Investigating the Sense of Pleasure and Abstract Perception of Different Artistic Genres within Iranian culture

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Extended Abstract

Aim

Art therapy has emerged as a valuable tool for individuals to express their observations, feelings, and thoughts visually or auditorily, supplementing verbal communication. It serves as a potential buffer against intense emotional distress resulting from traumatic experiences, offering a pathway for mastery and competence (Goodman, 2008; Gantt, 2011; Slayton, Archer, & Kaplan, 2011). From ancient paintings to AI art, the appreciation of visual art is deeply ingrained in the human experiential framework. Art appears to be both personal and globally inclusive, reflecting individual tastes while also adhering to universal rules for shaping artistic preferences (Kant, Heinzle, Park et al., 2011). Humans shape their everyday world based on their artistic preferences, whether it's choosing specific colored clothing, selecting a painting with a unique composition, or picking a hotel room with a special view. While these aesthetic preferences may seem simple and inconsequential, people invest significant time and energy in satisfying them, emphasizing the importance of aesthetic preferences in human life (Palmer, Ashloss, & Sammartino, 2013). Despite the profound impact of aesthetic preferences, our understanding of them remains limited. Gustav Fechner, the father of scientific psychology, laid the foundation for the study of aesthetic preferences. Although subsequent periods saw fewer psychological studies on aesthetic beauty, modern psychology, aided by advanced tools, is revisiting interdisciplinary efforts to scientifically examine aesthetic preferences (Shimamura & Palmer, 2014). The complexity of the brain's perception and valuation processes concerning artistic stimuli poses challenges to acquiring deep insights into artistic preferences. Previous experiences, such as episodic memories, can influence present preferences, yet the dynamic and fluid nature of aesthetic preferences suggests a continuous process shaped by both past experiences and new stimuli (Baron, Delane, & Behrens, 2013; Wimmer & Shohamy, 2012). Addressing these complexities, the current study explores the preferences and artistic interests in various painting styles within Iranian society. As the use of art therapy continues to grow in Iran, there is a pressing need to understand the cultural impact on artistic preferences. The study employs two indices, the Ranking of Liking (Iigaya, Wahle, & Tanwisuth, 2021) and the Tangibility Ranking (Chatterjee et al., 2010), to investigate the relationship between the tangibility of artistic work and individuals' liking for that artwork among those familiar and unfamiliar with art. The hypothesis posits a correlation between tangibility and liking for an artwork.

Methodology

The study, conducted in Iran, falls under the category of applied, cross-sectional, and within-group experimental research. The target population consists of undergraduate and graduate students from the Faculty of Engineering and the Faculty of Fine Arts (Painting) at the University of Tehran between 2021-2022. The participants were selected voluntarily based on mental and visual health criteria, with a sample size of six individuals, including three unfamiliar with art from the Faculty of Engineering and three art-related individuals from the Faculty of Fine Arts (Painting), with an average age of 32.33 and a standard deviation of 2.68. The research emulates a previous study's methodology conducted by

Iigaya et al. in 2021, adapting the approach for a sample size of 6 participants and the presentation of 1001 stimuli in the Iranian context. The execution phase involved selecting stimuli from five different art styles (Impressionism, Cubism, Abstraction, Color Field, and Expressionism) obtained from the WikiArt website. Python code facilitated the random selection and download of 1045 paintings based on quality criteria. The research employed ranking tests for participants' preferences and tangibility assessments of the art stimuli. To explore differences between art styles, the Kruskal-Wallis test was used, and the relationship between preference and tangibility was examined using mixed linear regression. In summary, the study systematically analyzed participants' responses to diverse art stimuli, exploring both their preferences and tangible perceptions, aligning with the methodologies of Iigaya et al. (2021) with adjustments for the Iranian context.

Findings

Descriptive analysis illuminated the systematic differences in perception and emotional response to different artistic styles. Notably, tangible art styles like Impressionism and Expressionism were favored over more abstract styles such as Cubism and Abstract art. While there was a noticeable discrepancy between art-familiar and unfamiliar groups in their ratings, the overall patterns across both cohorts aligned closely, suggesting a cultural consistency in aesthetic preference. Statistical analysis showed that actual differences in interest were rooted in the tangibility of the artwork, with more realistic works aligning with higher interest levels. Regression analysis indicated that, amidst Iranian society, just as in previous studies conducted in American society, the preference for an artistic piece was directly linked to its degree of realism or tangibility.

Conclusion

This study underlines the impact of tangibility on artistic preferences and reinforces the idea that more realistic artwork, connected to the external world, is generally more appealing to viewers—irrespective of cultural differences. The findings reinforce the universality of certain aesthetic preferences and suggest that art therapy can benefit from incorporating artwork with higher tangibility to induce specific therapeutic effects. Additionally, the study infers the importance of a tailored approach in art therapy, where the abstractness of art pieces can lead to more personalized and unpredictable therapeutic outcomes. While the small sample size of this study may limit generalizability, future research on larger populations, including psychological patients with conditions like depression or anxiety disorder, could expand upon these findings and further explore the applicability and effectiveness of art preferences within art therapy across different demographics and psychopathological spectrums.

Keywords: Aesthetic, Art Therapy, Tangibility, Preferences, Liking rate.

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