, Adelaide and Perth, and 15 per cent of both age groups listened to it in Melbourne. In Sydney, 17 per cent of 18 to 24 year olds listened to Triple J compared with 12 per cent of 13 to 17 year olds.

Music on television

Respondents aged 12 to 17 years in the survey and focus group discussions indicated that they were more likely to watch music video clips on television than older respondents.

AustraliaSCAN data found that 22 per cent of 18 to 24 year olds regularly watched music programs on television compared with 11 per cent of the general population aged 18 years and over.

AC Nielsen data indicates that 12 per cent of all Australian households

have access to pay television, up from four per cent in 1996. The AustraliaSCAN survey found the same level of access among those aged 18 to 24 years.

YouthSCAN data shows that roughly 20 per cent of 12 to 17 year olds have access to pay television in their homes, and 60 per cent of these regularly watched a music channel.

Live music

Few survey respondents said that attending live music events was the main way they accessed music. But about 30 per cent of the sample said that they did use live music events such as nightclubs, dance parties and live music concerts as one way to accessed music.

One in 10 focus group participants said they attended a live music event once a week. The majority said they attended live events once every six weeks or less often. Almost one in five said that they never see music live.

The survey found that about one in two young people said they attended live concerts with international music artists, outside music festivals, live concerts with Australian music artists, or clubs or nightclubs.

Participation

While 80 per cent said that they had participated in music activities at some time, 35 per cent said they participated on a regular basis. Playing an instrument was the most frequently mentioned activity.

Of those who played an instrument, 62 per cent said they had group music lessons at school, 54 per cent had private music lessons, 35 per cent played in a school band or orchestra and 23 per cent were self-taught.

Purchasing music

The 91 per cent of respondents who had bought at least one CD over the past year had bought an average of 16 CDs each (the survey does not

differentiate between CD albums or singles). The average number of CDs purchased increased with the age of the respondent. Of the 44 per cent who had bought an audiotape, each had bought an average of 10 tapes. Of the 24 per cent who had bought a videotape of recorded music, each had bought an average of five videotapes.

Online services and new technology

A growing proportion use the Internet to access information on performers. Some 57 per cent of survey respondents had used the Internet in the previous six months (conducted at the end of 1997). Of those, 53 per cent had accessed sites for bands or performers and 25 per cent had accessed sites of radio stations.

Some 20 per cent of respondents specifically mentioned the Internet as a new technology which will influence or change the way they obtain or use music. A third of respondents gave a response describing some type of new technology which they thought would influence their behaviour, 25 per cent said that they could not think of any new technology while 42 per cent said they did not know.

Conclusion

There is a great diversity in the types of music which appeal to young people. Their tastes may change as they grow older and are exposed to new types of music through family, friends and media. Established technologies including radio, recorded music and music videos are still the main source of music and information about music but the media landscape and environment is changing and new technologies and the Internet are affecting the way young people access and consume music. The introduction of digital radio and television services may provide further opportunities for new services which cater to the music needs of young people.

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