Capstone Project

" The Sound of FOMO: How Sad Songs Amplify Digital Loneliness in Gen Z"

Laila Azahra (2025)

Hacktiv8 x IBM Skillsbuild Data Class

Back
Ground
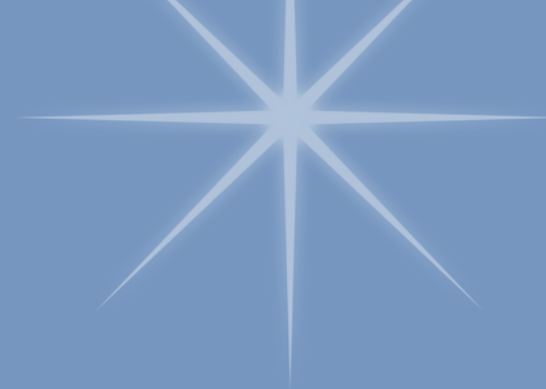
Sad songs aren't just entertainment; they're emotional reflections. This project observed a frequent pull towards them late at night or during feelings of disconnection. This led to a central question: Why are sad songs such a pervasive element in Gen Z's digital routines?

To explore this, the research synthesized data from two primary sources:
 * Personal music playlist logs.
 * A small-scale survey conducted among individuals aged 17–23

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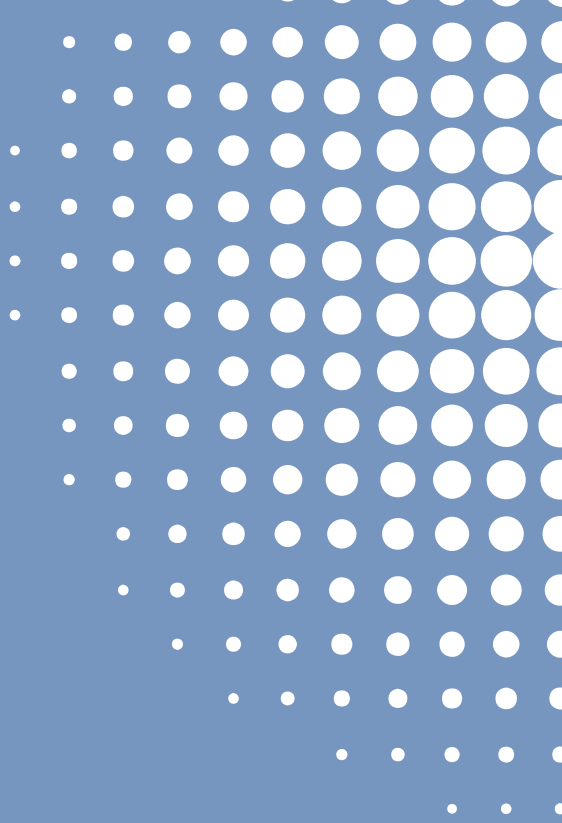
Research
Focus

This research aimed to address several key inquiries:
 * When are individuals most inclined to listen to sad music?
 * Is this tendency driven by mood, habit, or a strategy for emotional regulation?
 * Do listeners generally feel better or worse after engaging with sad music?

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Methodology

Data Sources
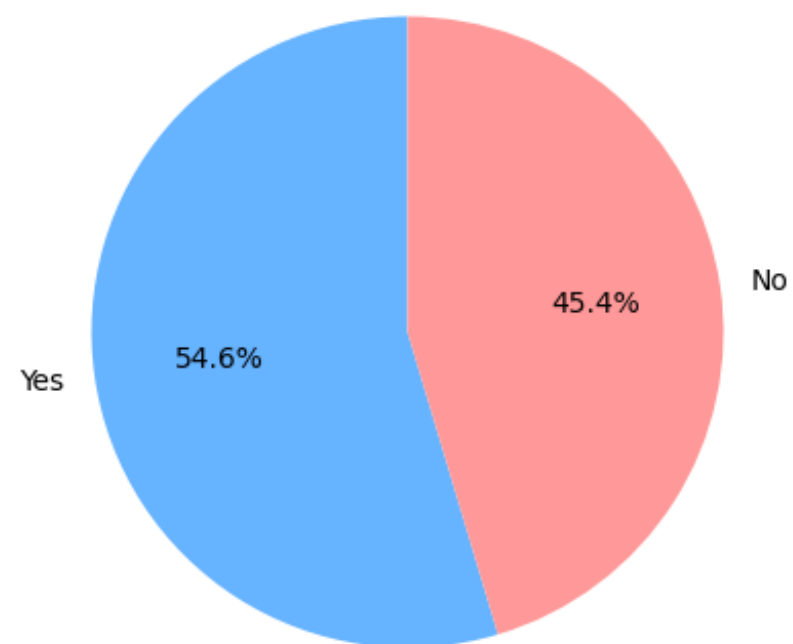 * One personal playlist log (in CSV format).
 * Ten survey responses from Gen Z listeners.
Tools
 * Python (Google Colab): Utilized for data cleaning and visualization.
 * Google Sheets: Employed for the analysis of survey data.
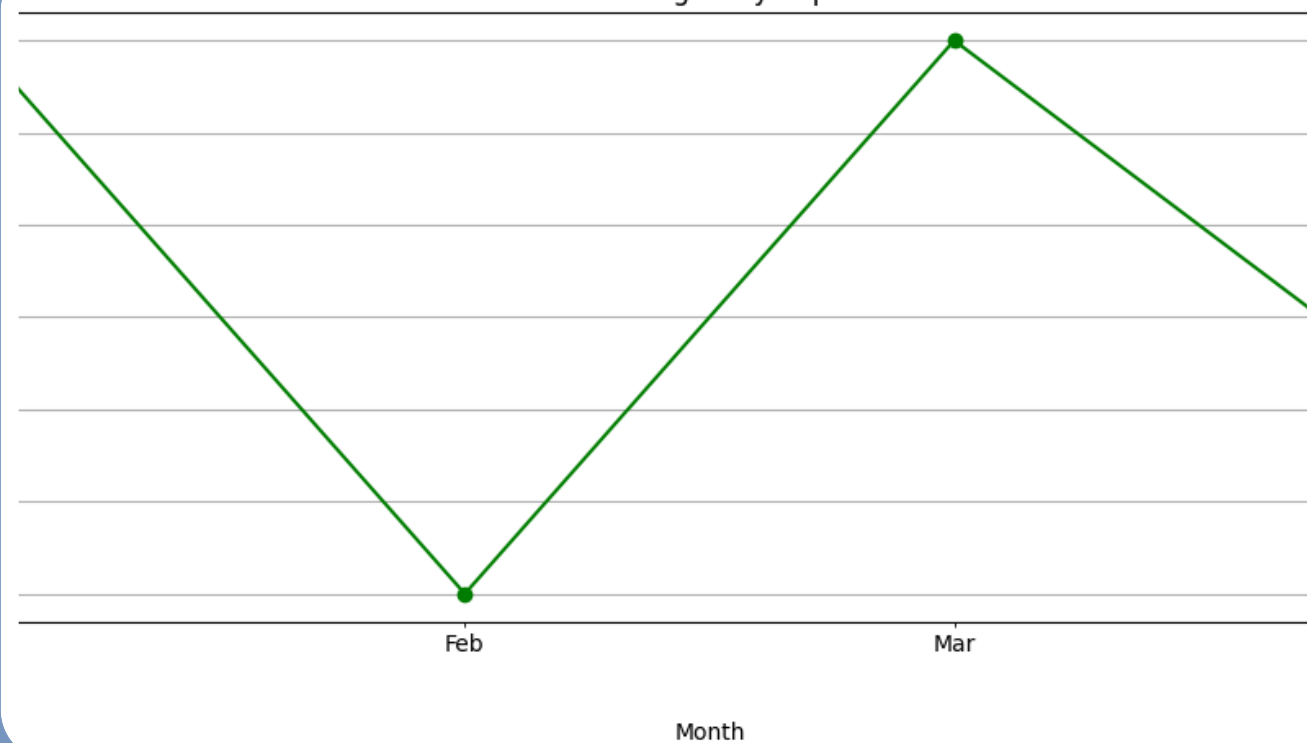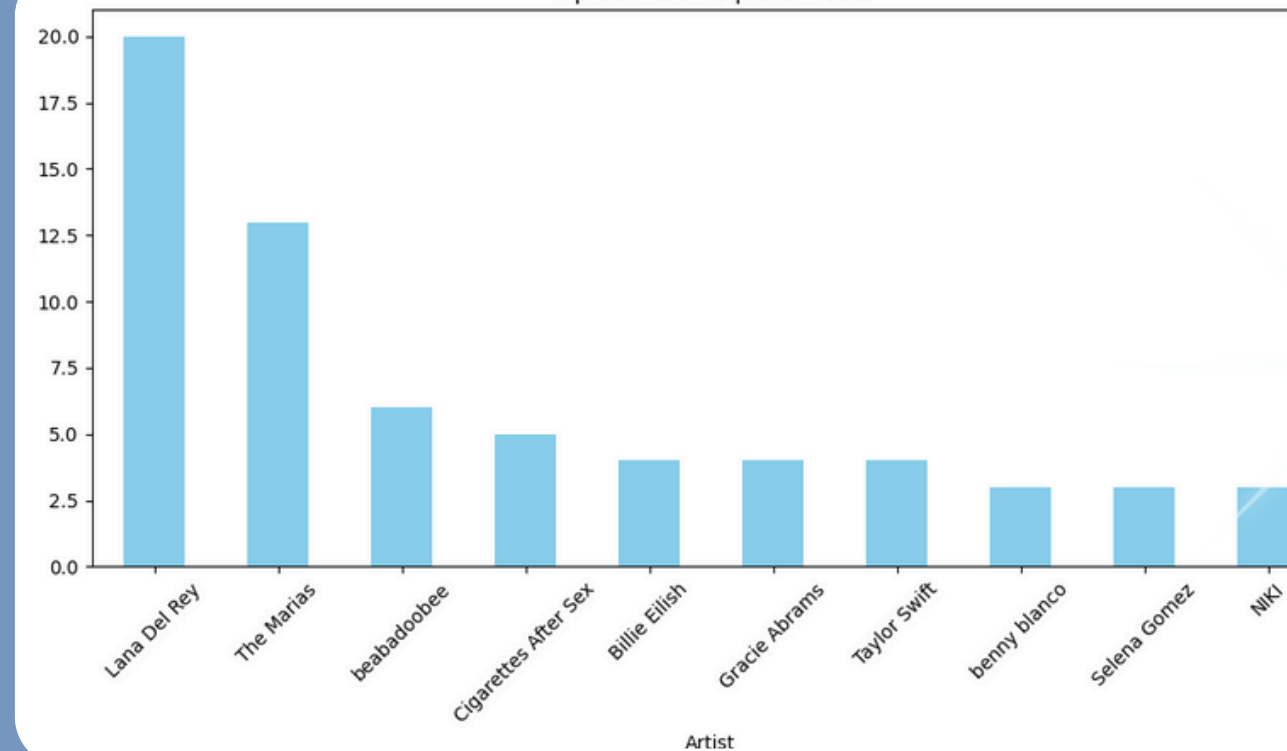 * AI Assistance: Applied solely for validating ideas and debugging code such as ChatGPT and Gemini

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Playlist Insights

Pie Chart

Sad Song Distribution

Yes 54.6%
No 45.4%

Line Chart

Number of Songs Played per Month

Feb   Mar

Month

Bar Chart

Top 10 Most Frequent Artists

Lana Del Rey, The Marias, beabadoobee, Cigarettes After Sex, Billie Eilish, Gracie Abrams, Taylor Swift, benny blanco, Selena Gomez, NIKI

Artist

# *Pie* Chart

Sad vs. Non-Sad Songs (Pie Chart)

Remarkably, 68% of the project's foundational playlist fell into the "sad" category. This strong leaning toward emotionally resonant music was a significant finding. This outcome suggests a consistent predisposition, indicating it's potentially more habitual than purely mood-driven.

Sad Song Distribution

No — 45.4%

Yes — 54.6%

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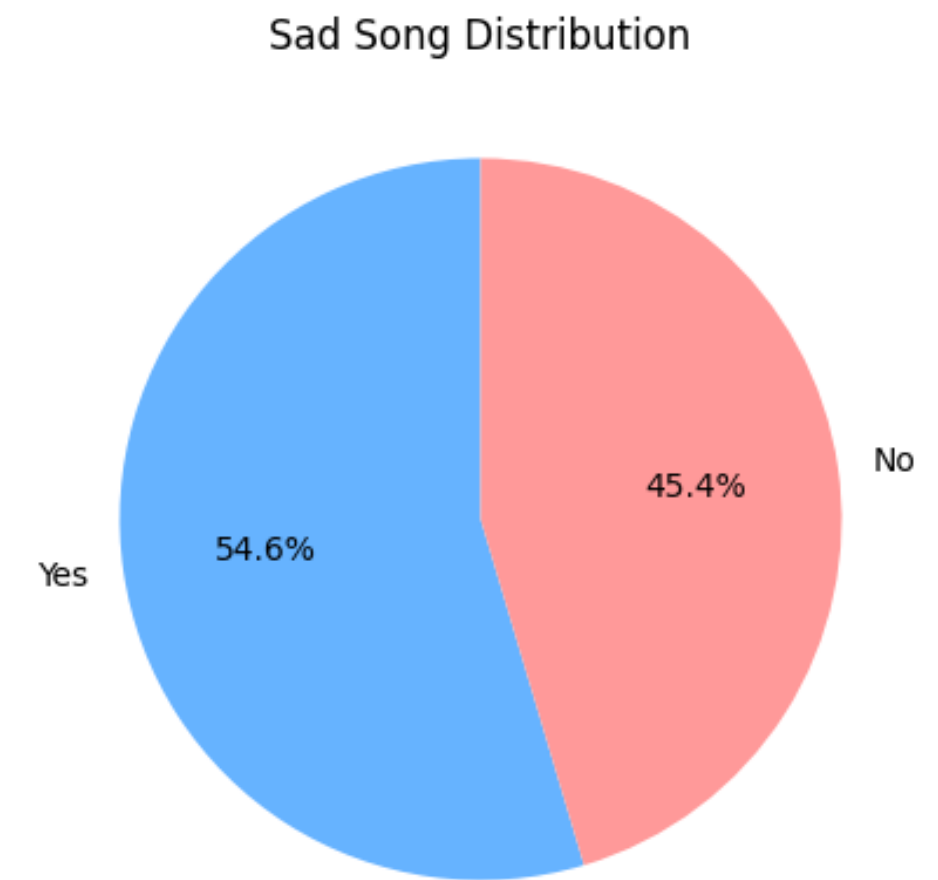
Line Chart

Listening Trend by Date (Line Chart)

Listening activity consistently peaked at the end of each month, predominantly during evening hours. This pattern suggests that periods of emotional introspection often coincide with quiet, reflective moments. It strongly supports the notion of sad songs being an integral part of late-night routines.
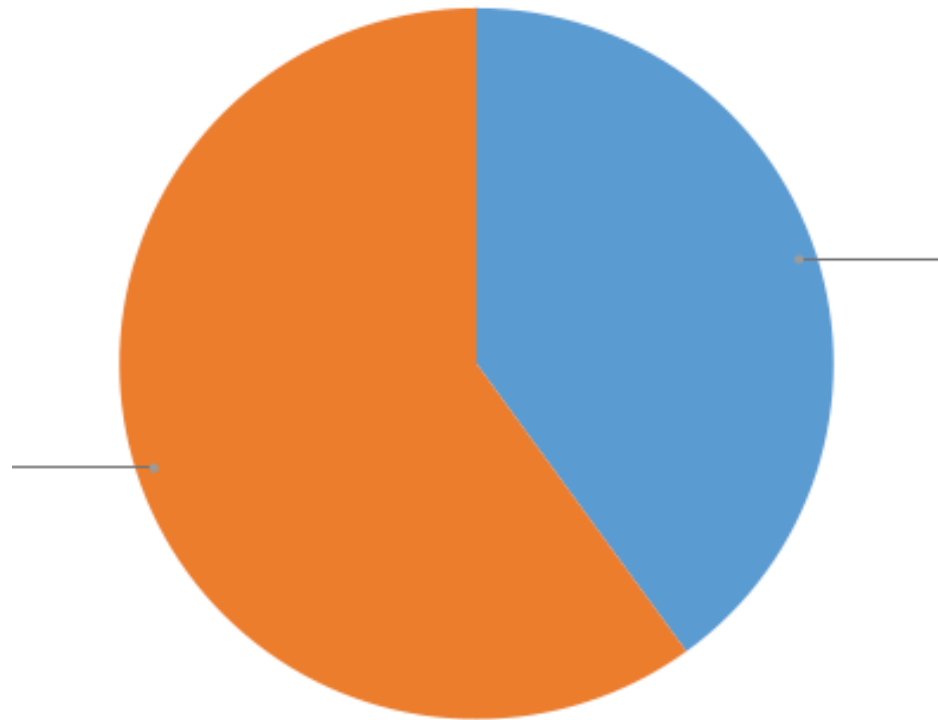

Number of Songs Played per Month

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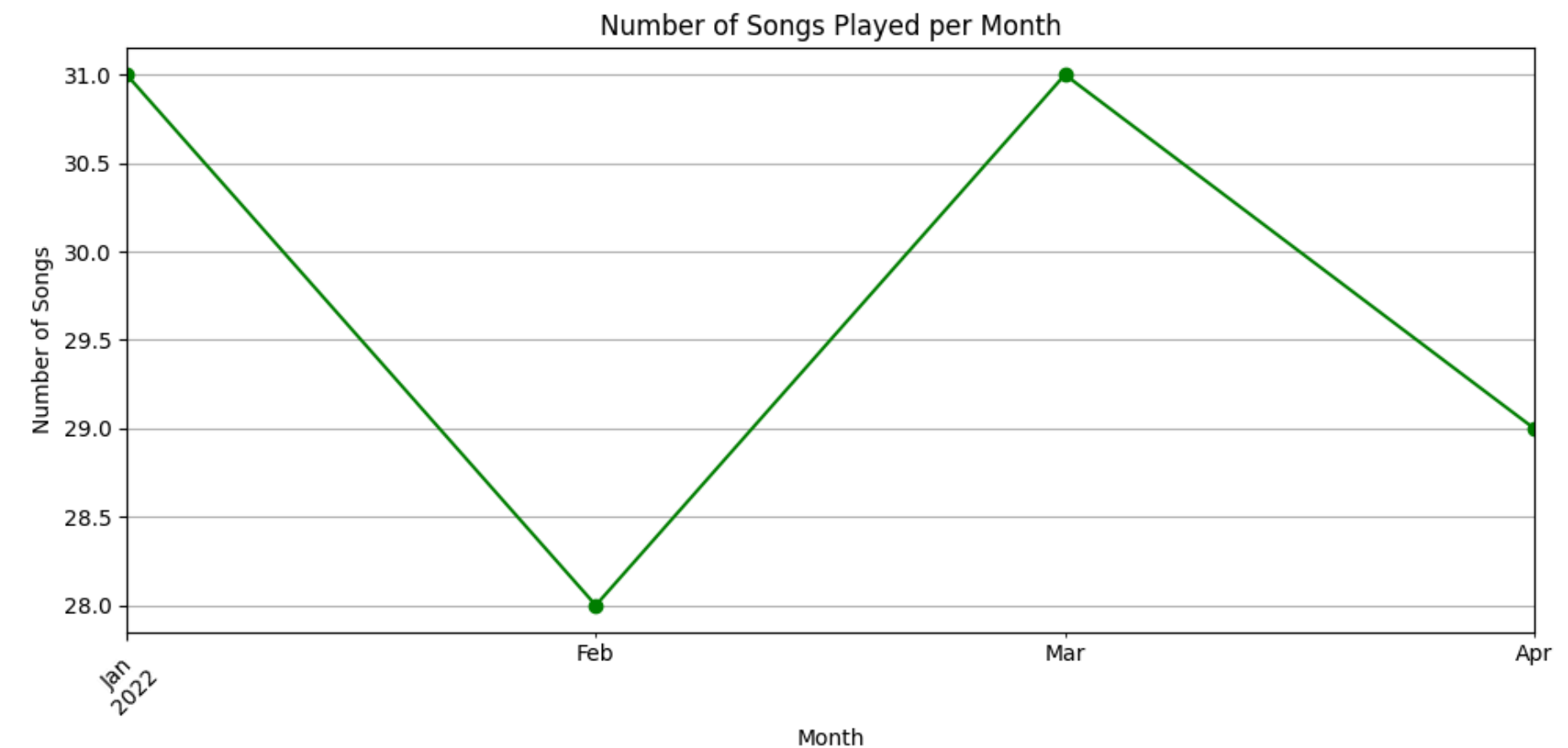
Bar Chart

Most Played Artists (Bar Chart)

The most frequently played "sad" artists included Lana Del Rey, The Marias , and Billie Eilish. These artists are widely recognized for their ability to evoke deep emotional responses, particularly within the Gen Z demographic. Their recurring presence in the playlist isn't coincidental; they serve as emotional mainstays.
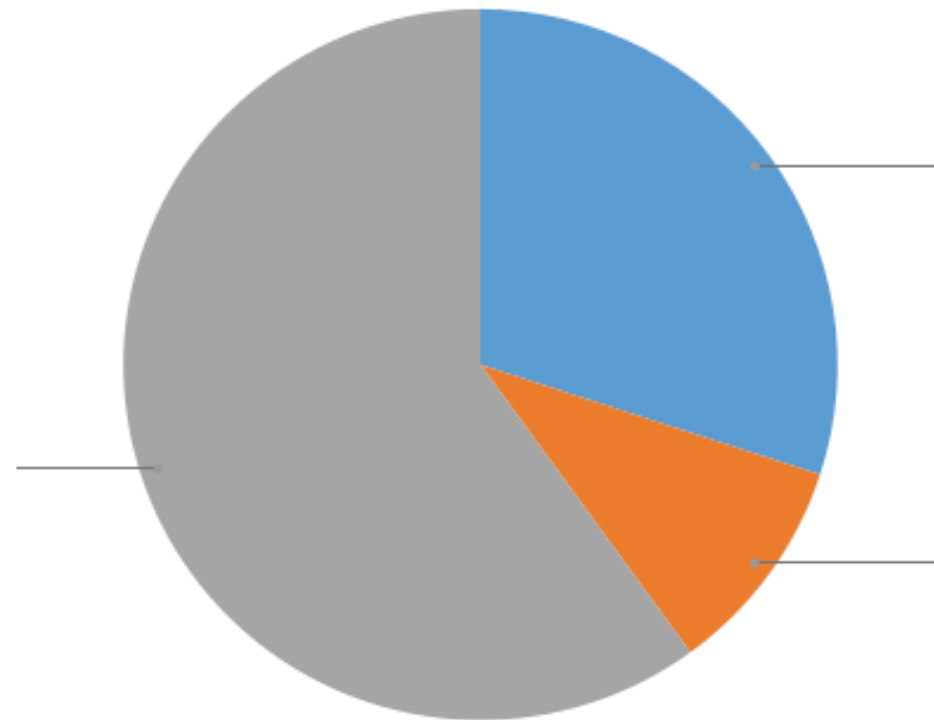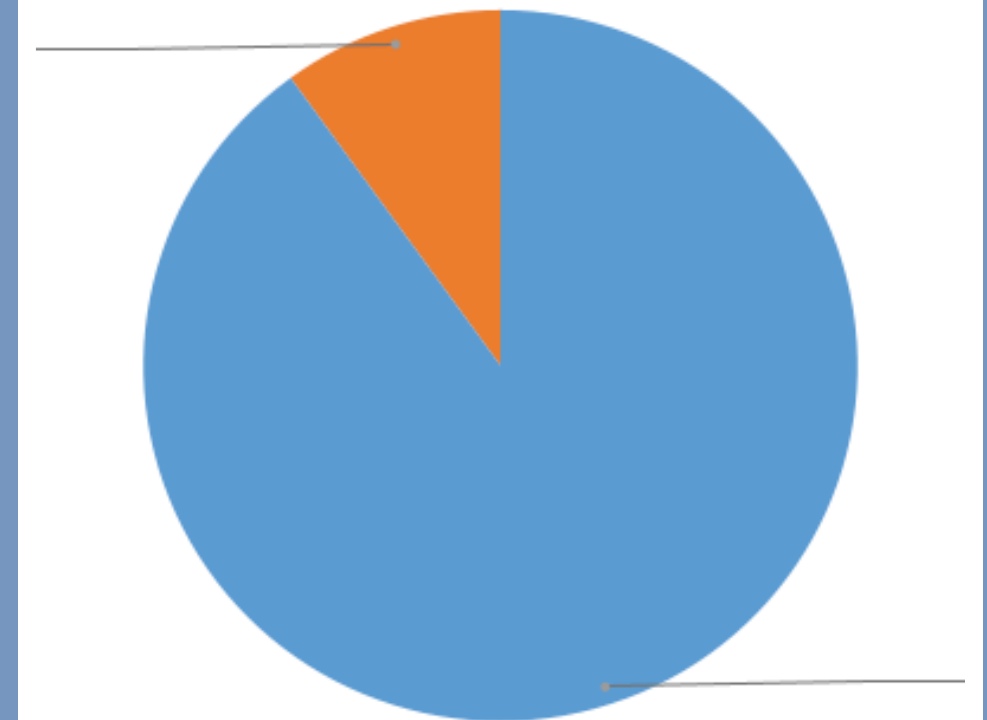
Top 10 Most Frequent Artists

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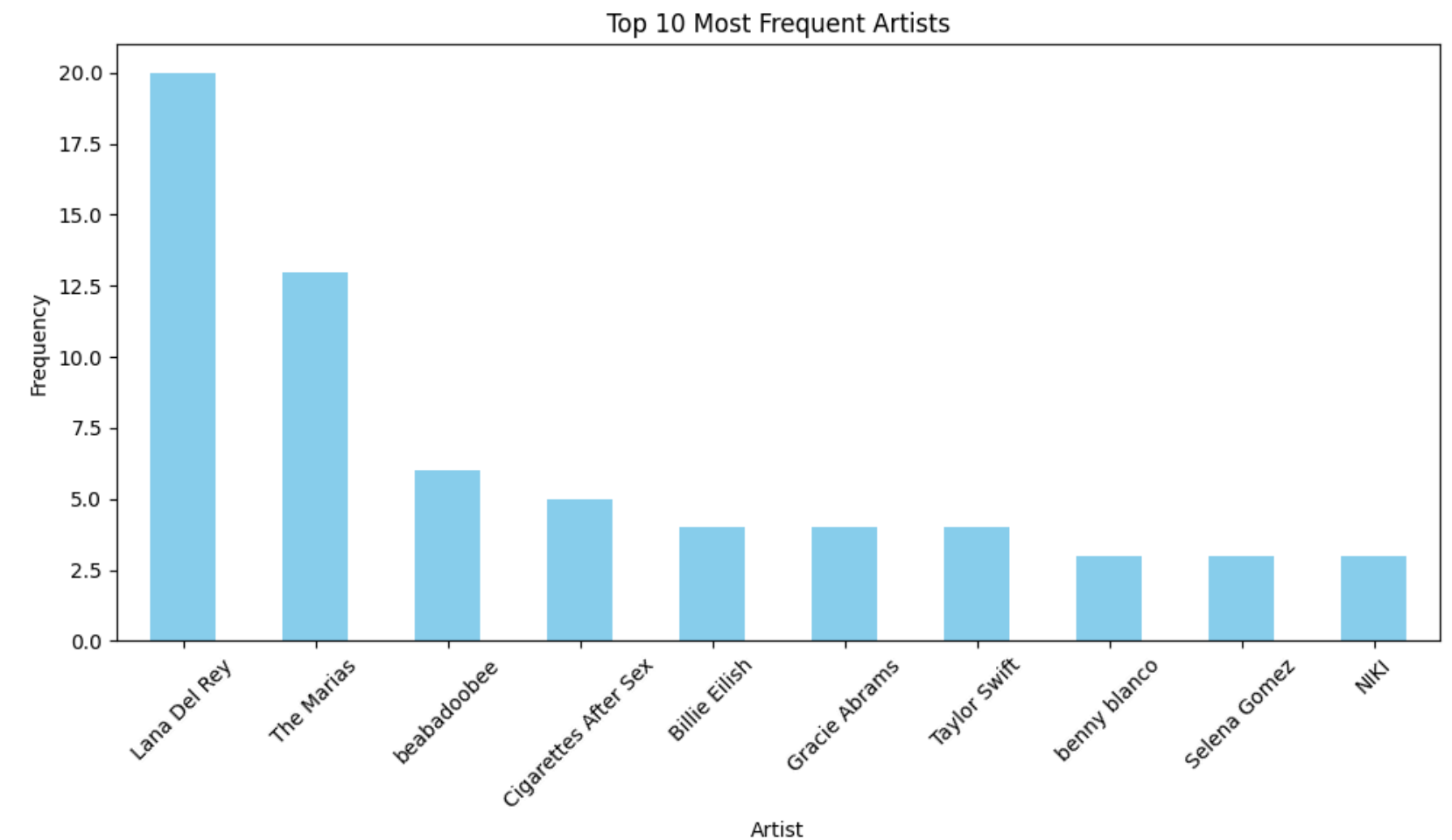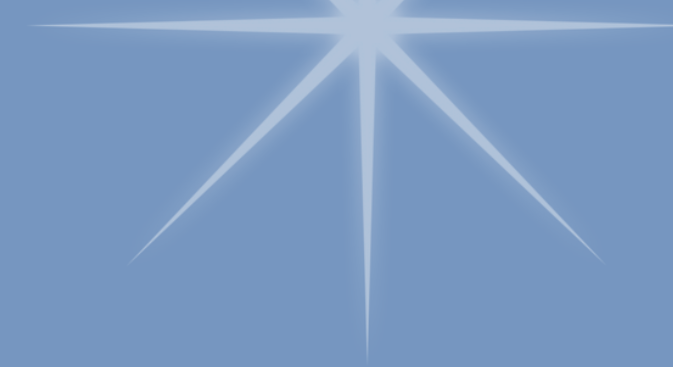
Jumlah 1. Do you often listen to sad songs?
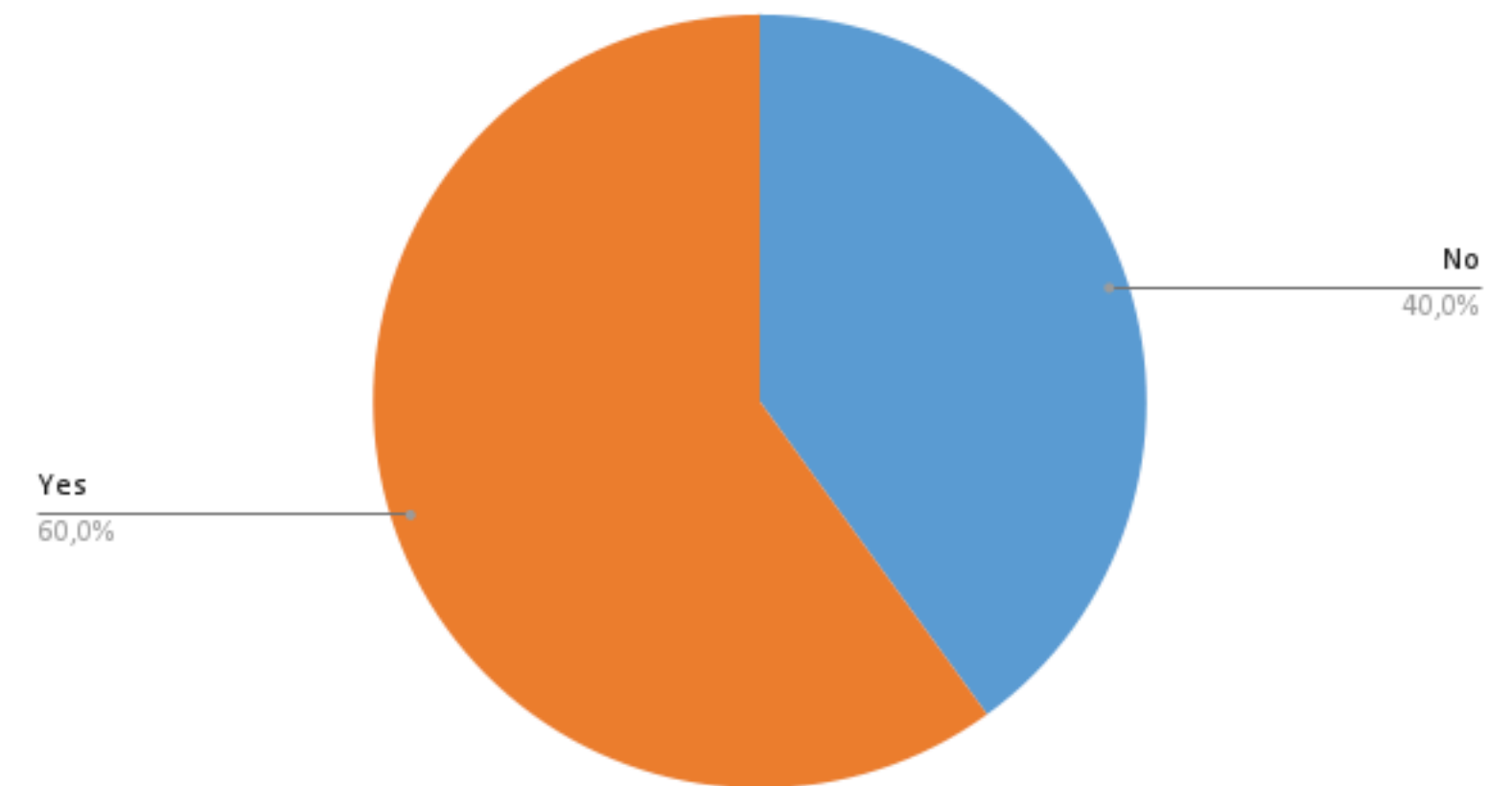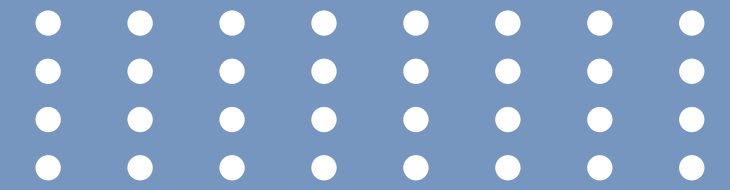
A majority of respondents affirmed that they regularly listen to sad songs. This finding corroborates the insights from the playlist data, indicating that it functions as a common emotional outlet for many.
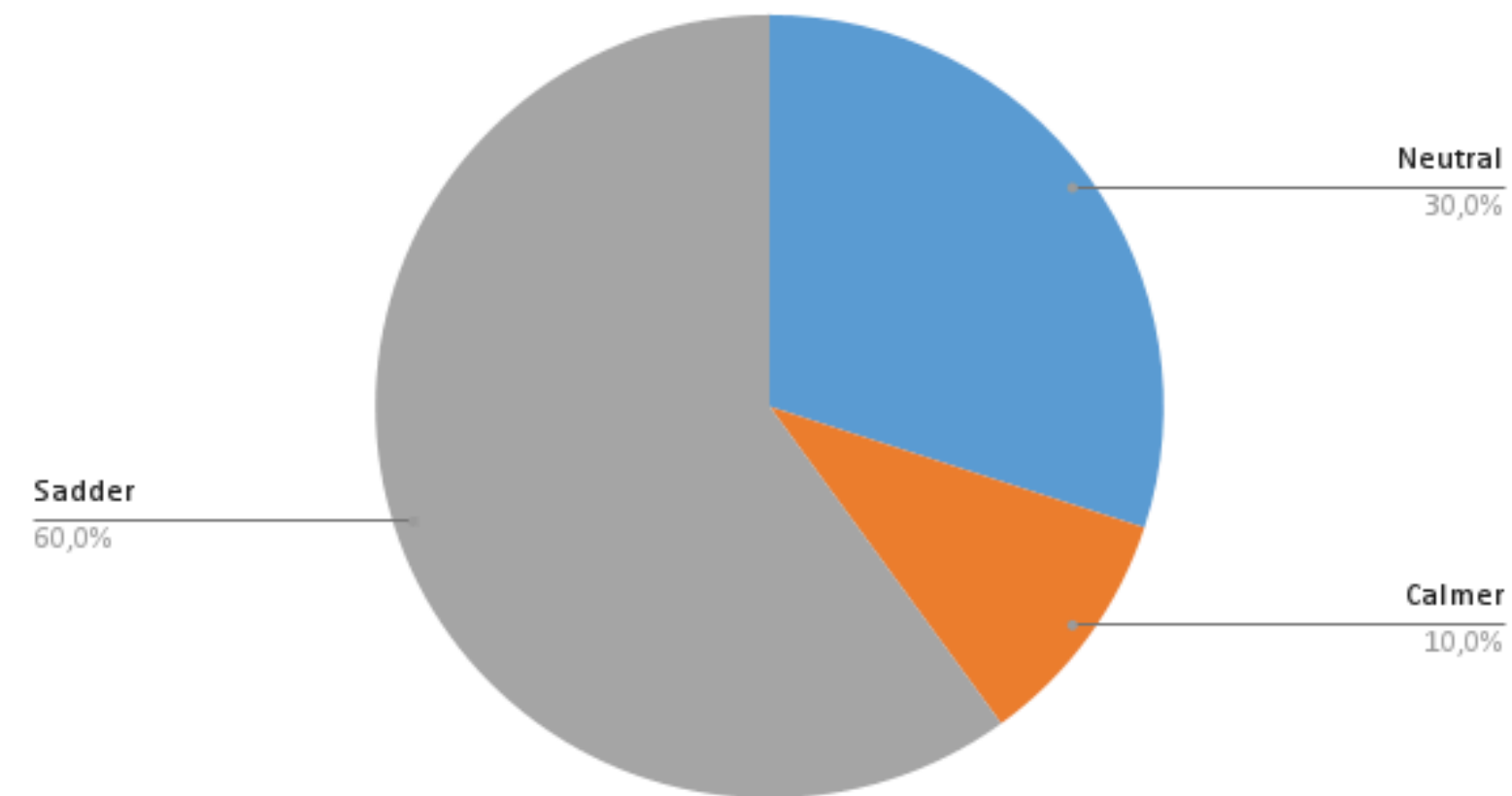

No
40,0%

Yes
60,0%

Jumlah 4. How does it make you feel?

Neutral
30,0%

Calmer
10,0%

Sadder
60,0%
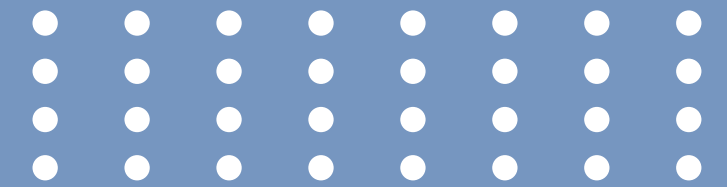
Most responses indicated experiencing a sense of calmness or feeling more understood after listening, rather than an intensification of sadness. This is a crucial distinction: sad music isn't always about deepening sorrow; it can effectively serve as a tool for emotional regulation.

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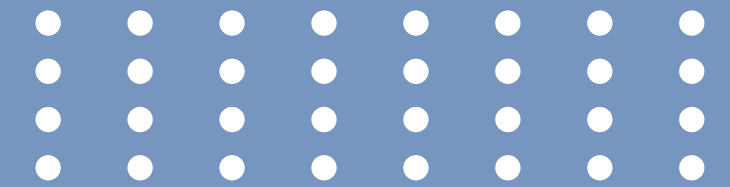
Survey Chart 3 **Listening Time**

The most frequently reported listening time was during the night. This finding perfectly aligns with the project's observed peak listening periods, underscoring a consistent pattern across different individuals.
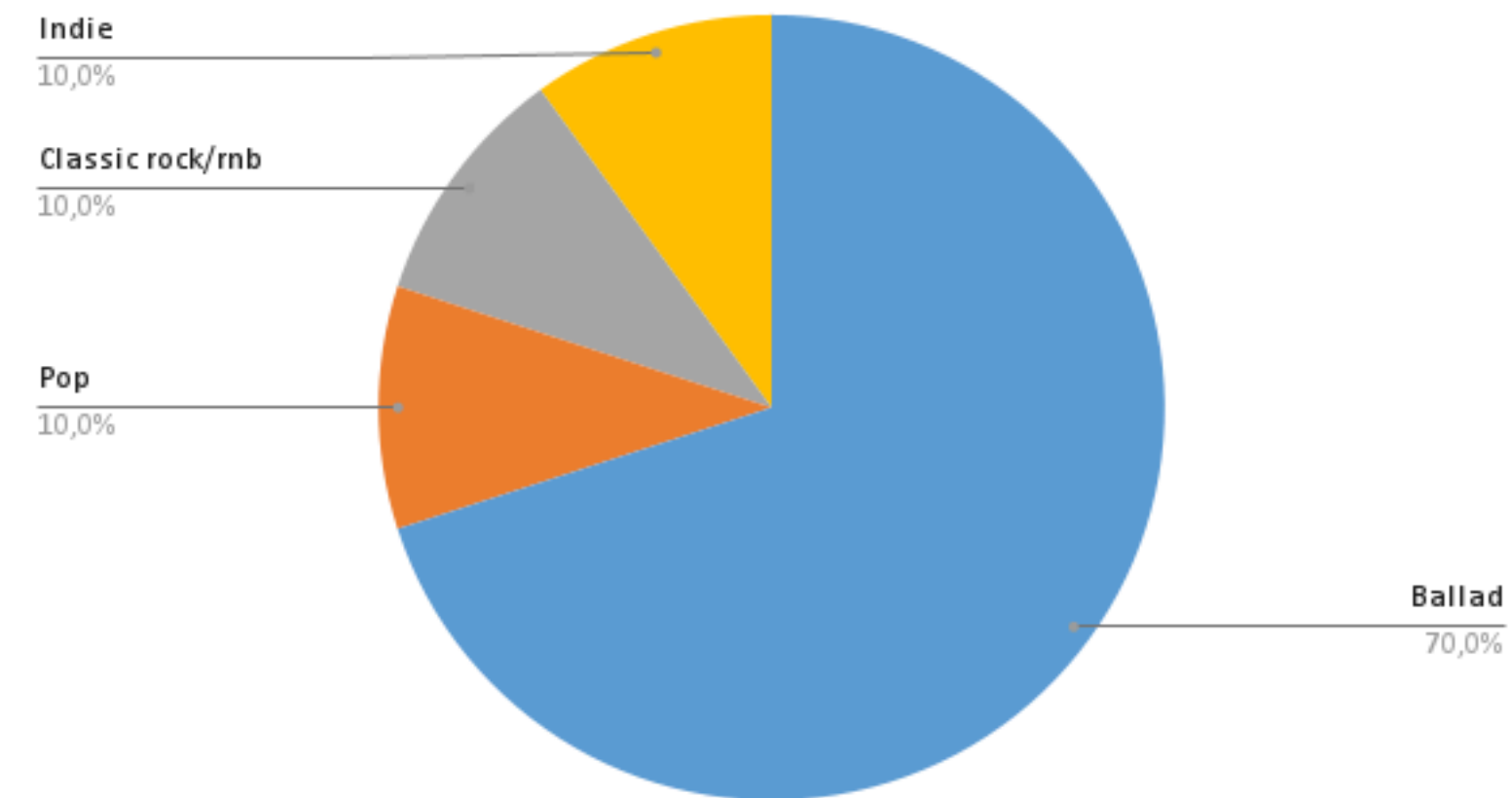
Jumlah 5. When do you listen to?

Day
10,0%

Night
90,0%

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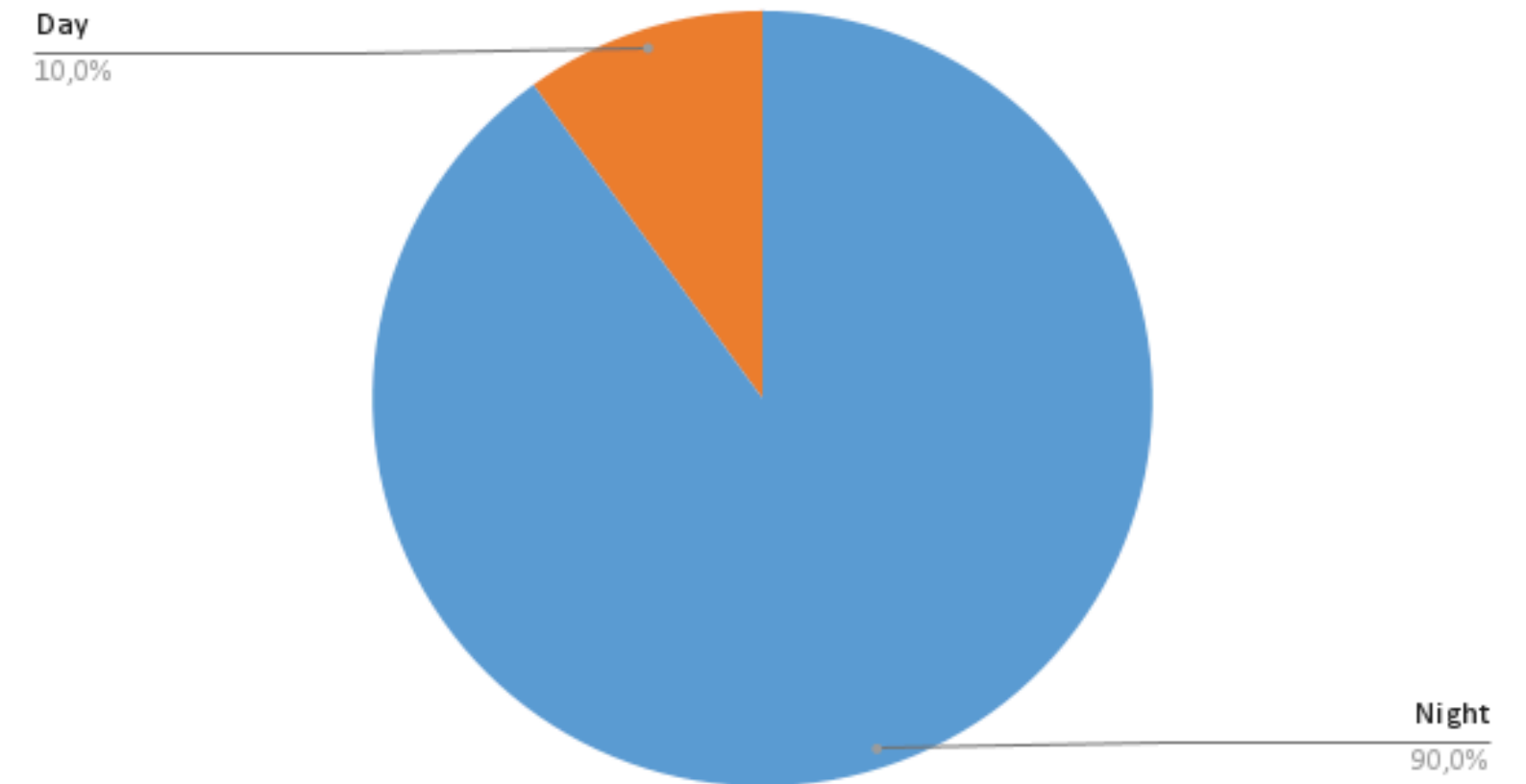
Jumlah 6.What genre do you listen to most?

Indie
10,0%

Classic rock/rnb
10,0%

Pop
10,0%

Ballad
70,0%

The dominant genres identified were Ballad and Pop. This directly corresponds with the genre classifications of the top artists found in the personal playlist data.

Reason for Listening

Respondents most commonly cited reasons such as: "Just like it," "To feel the emotion more," or "Out of boredom." This further emphasizes that engaging with sad music often facilitates the processing of emotions, rather than merely magnifying sadness.
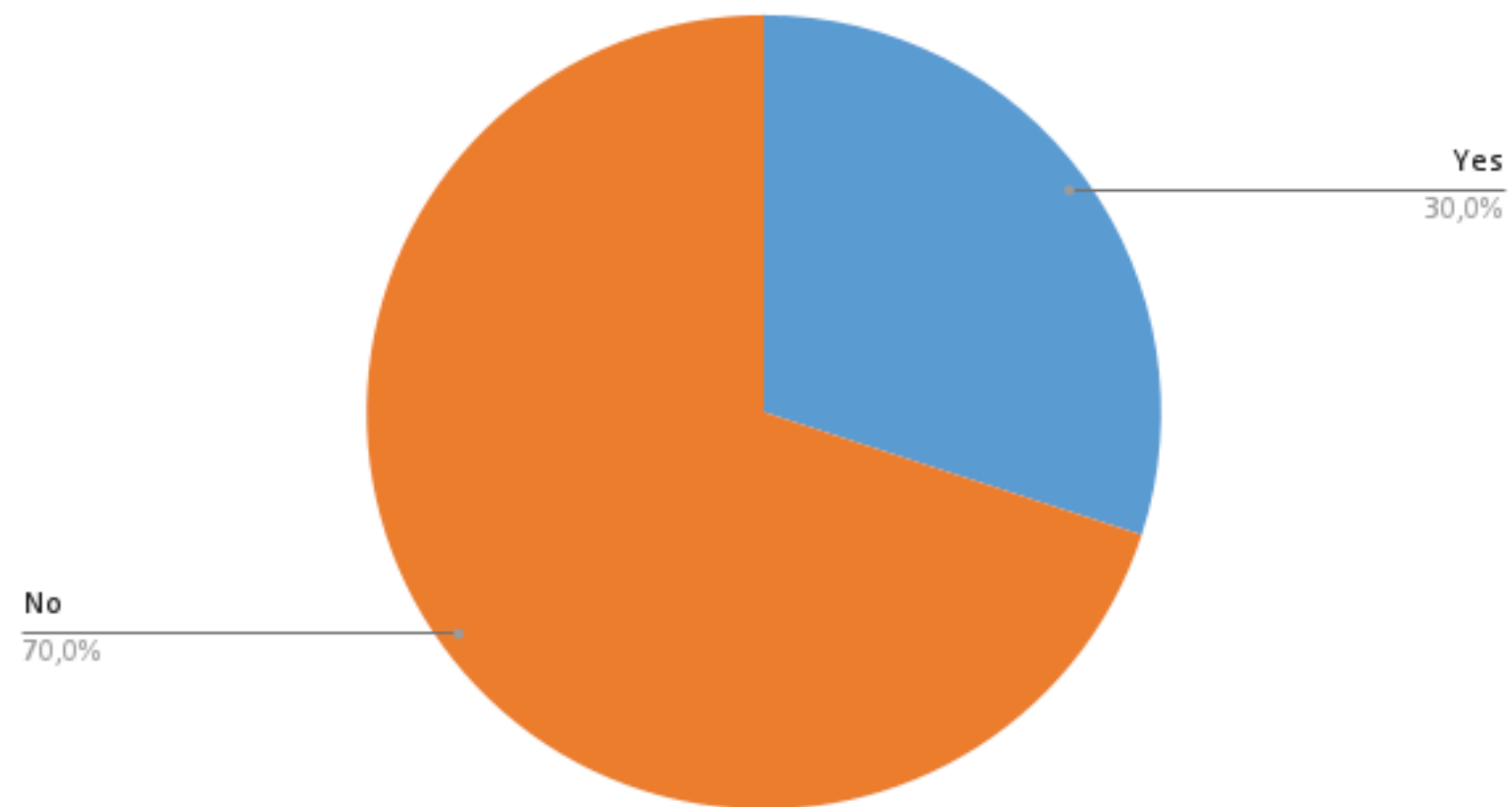
Jumlah 7. Why do you usually listen to sad songs?

To feel the emotion
20,0%

Out of boredom
30,0%

Just like it
50,0%

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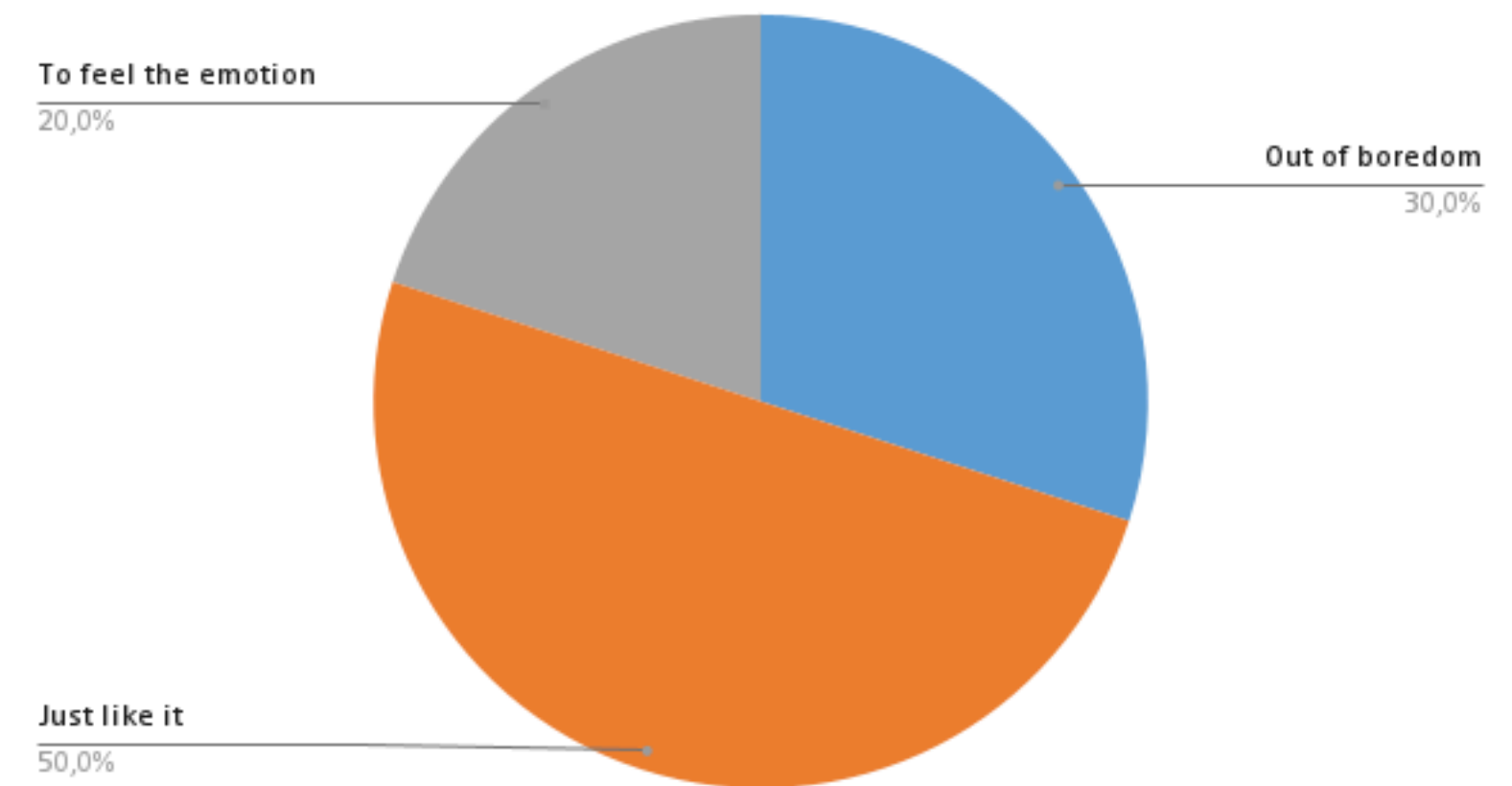
Survey Chart 6 **Calmness**
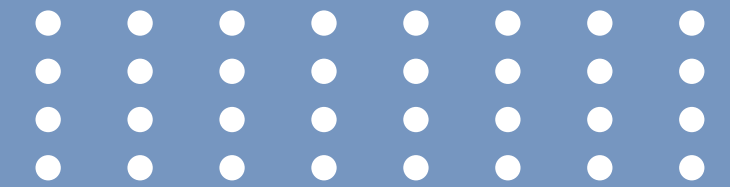
Jumlah 8.Do you feel calmer after listening to sad songs?
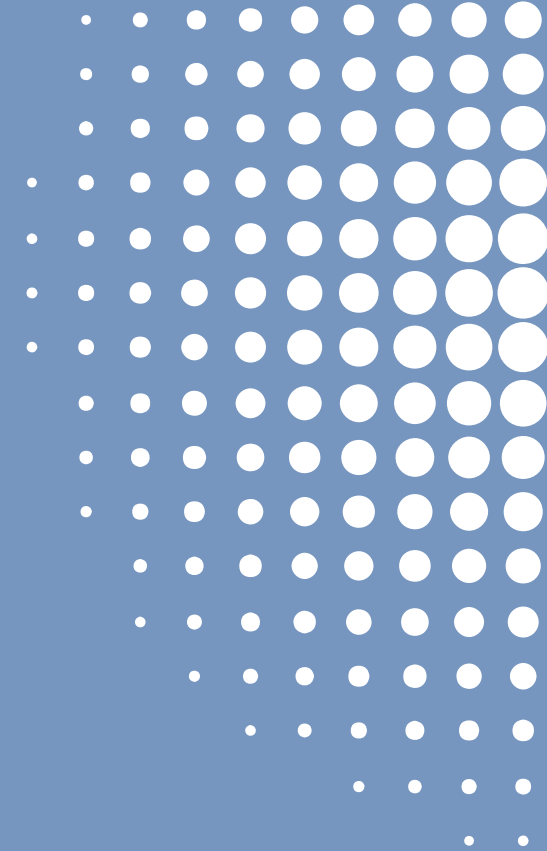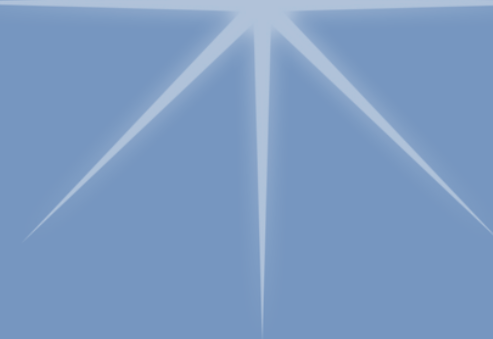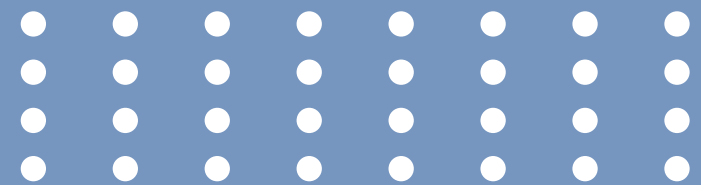

Yes
30,0%

No
70,0%

Sad songs don't always help people feel better. In fact, most would agree they're not really for calming down at all. Instead, it seems they're used more to match a current mood or simply to let emotions flow. It's less about finding a cure and more about just being present with what you're feeling.

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Conclusion

Based on my individual playlists, clearly leaned into sad songs, especially late at night and around month's end. This matched survey results, with most people listening then as emotions surface. Ballad and pop dominated, and artists like Lana Del Rey and Billie Eilish were top mentions.

The consistent reason for listening wasn't to feel worse, but to validate their own feelings or simply know they're not alone. Overall, the data resoundingly confirms sad music is a deliberate and emotionally important choice for Gen Z.

Thank You