Examination of the Change in Sonic Features of Viral Music following the COVID-19 Pandemic

Gene Park

Stay-at-home orders during the COVID-19 pandemic has brought individuals fear and anxiety related to social distancing and isolation. While it is difficult to measure how populations are dealing with unusual circumstances in real-time, the digital age provides tools to gather and analyze data regarding consumed media of the populations. Specifically, music is an omnipresent source of consumed media that people use to shape and regulate their moods and mental health, and it may reveal how individuals choose to respond to periods of isolation. The present study examines how online music consumption behavior changed shortly after the COVID-19 pandemic. Sonic features of daily Viral 50 tracks were extracted from Spotify ('danceability', 'key', 'acousticness', 'liveliness', etc.); specifically, 'acousticness' and 'danceability' of the music between the period following the declaration of the pandemic and the period from the previous year were compared. Results showed that individuals listened to music with significantly more 'acousticneess' and significantly less 'danceability' after the pandemic declaration compared to the same period from 2019. The results highlight the potential of utilization of passively collected, underutilized consumed media data, such as music, to monitor and predict how populations are responding to unusual situations, which can help create better public policies and timely interventions. In addition, it is suggested that a similar approach can be applied at an individual level.