

The Impact of Social Messages in Youth Music on Social Engagement of Vietnamese Youth: The Mediating Role of Social Empathy

Quan Nguyen Van¹, Anh Tran Hoang²

¹Faculty of Business Administration, Academy of Policy and Development, Hanoi, Vietnam

²Marie Curie Hanoi School, Hanoi, Vietnam

ABSTRACT: As developing countries undergo profound social transformations, from gender inequality, environmental pollution to youth mental health, the need to find media that can promote social awareness and action is increasingly urgent. Music, especially genres that are close to young people, has emerged as a powerful cultural tool, but has not yet been fully studied from the perspective of its psychosocial impact. Clarifying the mechanisms of music's influence on empathy and social participation behavior not only fills the current research gap, but also brings high application value in education, communication and cultural policy towards the young generation. The objective of the study is to investigate the influence of social messages in youth music on social engagement of Vietnamese youth through social empathy variable. Based on the ELM and Empathy-Altruism Hypothesis, the study used a quantitative research method using a questionnaire with 312 young people in Vietnam, then using SmartPLS4 to analyze collected data. The study found a positive impact of message relevance and music exposure on social engagement through the mediating role of social empathy. Research suggests that socially-informed music can be an effective tool for promoting empathy and social action in young people, especially when integrated into education, community activism, and media campaigns. Combining music education, directed artistic creation, and cross-sector collaboration between artists, civil society organizations, and policymakers will help to maximize the potential of music in building a more empathetic and socially-involved generation of young people.

KEYWORDS: Social empathy, social engagement, social messages, youth music

I. INTRODUCTION

In the dynamic media environment of the digital age, music has become a powerful vehicle for expressing values, shaping identities, and mobilising collective action, particularly among younger generations. Youth-oriented genres such as rap, indie, and pop often embed potent social messages that address issues including inequality, environmental sustainability, mental health, and community responsibility (Cheung et al., 2020). In Vietnam, where over 70% of the population is under the age of 35, music plays a significant role in influencing youth culture and shaping civic awareness. Beyond entertainment, young people increasingly turn to music as a source of meaning, reflection, and social commentary, suggesting that socially conscious lyrics may be an important driver of attitudinal and behavioural change. The widespread use of social media platforms such as TikTok, YouTube, and Facebook among Vietnamese youth has amplified the reach and impact of such music. These platforms enable rapid dissemination of content while providing interactive spaces for discussion, reflection, and collective engagement. Music videos, lyric interpretations, and fan-led initiatives have become catalysts for conversations around pressing social issues, creating fertile ground for empathy, awareness, and participation (Voorveld, 2019; Kujur & Singh, 2020). Yet, despite its growing cultural relevance, the specific mechanisms through which socially charged music influences young people's engagement in societal matters remain underexplored in the Vietnamese context.

Prior research has demonstrated that both emotional and cognitive processes particularly empathy, play a mediating role in transforming media consumption into prosocial behaviour (Grimani et al., 2024). Social empathy, defined as the ability to understand and share the feelings of others while also recognising systemic inequalities, may represent a crucial psychological link between music exposure and civic engagement. While studies have examined how media narratives evoke emotional responses (North et al., 2016), little is known about how musical storytelling interacts with empathy to foster youth participation in addressing social challenges.

The Impact of Social Messages in Youth Music on Social Engagement of Vietnamese Youth: The Mediating Role of Social Empathy

This study investigates the impact of social messages in youth music on the social engagement of Vietnamese youth, with social empathy as a mediating variable. In Vietnam, where cultural values and social change often intersect, socially conscious music serves as a powerful medium to convey messages, promote empathy, challenge stereotypes, and inspire community involvement. By examining these relationships, the research highlights music's potential as a catalyst for positive social change among the younger generation, offering both theoretical contributions to media effects and empathy studies, and practical implications for cultural policy, media literacy, and youth engagement initiatives (Abolhasani et al., 2025).

II. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH MODEL

Social Messages in Youth Music

Social messages in youth music refer to the explicit or implicit communication of social, cultural, and moral values through song lyrics and performance contexts. These messages may address issues such as social justice, environmental protection, equality, and community solidarity, aiming to raise awareness, influence attitudes, and inspire positive actions among listeners. Music has long been recognized as a powerful medium for both emotional expression and social influence (Corrigall & Schellenberg, 2013). By combining melody, rhythm, and narrative, it can evoke deep emotional responses, shape perceptions, and foster a sense of shared identity, especially among young audiences. The social impact of music is often mediated by its lyrical content: songs containing prosocial or value-oriented themes can enhance emotional awareness, empathy, and motivation for civic participation (Sever, 2016). When youth engage with such music, they may develop stronger social sensitivity and greater willingness to address community and societal issues. This effect is reinforced by music's immersive nature, which allows messages to resonate with personal moods and experiences, deepening cognitive and emotional engagement. Empirical evidence indicates that music exposure can regulate mood, reduce psychological distress, and foster positive emotional states (Ahmad, 2015; Saarikallio & Erkkilä, 2007). Leung & Cheung (2020) found that adolescents frequently exposed to positive-themed music reported improved emotional balance through enhanced emotional awareness and the promotion of positive emotions. Such findings support the view that social messages in youth music can foster prosocial behaviour by cultivating empathy and strengthening social connectedness (Taruffi & Koelsch, 2014). This perspective positions social empathy as a central psychological mechanism linking socially oriented music with youth civic engagement, in line with the broader understanding of music as a communicative tool for transmitting values, shaping identity, and mobilizing collective action (Hunter et al., 2010).

Social Empathy

Social empathy is the capacity to understand not only individual emotional and cognitive states but also the broader societal conditions that influence people's experiences. It combines affective and cognitive empathy with contextual awareness, allowing individuals to connect with others across diverse social, cultural, and economic backgrounds (de Waal, 2008). This multidimensional construct underpins the development of prosocial behaviours, actions intended to benefit others and society, by fostering compassion, moral reasoning, and a willingness to act in response to others' needs (Henrich & Muthukrishna, 2021). Empirical research demonstrates that higher levels of empathy in adolescence are linked to improved interpersonal relationships, greater willingness to support peers, and better conflict resolution (Gini et al., 2007). Empathy also plays an important role in moral development and enhances emotional and relational well-being in family, friendship, and romantic contexts (Gerdes et al., 2011). Conversely, a decline in empathy among youth has been associated with increased bullying, emotional isolation, and mental health problems such as depression and suicidal ideation. In Viet Nam, UNICEF (2022) reported significant levels of self-harm, abuse, and neglect among children and adolescents, with contributing factors including low emotional regulation, unsafe school environments, and a lack of mental health education (Mashburn & Pianta, 2006). By fostering awareness of societal issues such as discrimination, inequality, and injustice, social empathy can strengthen the motivation to engage in activities that promote fairness and equity. It also facilitates collaborative social behaviour, encouraging individuals to participate in initiatives that address community needs and support social justice (Singer & Steinbeis, 2009).

Social Engagement

Music has long been recognised not only as a form of artistic expression but also as a catalyst for social connection and collective action. When embedded with social messages, youth music can become a powerful medium for inspiring participation in community life and strengthening civic values. In this context, social engagement refers to the degree to which individuals take part in activities that foster interpersonal bonds, contribute to community well-being, and promote collective goals (Putnam, 2000). Within the musical sphere, this may include attending charity concerts, joining music-based volunteer initiatives, participating in online campaigns inspired by song lyrics, or collaborating in creative projects that address social issues

The Impact of Social Messages in Youth Music on Social Engagement of Vietnamese Youth: The Mediating Role of Social Empathy

(Borgonovi & Andrieu, 2020; McKay & Higham, 2012). Such engagement is often facilitated by the emotional and identity-forming qualities of music, which can increase empathy, reinforce a sense of belonging, and motivate civic participation (Decety & Cowell, 2014). Even in times of social disruption, such as during the COVID-19 pandemic, music-related social engagement has served as an important tool for maintaining connectedness and mobilising collective action (Fisher et al., 2021). Given that empathy acts as a psychological bridge between socially oriented music and active civic participation (Leung & Cheung, 2020), social engagement in the musical context emerges as a vital pathway for nurturing prosocial behaviour, strengthening community resilience, and fostering social cohesion.

Hypothesis Development and Research Model

This study is built on two fundamental theoretical frameworks: Petty and Cacioppo's (1986) Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) and Batson's (1991) Empathy-Altruism Hypothesis. According to ELM, when a message is perceived as directly relevant to the recipient, they tend to process the information through the "central route" – that is, they are deeply involved in the process of thinking, analyzing, and feeling the message, thereby enhancing emotional and cognitive connection (Petty et al., 1983). Meanwhile, Batson's (1991) theory suggests that empathy can promote altruistic social behavior, regardless of self-interest motives. From this background, the study focuses on the role of two factors: message relevance perception and music exposure in forming social empathy and promoting social engagement.

Message relevance perception (MRP) refers to the extent to which individuals perceive a message as personally meaningful, applicable, and congruent with their own values, beliefs, and experiences (Bosacki & O'Neill, 2015; Croom, 2015). When individuals find a message relevant, they are more likely to engage emotionally and cognitively with the content, which facilitates deeper processing and empathetic understanding (Bosacki & O'Neill, 2015). This enhanced emotional engagement can stimulate perspective-taking and increase sensitivity towards the feelings and experiences of others, core components of social empathy (Wu & Lu, 2021; Sittler et al., 2019). Social empathy extends beyond interpersonal empathy by emphasizing an awareness and responsiveness to social and cultural contexts (Anh, 2024). Thus, the perception of message relevance may foster greater social empathy by helping individuals connect their own experiences with those of others in broader social frameworks. Based on these above arguments, the authors proposed the hypothesis:

H1: Message relevance perception is positively associated with social empathy.

Music exposure (ME) denotes the frequency, duration, and intensity with which individuals engage with music, including activities such as listening, performing, or participating in musical training (Grimani et al., 2024; Cotter et al., 2025). Exposure to music has been widely documented as a potent stimulator of emotional and cognitive processes linked to empathy development (Wu & Lu, 2021). Through music, individuals can experience emotional arousal and gain insights into the feelings and perspectives conveyed by musicians and musical compositions (Sittler et al., 2019). This empathic engagement facilitated by music exposure can enhance prosocial tendencies by promoting emotional sensitivity and perspective-taking skills (Grimani et al., 2024). Furthermore, recent studies demonstrate that music exposure interventions can effectively foster prosocial behavior, highlighting its potential role in cultivating social empathy (Cotter et al., 2025). Based on these above arguments, the authors proposed the hypothesis:

H2: Music exposure is positively associated with social empathy.

Social empathy involves an individual's capacity to perceive, understand, and respond to the feelings, experiences, and perspectives of others, especially within complex and dynamic social environments (Anh, 2024; Wu & Lu, 2021). This empathic ability not only facilitates deeper emotional connections but also serves as a critical motivational driver for engaging in socially constructive behaviors, such as volunteering, community participation, and collaborative problem solving (Sittler et al., 2019). Empirical studies highlight that social empathy enables individuals to transcend self-focused concerns and develop a broader awareness of social issues, thus fostering prosocial intentions and behaviors. When individuals perceive messages as personally relevant resonating with their values, beliefs, or lived experiences, this cognitive and emotional resonance may activate or strengthen social empathy, which in turn facilitates the translation of such internal processes into concrete social engagement (Wu & Lu, 2021). This mediating mechanism aligns with established social cognitive theories that conceptualize empathy as a psychological bridge connecting internal affective and cognitive states with external behavioral outcomes (Wu & Lu, 2021). Based on these above arguments, the authors proposed the hypothesis:

H3: Social empathy mediates the relationship between message relevance perception and social engagement.

Similarly, the influence of music exposure on social engagement may operate indirectly, with social empathy functioning as a key mediating factor. Engagement with music whether through active listening, performance, or musical training not only enriches individuals' emotional experiences but also enhances their capacity to empathize with others' feelings and perspectives

The Impact of Social Messages in Youth Music on Social Engagement of Vietnamese Youth: The Mediating Role of Social Empathy

(Wu & Lu, 2021). This enhanced empathic ability nurtured by music exposure has been shown to promote greater involvement in social activities, foster stronger social bonds, and encourage collective initiatives that benefit communities (Gustavson et al., 2021; Tu & Fu, 2024). Music-evoked empathy is a powerful mechanism through which musical experiences are internalized and transformed into prosocial actions, highlighting the intertwined roles of emotional and cognitive processes in social behavior (Grimani et al., 2024). Empirical research corroborates that individuals with higher levels of music exposure tend to exhibit increased prosocial tendencies, mediated by their elevated social empathy, which motivates positive contributions to social welfare and community cohesion (Tu & Fu, 2024). Based on these above arguments, the authors proposed the hypothesis:

H4: Social empathy mediates the relationship between music exposure and social engagement.

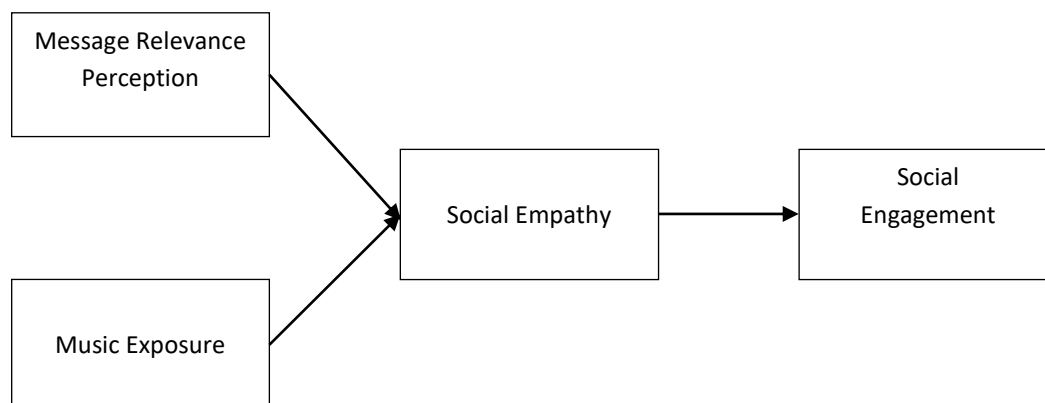


Figure 1. Research Model

III. METHODOLOGY

Measurement of Constructs

This study was conducted using quantitative research method. To examine the relationships among key constructs in this study, a structured questionnaire was developed based on previously validated measurement scales from prior literature. The questionnaire comprised items measuring Message Relevance Perception (MRP), Music Exposure (ME), Social Empathy (SEM), and Social Engagement (SEN), with all items assessed using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = “Strongly disagree” to 5 = “Strongly agree.” Message Relevance Perception (MRP) was measured using three items adapted from Bosacki and O’Neill (2015) and Croom (2015). Music Exposure (ME) was assessed with three items drawn from Grimani et al. (2024) and Cotter et al. (2025). Social Empathy (SEM) included four items adapted from Anh (2024), Wu and Lu (2021), and Sittler et al. (2019). Social Engagement (SEN) was measured using five items derived from Gustavson et al. (2021) and Tu and Fu (2024). The measurement items were designed to capture respondents’ perceptions and behaviors in relation to music-related messages, their exposure to music, their capacity for empathy in social contexts, and their engagement in social activities. Drawing on validated scales ensured construct reliability and content validity. Accordingly, the constructs were later subjected to statistical analyses using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) to examine internal consistency, convergent validity, and discriminant validity within the research model, as well as to test the hypothesized relationships among constructs.

Sample and Data Collection

To investigate the impact of social messages in youth music on social engagement among Vietnamese youth, with a focus on the mediating role of social empathy, this study employed a structured questionnaire survey targeting young individuals residing in Vietnam. Data were collected over a three-week period in the first quarter of 2025. A total of 323 responses were received, of which 312 valid responses were retained after screening for completeness and eligibility. The sampling method combined purposive and convenience sampling to ensure that only respondents who actively listen to youth-oriented music were included in the analysis. The questionnaire consisted of three main sections: screening questions to identify qualified participants, core measurement items for the main constructs, and demographic profiling. The demographic composition of the sample is summarized in Table 1. In terms of gender, both male and female respondents participated. The age of participants was categorized into three groups: under 18, 18–25, and above 25, reflecting a wide range of youth and young adult listeners. Educational backgrounds included high school, college/university, and postgraduate levels. The survey also recorded whether respondents were currently members of a volunteer club, as well as the frequency of their participation in social activities per year (less than 5 times, 5–10 times, or more than 10 times). This diversity in demographic characteristics and social participation

The Impact of Social Messages in Youth Music on Social Engagement of Vietnamese Youth: The Mediating Role of Social Empathy

frequency provides a comprehensive basis for analyzing how exposure to social messages in music and levels of social empathy are associated with youth social engagement in the Vietnamese context. The data then will be analyzed by SmartPLS4.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Descriptive Statistics Result

Out of the 312 valid respondents, the gender distribution was relatively balanced, with 48.1% male and 51.9% female participants. Regarding age, the majority were between 18 and 25 years old (57.7%), followed by those under 18 (28.8%), and a smaller group above 25 (13.5%). This demographic profile reflects a predominantly young population, which aligns well with the study's focus on youth engagement with music-related messages and social activities. In terms of education, most respondents were college or university students (57.7%), while 32.1% had completed high school, and 10.3% were postgraduate students. The high proportion of university-level participants suggests that the sample is likely to have substantial exposure to diverse music content and digital platforms, factors potentially influencing social empathy and engagement. A significant majority (64.1%) reported being active members of volunteer clubs, highlighting an existing tendency toward social participation within the sample. In terms of frequency of joining social activities, 44.9% engaged in 5–10 activities per year, 29.5% participated in over 10 activities annually, and 25.6% joined fewer than five. This suggests that a considerable proportion of respondents are actively involved in social initiatives, which is relevant to understanding the mediating role of social empathy in the relationship between music messages and social engagement.

Table 1. Demographics of Respondents

Demographics		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	150	48.1
	Female	162	51.9
Age	Less than 18	90	28.8
	18–25	180	57.7
	More than 25	42	13.5
Education level	High school	100	32.1
	College / University	180	57.7
	Postgraduate	32	10.3
Currently in a volunteer club or not?	Yes	200	64.1
	No	112	35.9
How often join social activities (per year)	Less than 5 times	80	25.6
	5–10 times	140	44.9
	Over 10 times	92	29.5
Total		312	100

Reliability and Validity Assessment

Table 2 presents the results of the reliability and convergent validity assessment of the measurement model. All constructs showed strong internal consistency, with Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability (CR) values exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.7 (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994; Hair et al., 2019). For instance, Music Exposure (ME: $\alpha = 0.796$, CR = 0.875), Music-Related Perceptions (MRP: $\alpha = 0.863$, CR = 0.917), Social Empathy (SEM: $\alpha = 0.821$, CR = 0.879), and Social Engagement (SEN: $\alpha = 0.889$, CR = 0.919) all demonstrated satisfactory reliability. In terms of convergent validity, all Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values were above 0.5, ranging from 0.615 to 0.786, indicating that the constructs explained a sufficient proportion of variance in their observed indicators. These results confirm that the measurement scales applied in the study are both reliable and valid for further analysis using PLS-SEM.

The Impact of Social Messages in Youth Music on Social Engagement of Vietnamese Youth: The Mediating Role of Social Empathy

Table 2. Reliability and Convergent Validity of Constructs

	Cronbach's Alpha	rho_A	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
ME	0.796	0.861	0.875	0.701
MRP	0.863	0.871	0.917	0.786
SEM	0.821	0.894	0.879	0.615
SEN	0.889	0.892	0.919	0.693

Table 3 presents the results of discriminant validity assessments using both the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) and the Fornell-Larcker criterion. The HTMT values among the constructs as ME, MRP, SEM, and SEN are all below the recommended threshold of 0.90, with the highest observed value being 0.896 (between MRP and SEM). According to Hair et al. (2019), HTMT values below 0.90 indicate adequate discriminant validity, suggesting that the constructs are empirically distinct. Furthermore, the Fornell-Larcker criterion also supports discriminant validity, as the square roots of the AVE values (diagonal elements: 0.837, 0.887, 0.791, and 0.832) are greater than the corresponding inter-construct correlations (off-diagonal elements) for all constructs. These results collectively confirm that discriminant validity is established in the measurement model.

Table 3. Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) and Fornell-Larcker Criterion

	Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT)				Fornell-Larcker Criterion			
	ME	MRP	SEM	SEN	ME	MRP	SEM	SEN
ME					0.837			
MRP	0.345				0.294	0.887		
SEM	0.161	0.896			0.120	0.791	0.784	
SEN	0.181	0.395	0.276		0.171	0.348	0.244	0.832

Structural Measurement Assessment and PLS-SEM Result

The results of the structural equation modeling reveal a high explanatory power for the proposed conceptual framework. Specifically, the model accounts for 63.7% of the variance in social empathy (Adjusted $R^2 = 0.637$) and 5.6% of the variance in social engagement (Adjusted $R^2 = 0.056$). These values indicate that the model is particularly effective in explaining the development of empathy among Vietnamese youth, but less so in directly predicting their social engagement, suggesting the potential involvement of other influential variables such as personal motivation, social norms, or broader civic awareness. Effect size (f^2) analysis further highlights the dominance of message relevance perception ($f^2 = 2.013$) as a driver of empathy, while music exposure has a small yet meaningful effect ($f^2 = 0.037$). This pattern underscores the idea that while music plays an important role in fostering empathy, the perceived personal relevance of the music's message is the decisive factor in this process.

The statistical analysis offers compelling empirical support for H1, with a large and highly significant path coefficient ($\beta = 0.827$, $t = 22.003$, $p < 0.001$). This finding reinforces the theoretical proposition that message relevance perception (MRP) the extent to which individuals perceive a message as personally meaningful, applicable, and aligned with their values, beliefs, and experiences—serves as a crucial driver of social empathy. When young people perceive music lyrics or themes as relevant to their own lives, they are more likely to engage with the content both emotionally and cognitively, enabling deeper processing and fostering an empathetic connection with others. This is consistent with prior research showing that perceived relevance enhances emotional engagement, cognitive elaboration, and perspective-taking (Bosacki & O'Neill, 2015; Croom, 2015; Wu & Lu, 2021; Sittler, Cooper, & Montag, 2019). In the Vietnamese youth context, this suggests that songs addressing relatable

The Impact of Social Messages in Youth Music on Social Engagement of Vietnamese Youth: The Mediating Role of Social Empathy

experiences such as social justice struggles, environmental concerns, or shared cultural narratives can act as powerful catalysts for developing awareness and responsiveness to broader social and cultural realities. The magnitude of the coefficient further indicates that MRP is not a peripheral element but a primary pathway through which music fosters social empathy in this demographic.

Table 4. Structural Equation Modelling Results

	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics (O/STDEV)	P Values	Adj R ²	f2	Hypothesis Conclusion
ME -> SEM	0.224	0.299	0.060	3.071	0.039	SEM: 0.637 SEN: 0.056	0.039	Accepted
MRP -> SEM	0.827	0.821	0.038	22.003	0.000		1.735	Accepted
SEM -> SEN	0.244	0.251	0.066	3.680	0.000		0.063	Accepted

H2 is also supported, with results showing a statistically significant positive relationship between music exposure and social empathy ($\beta = 0.224$, $t = 3.071$, $p = 0.039$). This indicates that higher frequency and greater intensity of engaging with music are associated with stronger empathetic capacities among youth. The finding aligns with prior research suggesting that music exposure can evoke emotional arousal and facilitate perspective-taking by immersing listeners in the feelings, narratives, and worldviews conveyed through melodies, harmonies, and lyrics (Wu & Lu, 2021; Sittler, Cooper, & Montag, 2019). Such musical engagement offers individuals an opportunity to vicariously experience the emotional states of others, thereby sharpening their emotional sensitivity and reinforcing prosocial dispositions (Grimani, Moog, & Vlaev, 2024; Cotter et al., 2025). This process appears to be particularly pronounced when the music carries socially or emotionally charged messages that encourage reflection on interpersonal relationships and broader societal issues. In this way, music functions not merely as a source of entertainment but also as a subtle yet powerful educational and socialization tool, capable of shaping moral sensibilities and fostering solidarity within communities. These results suggest that fostering intentional and meaningful exposure to socially resonant music could be a valuable approach for educators, policymakers, and youth organizations aiming to nurture empathy and civic engagement in younger generations.

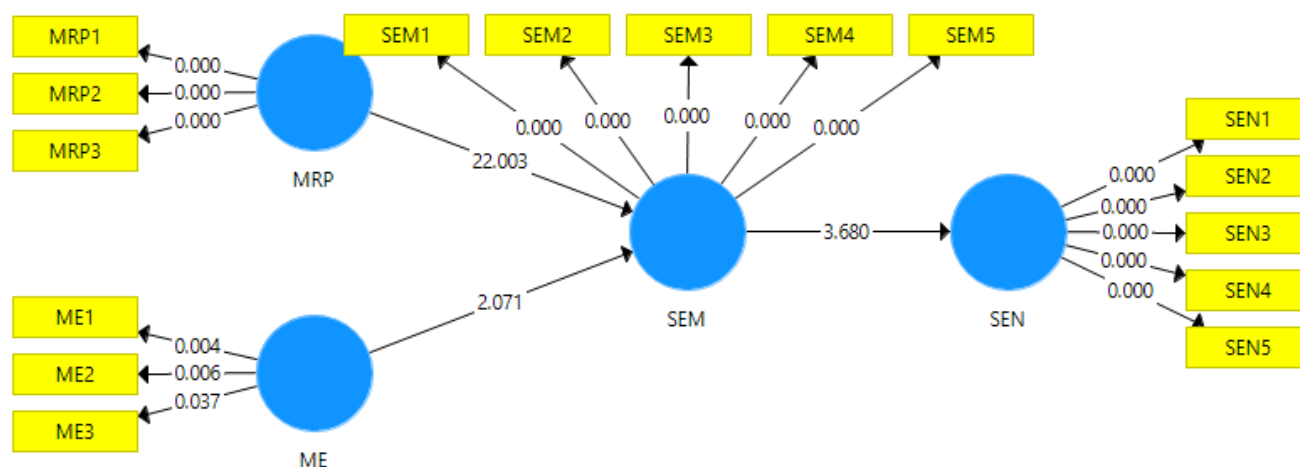


Figure 2. PLS Bootstrapping Model

The Impact of Social Messages in Youth Music on Social Engagement of Vietnamese Youth: The Mediating Role of Social Empathy

The findings indicate that social empathy functions as a crucial channel through which the perceived relevance of music messages is transformed into tangible social engagement. Statistical analysis confirms that social empathy has a positive and significant effect on social engagement ($\beta = 0.244$, $t = 3.680$, $p < 0.001$), aligning with previous research that conceptualizes social empathy as the capacity to perceive, understand, and respond to the feelings and experiences of others, especially in complex and dynamic social contexts (Anh, 2024; Wu & Lu, 2021). When music messages resonate personally by reflecting listeners' values, beliefs, or lived experiences, they appear to activate or strengthen empathic abilities. Such heightened empathy enables individuals to transcend self-focused concerns, cultivate a broader awareness of social issues, and engage in prosocial actions such as volunteering, advocacy, or collaborative problem-solving (Sittler, Cooper, & Montag, 2019). The observed mediation effect reinforces the view that empathy operates as a psychological bridge, converting internal cognitive–emotional resonance into concrete behavioral outcomes. This finding provides empirical support for the theorized pathway linking message perception to real-world civic engagement, underscoring empathy's pivotal role in transforming meaning into action.

Similarly, H4 is supported, providing evidence that social empathy functions as a critical mediating pathway between music exposure and social engagement. The results indicate that although music exposure alone does not exert a strong and direct influence on individuals' willingness to engage in socially oriented activities, its impact becomes more substantial when it operates through the enhancement of empathic capacities. This aligns with the view advanced by Gustavson et al. (2021) and Tu & Fu (2024) that empathy is not merely an emotional state but a cognitive-affective mechanism capable of transforming abstract or passive awareness into concrete prosocial actions. In this study's context, repeated or meaningful exposure to music carrying socially conscious messages appears to foster deeper perspective-taking and emotional resonance with others' experiences, thereby encouraging active participation in volunteering, advocacy, or community initiatives. The fact that the indirect effect through empathy is stronger than the direct effect of music exposure suggests that it is not the music per se that drives engagement, but rather the reflective and emotional processes it stimulates. This underscores the importance of recognizing empathy as a central psychological bridge that converts sustained music listening experiences into tangible forms of social contribution, especially among Vietnamese youth navigating complex social and cultural environments.

V. IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The present study extends the growing literature on the social impact of music by highlighting the mediating role of social empathy in the relationship between socially conscious music exposure and social engagement among Vietnamese youth. These findings suggest that while direct exposure to music with prosocial messages may not immediately lead to active social participation, its influence becomes more substantial when it cultivates empathy first. This aligns with the broader understanding that music can shape both cognitive and emotional processes, which in turn drive prosocial behaviors (Kwon et al., 2020; Galinha et al., 2022). By revealing the mechanism through which music operates via empathy, this research contributes to a more nuanced theoretical framework for understanding how cultural products, such as popular music, can foster civic and community involvement among young people.

From a practical standpoint, the findings of this study offer significant implications for educators, campaign strategists, artists, and policymakers concerned with promoting social empathy and civic participation among youth. Firstly, educational institutions and community development programs could benefit greatly from the intentional integration of music that carries prosocial themes and socially relevant narratives. Rather than relying solely on conventional lecture-based approaches to promote civic values, educators could incorporate music as an emotional and cognitive bridge that enhances message receptivity and empathy-building. Music that aligns with youth interests and reflects pressing social concerns such as environmental sustainability, mental health, or social justice can serve as an immersive pedagogical tool, fostering not only awareness but also deep emotional resonance. As suggested by research on emotional engagement (Wu & Lu, 2021), these affective responses are key mechanisms in transforming passive awareness into active, sustained participation in social causes.

Secondly, music educators, youth counselors, and community organizers should be encouraged to develop experiential and participatory activities centered around music. These may include songwriting workshops, collaborative music production sessions, lyrical analysis forums, or group performances that thematically address societal issues. Such initiatives do not merely enhance musical skills, but also cultivate critical reflection, emotional intelligence, and collective problem-solving skills that are foundational for meaningful civic engagement. Studies such as Kwon et al. (2020) have shown that music education enhances students' confidence, collaboration, and self-expression. By embedding socially conscious themes into these activities, educators can further leverage music's transformative potential to develop empathy and a sense of social responsibility, ultimately empowering youth to act on shared concerns.

The Impact of Social Messages in Youth Music on Social Engagement of Vietnamese Youth: The Mediating Role of Social Empathy

Thirdly, the results highlight the potential of cross-sector collaborations involving artists, NGOs, youth organizations, and cultural institutions. These partnerships can be instrumental in producing and disseminating music content that not only entertains but also informs and inspires. When musicians co-create with social organizations, they can craft messages that reflect lived experiences and aspirations of young audiences ensuring that the content is both culturally relevant and emotionally authentic. For example, socially engaged music campaigns that use storytelling, diverse voices, and interactive platforms (e.g., TikTok challenges, live-streamed concerts, virtual dialogues) can create network effects, amplifying reach while fostering a sense of belonging and shared purpose among youth. These cultural interventions can complement formal education by offering alternative, affect-rich spaces where empathy, identity exploration, and civic commitment converge.

Lastly, policymakers aiming to enhance youth engagement and social cohesion should consider allocating resources toward creative education programs and culturally grounded social campaigns that emphasize the arts. Instead of viewing music as a recreational byproduct, it should be acknowledged as a strategic medium for civic development. Funding for music-based initiatives that promote dialogue, inclusivity, and emotional connection especially in marginalized communities could serve as a long-term investment in building a more empathetic, socially active generation. When youth are engaged not only intellectually but also emotionally, through the universal language of music, they are far more likely to transition from passive observers to active agents of change.

Several limitations should be noted. This study focused on Vietnamese youth as a specific cultural group, and thus the findings may not be generalizable to other age groups or cultural contexts. Additionally, factors such as musical preferences, genre-specific influences, and frequency of music engagement were not distinguished, which may have nuanced effects on empathy development and social participation (Swaminathan et al., 2017). Future studies could examine how different genres particularly those with varying lyrical content, may affect empathy and engagement differently. Moreover, while the current research identified a mediating effect of social empathy, other psychological variables such as moral identity, social connectedness, or political efficacy may also serve as mediators or moderators. Expanding the scope to non-youth populations, or comparing youth in different countries, would also offer valuable cross-cultural insights. Finally, although social engagement is an important aspect of youth development, it does not capture the full spectrum of civic and mental well-being. Future research could explore how socially conscious music influences resilience, emotional regulation, and collective efficacy in the long term (Wahlbeck, 2015).

REFERENCES

- 1) Abolhasani, M., Masters, J., & Golrokhi, Z. (2025). The sound of persuasion: music's impact in university advertising. *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*, 1-26.
- 2) Ahmad, N., & Rana, A. (2015). Impact of music on mood: Empirical investigation. *Research on Humanities and Social Sciences*. ISSN (Paper), 2224-5766.
- 3) Anh, H. H. (2024). Harmonizing engagement: the impact of music on consumer interaction in social media marketing. *International Journal of Economics, Business, and Management Research*, 8(10), 182-202.
- 4) Batson, C. D. (1991). *The altruism question: Toward a social-psychological answer*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- 5) Bonneville-Roussy, A., Hruska, E., & Trower, H. (2020). Teaching music to support students: how autonomy-supportive music teachers increase students' well-being. *Journal of Research in Music Education*, 68(1), 97-119.
- 6) Bosacki, S. L., & O'Neill, S. A. (2015). Early adolescents' emotional perceptions and engagement with popular music activities in everyday life. *International Journal of Adolescence and Youth*, 20(2), 228-244.
- 7) Cheung, M. L., Pires, G., & Rosenberger, P. J. (2020). The influence of perceived social media marketing elements on consumer-brand engagement and brand knowledge. *Asia Pacific Journal of Marketing and Logistics*, 32(3), 695-720.
- 8) Corrigan, K. A., & Schellenberg, E. G. (2013). Music: The language of emotion. *Handbook of psychology of emotions: Recent theoretical perspectives and novel empirical findings*, 2, 299-325.
- 9) Cotter, K., Spas, A., Kirk, S., Delizia, M. R., Patel, J., Siddiqi, R., ... & Pawelski, J. (2025). Examining the Connections Between Music Engagement and Social Well-Being: A Scoping Review.
- 10) Croom, A. M. (2015). Music practice and participation for psychological well-being: A review of how music influences positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment. *Musicae Scientiae*, 19(1), 44-64.
- 11) De Waal, F. B. (2008). Putting the altruism back into altruism: the evolution of empathy. *Annu. Rev. Psychol.*, 59(1), 279-300.

The Impact of Social Messages in Youth Music on Social Engagement of Vietnamese Youth: The Mediating Role of Social Empathy

- 12) Decety, J., & Cowell, J. M. (2014). The complex relation between morality and empathy. *Trends in cognitive sciences*, 18(7), 337-339.
- 13) Fink, L. K., Warrenburg, L. A., Howlin, C., Randall, W. M., Hansen, N. C., & Wald-Fuhrmann, M. (2021). Viral tunes: changes in musical behaviours and interest in coronamusic predict socio-emotional coping during COVID-19 lockdown. *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, 8(1).
- 14) Galinha, I. C., García-Martín, M. Á., & Lima, M. L. (2022). Sing4Health: Randomised controlled trial of the effects of a singing group program on the subjective and social well-being of older adults. *Applied Psychology: Health and Well-Being*, 14(1), 176-195.
- 15) Gerdes, K. E., Segal, E. A., Jackson, K. F., & Mullins, J. L. (2011). Teaching empathy: A framework rooted in social cognitive neuroscience and social justice. *Journal of social work education*, 47(1), 109-131.
- 16) Gini, G., Albiero, P., Benelli, B., & Altoe, G. (2007). Does empathy predict adolescents' bullying and defending behavior?. *Aggressive Behavior: Official Journal of the International Society for Research on Aggression*, 33(5), 467-476.
- 17) Grimani, A., Moog, A., & Vlaev, I. (2024). Analysis of music-exposure interventions for impacting prosocial behaviour via behaviour change techniques and mechanisms of action: a rapid review. *Current Psychology*, 43(2), 1136-1168.
- 18) Grimani, A., Moog, A., & Vlaev, I. (2024). Analysis of music-exposure interventions for impacting prosocial behaviour via behaviour change techniques and mechanisms of action: a rapid review. *Current Psychology*, 43(2), 1136-1168.
- 19) Gustavson, D. E., Coleman, P. L., Iversen, J. R., Maes, H. H., Gordon, R. L., & Lense, M. D. (2021). Mental health and music engagement: review, framework, and guidelines for future studies. *Translational psychiatry*, 11(1), 370.
- 20) Henrich, J., & Muthukrishna, M. (2021). The origins and psychology of human cooperation. *Annual review of psychology*, 72(1), 207-240.
- 21) Hunter, P. G., Schellenberg, E. G., & Schimmack, U. (2010). Feelings and perceptions of happiness and sadness induced by music: similarities, differences, and mixed emotions. *Psychology of Aesthetics, Creativity, and the Arts*, 4(1), 47.
- 22) Kujur, F., & Singh, S. (2020). Visual communication and consumer-brand relationship on social networking sites-uses & gratifications theory perspective. *Journal of theoretical and applied electronic commerce research*, 15(1), 30-47.
- 23) Kwon, S., Choi, B., & Park, S. (2020). Effects of student-and school-level music concert attendance on subjective well-being: A longitudinal study of Korean adolescents. *International Journal of Music Education*, 38(2), 240-251.
- 24) Leung, M. C., & Cheung, R. Y. (2020). Music engagement and well-being in Chinese adolescents: Emotional awareness, positive emotions, and negative emotions as mediating processes. *Psychology of Music*, 48(1), 105-119.
- 25) Mashburn, A. J., & Pianta, R. C. (2006). Social relationships and school readiness. *Early education and development*, 17(1), 151-176.
- 26) McKay, G., & Higham, B. (2012). Community music: History and current practice, its constructions of 'community', digital turns and future soundings, an Arts and Humanities Research Council research review. *International Journal of Community Music*, 5(1), 91-103.
- 27) North, A. C., Sheridan, L. P., & Areni, C. S. (2016). Music congruity effects on product memory, perception, and choice. *Journal of Retailing*, 92(1), 83-95.
- 28) Petty, R. E., & Cacioppo, J. T. (1986). *Communication and persuasion: Central and peripheral routes to attitude change*. Springer-Verlag.
- 29) Petty, R. E., Cacioppo, J. T., & Schumann, D. (1983). Central and peripheral routes to advertising effectiveness: The moderating role of involvement. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 10(2), 135-146.
- 30) Putnam, R. D. (2000). *Bowling alone: The collapse and revival of American community*. Simon and schuster.
- 31) Saarikallio, S., & Erkkilä, J. (2007). The role of music in adolescents' mood regulation. *Psychology of music*, 35(1), 88-109.
- 32) Sever, S. (2016). Rap music on education: a preliminary study. *Journal of Education and Future*, (9), 139-153.
- 33) Singer, T., & Steinbeis, N. (2009). Differential roles of fairness-and compassion-based motivations for cooperation, defection, and punishment. *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, 1167(1), 41-50.
- 34) Sittler, M. C., Cooper, A. J., & Montag, C. (2019). Is empathy involved in our emotional response to music? The role of the PRL gene, empathy, and arousal in response to happy and sad music. *Psychomusicology: Music, Mind, and Brain*, 29(1), 10.
- 35) Swaminathan, S., Schellenberg, E. G., & Khalil, S. (2017). Revisiting the association between music lessons and intelligence: Training effects or music aptitude?. *Intelligence*, 62, 119-124.
- 36) Taruffi, L., & Koelsch, S. (2014). The paradox of music-evoked sadness: An online survey. *PloS one*, 9(10), e110490.

The Impact of Social Messages in Youth Music on Social Engagement of Vietnamese Youth: The Mediating Role of Social Empathy

- 37) Tu, J., & Fu, H. (2024). The path to happiness for music students: Music empathy and music engagement as potential sources of subjective well-being. *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, 11(1), 1-9.
- 38) Voorveld, H. A. (2019). Brand communication in social media: A research agenda. *Journal of advertising*, 48(1), 14-26.
- 39) Wahlbeck, K. (2015). Public mental health: the time is ripe for translation of evidence into practice. *World Psychiatry*, 14(1), 36-42.
- 40) Wu, X., & Lu, X. (2021). Musical training in the development of empathy and prosocial behaviors. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12, 661769.



There is an Open Access article, distributed under the term of the Creative Commons Attribution – Non Commercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC 4.0) (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits remixing, adapting and building upon the work for non-commercial use, provided the original work is properly cited.