



An Exploration of Digital Music Nostalgia: Investigating the Reminiscence Bump through YouTube Streaming

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Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi fenomena *reminiscence bump* dalam konteks musik digital melalui platform *YouTube*. *Reminiscence bump* merujuk pada kecenderungan individu untuk mengingat kembali kejadian-kejadian di masa remaja hingga dewasa awal dengan lebih jelas, yang dalam penelitian ini diaktifkan melalui paparan musik dari tahun 1990-an dan 2000-an. Data dikumpulkan dari 100 komentar pengguna pada video kompilasi musik nostalgia dan dianalisis menggunakan teknik analisis tematik. Komentar yang dianalisis dipilih secara purposif dengan mempertimbangkan relevansi tematik dan ekspresi emosional, meskipun keterbatasan jumlah dan sumber video tunggal dapat membatasi generalisasi temuan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa musik dari masa remaja dan awal masa dewasa membangkitkan kenangan otobiografi yang kuat dan emosional. Tema-tema yang dominan termasuk nostalgia masa sekolah, kehilangan orang yang dicintai, refleksi kehidupan, dan kenangan spesifik yang terkait dengan lagu-lagu tertentu. Musik ditemukan sebagai media yang efektif untuk menghubungkan masa lalu dengan identitas seseorang saat ini. Temuan ini mendukung teori bahwa meskipun media telah bertransisi ke format digital, struktur memori otobiografi tetap konsisten. Penelitian ini berkontribusi pada bidang psikologi musik dan penelitian memori serta menyoroti potensi penerapan musik nostalgia dalam pengaturan terapeutik dan pendidikan.

Kata Kunci: Nostalgia Musik Digital, Lonjakan Memori, *Streaming YouTube*.

Abstract

This study explores the phenomenon of the reminiscence bump in the context of digital music through the YouTube platform. The reminiscence bump refers to the tendency of individuals to more vividly recall events from adolescence to early adulthood, which in this research is activated through exposure to music from the 1990s and 2000s. Data were collected from 100 user comments on nostalgic music compilation videos and analyzed using thematic analysis. Comments were purposively selected based on thematic relevance and emotional expression, although the limited sample size and reliance on a single video source may constrain the generalizability of the findings. The results indicate that music from adolescence and early adulthood evokes strong and emotional autobiographical memories. Dominant themes include school-related nostalgia, the loss of loved ones, life reflection, and specific personal memories associated with particular songs. Music was found to be an effective medium for connecting the past with one's present identity. These findings support the theory that, despite the transition to digital media, the structure of autobiographical memory remains consistent. This study contributes to the fields of music psychology and memory research, and highlights the potential application of nostalgic music in therapeutic and educational settings.

Keywords: Digital Music Nostalgia, Reminiscence Bump, *YouTube Streaming*.

Introduction

Music possesses an extraordinary ability to evoke memories and human emotions. As a medium that combines auditory and emotional elements, music often serves as a primary trigger for accessing an individual's autobiographical memory (Martínez-Saez et al., 2023). This phenomenon has increasingly gained academic attention alongside the growing body of research on the reminiscence bump, which refers to the tendency of individuals to recall events that occurred during adolescence to early adulthood, approximately between the ages of 10 and 30 years (Koppel & Rubin, 2016).

The *reminiscence bump* has been recognized as one of the most consistent findings in autobiographical memory research (Munawar et al., 2018). Various theories have been developed to explain this phenomenon, including the identity formation theory, the cultural life script theory, and the theory of peak cognitive capacity during adolescence and early adulthood (Zimprich, 2020). At its core, this period is considered a critical phase in an individual's life, during which numerous novel experiences and the formation of personal identity occur, resulting in stronger memory traces compared to other life stages (Renwick & Woolhouse, 2023).

In the context of music, the reminiscence bump exhibits a similar pattern. Research shows that music listened to or popular during an individual's adolescence and early adulthood is more likely to trigger autobiographical memories compared to music from other periods of life (Jakubowski et al., 2020). This is further supported by findings indicating that songs from this period are not only more easily recognized but also carry greater emotional weight and stronger associations with personal experiences (Renwick & Woolhouse, 2023).

The relationship between music and memory is also significantly influenced by the level of familiarity and prior exposure (Bohn & Berntsen, 2011). Music that feels familiar—even if it has not been explicitly heard before—can activate memories through the mechanism of “musical schemas” embedded within individual cognition (Kathios et al., 2023). This suggests that both actual exposure and the perceived familiarity of music play important roles in triggering music-evoked autobiographical memories (MEAMs).

Recent studies have also shown that the experience of listening to music through digital

platforms such as YouTube can expand the dynamics of the reminiscence bump in the modern era (Krumhansl & Zupnick, 2013). Through user comments expressing emotional connections to specific songs, it becomes evident that digital music serves not only as a means of entertainment but also as an emotional “time machine” that links individuals to their past.

Nevertheless, most research on the reminiscence bump and music remains dominated by Western cultural contexts and tends to focus on traditional platforms or physical media. Studies examining how music within the digital ecosystem, particularly YouTube, shapes patterns of autobiographical memory are still relatively scarce. Furthermore, within the Indonesian context, academic exploration of the relationship between digital music and the reminiscence bump remains largely underdeveloped.

Therefore, this study aims to explore the phenomenon of the reminiscence bump within the context of digital music through the YouTube platform. The primary focus is to understand how music accessed via YouTube can evoke autobiographical memories and emotions, and how this phenomenon contributes to the formation of self-identity and users' emotional well-being. Through this approach, the study seeks to expand the body of knowledge regarding the dynamics of musical memory in the digital era, while also offering an initial contribution to the exploration of the reminiscence bump within the Indonesian cultural context.

Method

Type of Research

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach aimed at exploring the phenomenon of the reminiscence bump emerging through the consumption of digital music on the YouTube platform. The primary focus was to understand how digitally accessed music evokes users' autobiographical memories and emotional responses.

Data Sources

The data for this study were obtained from user comments on YouTube videos featuring “nostalgic music compilations.” The selected videos consisted of popular songs from the 1990s to the early 2000s, corresponding to the period typically associated with the reminiscence bump

phenomenon (ages 10 to 30 during initial exposure). Although specific demographic details such as the commenters' age or background were not available, many comments implicitly referenced life stages such as high school, early adulthood, or familial relationships, which allowed for inferential alignment with the targeted age range. Nonetheless, this limitation is acknowledged as it restricts precise verification of users' alignment with the theoretical age band of the reminiscence bump.

Criteria for Video and Comment Selection

1. Videos featuring themes such as "Best 90s Songs," "Throwback Hits," or "Greatest Hits of the 90s/2000s."
2. Comments containing expressions of personal experiences or past memories.
3. Comments expressing emotional responses (such as feelings of longing, happiness, nostalgia, or loss).
4. Comments written in English or Indonesian that could be clearly understood.

Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected using a non-participant observation method by accessing publicly available comments without interacting with users. Comments were manually collected, with a target of approximately 100 comments.

Data Collection Procedure

1. Selecting one or two nostalgic music compilation videos based on the predetermined criteria.
2. Reading and filtering comments based on their relevance to themes of memory and emotion.
3. Copying the selected comments into a working document.
4. Conducting preliminary coding based on the content of the comments.

Data Analysis Techniques

The analysis was conducted using thematic analysis, consisting of the following stages:

1. Data Familiarization: Reading all comments to gain a comprehensive understanding of the data.
2. Initial Coding: Assigning labels to relevant portions of the comments, such as

"adolescent memories," "family memories," "emotional events," or "self-identity."

3. Theme Identification: Grouping initial codes into major themes related to the reminiscence bump and emotional activation.
4. Theme Review: Re-examining the consistency and coherence among the themes.
5. Defining and Naming Themes: Formulating concise descriptions for each identified theme.
6. Thematic Narrative Construction: Compiling the results into an academic narrative.

Research Ethics

Since the data were sourced from publicly available comments on the YouTube platform, no additional ethical approval was required. However, user identities were anonymized, and comment excerpts were used without mentioning usernames, in order to protect privacy and adhere to academic ethical standards.

Result

This study analyzed 100 user comments from a YouTube video titled "90s and 2000s Nostalgic Songs" (accessed on April 25, 2025), which featured a compilation of popular music from that era. The analysis aimed to identify the presence of the reminiscence bump phenomenon as well as patterns of memory activation and emotional experiences associated with music.

From the comment analysis, five major themes emerged that represented patterns of memory and emotional experiences among users:

Table 1. Five Major Themes

Theme	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Nostalgia for Adolescence and School Years	48 Comments	48%
Longing for the Past and Loss of Loved Ones	21 Comments	21%
Self-Reflection and Adult Life	15 Comments	15%
Musical Identity and Specific	11 Comments	11%

Personal Memories		
Mixed Emotions (happiness, nostalgia, regret)	5 Comments	5%

Theme 1: Nostalgia for Adolescence and School Years

The majority of comments demonstrated a strong emotional attachment to adolescence, particularly during high school or college years. Music from the 1990s to 2000s served as the primary trigger for recalling memories of carefree times and social bonding.

Example comments:

"Berasa diajakin ke tahun 2002... Lagu-lagunya menemani gw saat muda dulu, dengan segala kenangannya" (Comments #68) ("It feels like I'm being taken back to 2002... These songs accompanied me during my youth, along with all the memories")

"Serasa kembali ke masa dulu yg penuh kenangan dimana teman-teman menjadi penyemangat hidup" (Comments #13) ("It feels like going back to the good old days filled with memories, where friends were the true spirit of life")

Theme 2: Longing for the Past and Loss of Loved Ones

Several users associated the music with important figures in their lives who had passed away, such as parents or childhood friends.

Example comments:

"Ingin kembali ke masa itu, ya Allah, di situ ayahku masih ada..." (Comments #2) ("I wish I could go back to that time... back when my father was still alive")

"Saat aku masih SD ini mah... kenangan saat ibuku masih hidup" (Comments #84) ("I was still in elementary school back then... memories from when my mother was still alive")

Theme 3: Self-Reflection and Adult Life

Many comments contained reflections on how the burdens of adult life feel much heavier compared to the carefree nature of youth, illustrating the process of identity transition with age.

Example comment:

"Jaman-jaman masih menikmati hidup tanpa beban pikiran, sekarang beban berat banget, harus berjuang untuk keluarga" (Comments #51) ("Those were the days when I could enjoy life without worries. Now, the burdens are so heavy; I have to fight for my family")

Theme 4: Musical Identity and Specific Personal Memories

Several comments explicitly linked specific songs to particular events in users' lives, demonstrating how music becomes an integral part of the formation of autobiographical identity. Example comments:

"Lagu 'Jika' mengingatkanku pada mantan pertamaku" (Comments #86) ("The song 'Jika' reminds me of my first love")

"2006 sering dengerin lagu ini di kelas sambil nyanyi bareng teman" (Comments #93) ("Back in 2006, I used to listen to this song in class while singing along with friends")

Theme 5: Mixed Emotions (Happiness, Nostalgia, Regret)

Many users expressed a blend of emotions when listening to these nostalgic songs, experiencing both happiness in recalling the past and sadness in realizing how much time has passed.

Example comment:

"Masa SMA terkenang... Tapi kok sedih ya, padahal kenangannya bahagia semua" (Comments #76) ("High school memories are flooding back... But why does it feel sad, even though all the memories were happy?")

To address the complexity of the digital music ecosystem, it is important to note that this study focuses solely on YouTube, which represents only a portion of the broader digital music landscape that includes platforms such as Spotify, TikTok, and Instagram Music. This narrow platform focus may limit the generalizability of findings across the wider digital environment. Future studies should consider incorporating data from multiple platforms to better capture the diversity of digital music experiences.

Furthermore, while this study employs thematic analysis rooted in the theory of the reminiscence bump, it recognizes that emotional expressions captured in user comments are inherently subjective. Interpretations may vary, and researcher bias could influence theme

construction. Therefore, future research would benefit from incorporating interrater reliability checks or triangulation with interview-based methods to strengthen interpretive validity.

Lastly, while this study proposes potential applications in therapeutic and educational settings, these implications remain conceptual. A more detailed exploration is needed regarding how nostalgic music might be practically integrated into music therapy sessions or educational curricula aimed at intergenerational learning or identity development.

Discussion

The findings from the analysis of 100 YouTube comments on a compilation video of 90s and 2000s nostalgic songs revealed a strong connection between digital music and the activation of users' autobiographical memories. These results consistently reinforce the theory of the reminiscence bump in the context of music, as outlined in previous studies (Koppel & Rubin, 2016; Munawar, Kuhn, & Haque, 2018).

Music as a Trigger for the Reminiscence Bump

The majority of comments indicated that songs from adolescence and early adulthood (ages 10–30) possess a strong emotional power to evoke memories. This finding aligns with the explanation by Krumhansl and Zupnick (2013), who found that popular music listened to during adolescence often evokes powerful personal memories and forms a significant part of one's self-identity.

The nostalgia experiences triggered by music during this period also correspond to the findings of Renwick and Woolhouse (2023), who emphasized that the phenomenon of the musical reminiscence bump is universal across genres, countries, and generations. In the comment data, intergenerational narratives also emerged, with parents introducing 90s-era songs to their children, thereby reinforcing the phenomenon of the cascading reminiscence bump (Krumhansl & Zupnick, 2013).

The Emotional Dimension of Musical Nostalgia

The emotional dimension of the memories evoked also emerged as a significant finding. Many comments expressed feelings of happiness, longing, and even deep sadness about the past, such as the loss of parents or close friends. This

supports the findings of Munawar, Kuhn, and Haque (2018), who emphasized that the reminiscence bump involves not only cognitive memory but is also mediated by intense emotional experiences.

Barrett et al. (2010) highlighted that music's power to trigger nostalgia is closely linked to its ability to activate emotional memories associated with significant life events. This is clearly illustrated in comments expressing a yearning to return to school days or times spent with family.

Nostalgia as a Mechanism for Identity Formation and Reflection

In addition to serving as a memory trigger, music also appears to play a role in the formation of self-identity. Several comments revealed how music had become an integral part of life experiences that shaped who they are today. Consistent with Jakubowski et al. (2020), autobiographical memory plays a central role in constructing and maintaining personal identity.

This identity is often built through the recollection of "carefree" times, which many commenters associated with periods of personal growth, the formation of social relationships, and emotional exploration. Koppel and Rubin (2016) also noted that within the framework of life narratives, memories formed during the reminiscence bump serve as "cornerstones" for an individual's life story.

Digital Music as a New Medium for Memory Activation

Interestingly, within the context of the digital era, YouTube serves as a new medium for memory activation. Compared to the past, when physical media such as cassette tapes and CDs were relied upon, users today can instantly access songs from their past, thereby strengthening their emotional connection to their memories (Martínez-Saez et al., 2023).

This process suggests that although the platforms have changed, the fundamental structure of autobiographical memory remains consistent: music continues to serve as a powerful bridge between the past and the present. However, the speed of access and the abundance of choices within the modern digital ecosystem appear to accelerate and intensify the nostalgic experience.

Emotional Variations: Happiness, Nostalgia, and Regret

Another interesting finding was the complexity of emotions experienced by users. Not only did they express happiness, but also feelings of nostalgia, deep longing, and even regret. This reinforces the view that nostalgia is a mixed-emotion phenomenon, rather than merely a positive feeling (Bohn & Berntsen, 2011).

As reflected in the comments, some users felt joy in recalling their youth, while simultaneously experiencing a sense of loss over time passed and people who were no longer present. This finding is consistent with the explanation by Munawar et al. (2018), which emphasizes that nostalgia plays a crucial role in coping with identity changes and experiences of loss throughout life.

It is important to note that emotional expressions observed in user comments are subject to interpretive variability. As such, the thematic analysis conducted in this study carries inherent subjectivity due to the researcher's perspective. To enhance the validity of emotional interpretations, future studies should apply methods such as interrater reliability or triangulation with interview data.

Additionally, platform-specific characteristics such as YouTube's algorithmic promotion of comments can introduce visibility bias. This means that the most visible and liked comments may not represent the broader spectrum of user experiences and emotional responses. Researchers should remain cautious about generalizing findings derived from such comment samples.

Although this study suggests potential applications in therapeutic and educational contexts, these implications remain preliminary. Further investigation is required to conceptualize and design specific models for implementing nostalgic music in music therapy practices or experiential-based educational programs, particularly those aimed at fostering identity development or intergenerational engagement.

Conclusion

This study confirms that digital music, particularly through the YouTube platform, plays a significant role in activating autobiographical memories related to the phenomenon of the reminiscence bump. Findings from the analysis of 100 user comments demonstrate that songs

popular during adolescence and early adulthood are capable of evoking a wide range of emotions, including happiness, gratitude, longing, and regret.

This phenomenon reinforces the view that adolescence and early adulthood are critical phases in the formation of identity-related memories, as noted by Koppel and Rubin (2016). In this context, music serves as an emotional "shortcut" that reconnects individuals with their past experiences, strengthens their identity, and helps them navigate emotional changes throughout life.

Moreover, this study shows that in the modern digital era, the characteristics of the reminiscence bump remain consistent, even though the medium of music access has shifted from physical formats to digital streaming. This demonstrates the flexibility and resilience of the structure of human autobiographical memory.

Theoretical Implications

This study contributes to the theories of autobiographical memory and music psychology by expanding the understanding of how digital music can serve as a tool for memory activation within contemporary cultural and technological contexts. It also reinforces the importance of adopting a multidimensional approach when analyzing the reminiscence bump, including the consideration of emotional, identity-related, and technological factors.

Furthermore, these findings support the theories of the cultural life script and narrative identity, which posit that life experiences occurring during adolescence and early adulthood hold a privileged position within an individual's self-narrative (Koppel & Rubin, 2016; Munawar et al., 2018).

Practical Implications

These findings have practical relevance in the fields of clinical psychology, music therapy, and education. In therapeutic practice, nostalgic music can be used as a medium to activate positive memories and enhance the emotional well-being of patients, particularly among older adults or individuals with memory disorders such as dementia.

In the context of education and personal development, music can serve as a tool for self-reflection, strengthening identity narratives, and fostering intergenerational connections. Moreover, these findings are valuable for digital

platform developers seeking to understand how users' emotional experiences can be optimized through nostalgia-based content curation.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future studies are recommended to:

1. Expand the analysis to various music genres and other digital platforms such as Spotify, TikTok, or Instagram Music.
2. Employ a mixed-methods approach by incorporating in-depth interviews to capture richer narratives of user experiences.

3. Examine cross-cultural differences in digital music and nostalgia experiences.
4. Investigate the role of demographic factors such as age, gender, and socioeconomic background in influencing the intensity of the reminiscence bump experience.

By pursuing these directions, a more comprehensive understanding of the interaction between music, memory, and emotion within the digital context can continue to be developed in the future.

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