

Connotative Meanings in Billboard's Top Songs (2008-2022)

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze and compare the connotative meanings of Billboard's Top Songs from 2008 to 2017, and 2018 to 2022 of the release date. The data includes a total of 100 songs which will be separated into 50 songs in two periods based on the top 10 and top 5 songs to compare and demonstrate how different the results are. The findings reveal that positive connotative meanings are found dominantly in the first period. Notably, in the second period, the findings stand out with positive connotations, while from 2019 to 2021, negative connotations dominate. The similarities of connotative meaning categories in both time periods include thematic references such as "Fight for Life", "Romantic Relationship", "Heartbreak", "Sexuality", "Money", and "Communication" in distinctive categories. The findings reveal that the study of the connotative meaning of the songs can relate to social issues and during tough socioeconomic times, songs are likely to contain more references to meaningful, comforting, and romantic themes.

Keywords: connotative meanings, song lyrics, thematic references

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Introduction

Music, as a powerful form of artistic expression, possesses the potential to evoke a wide range of emotions through lyrics. It often offers enjoyment, contexts for self-identity and ethical growth, a distraction from difficulties, effortless remedies for boredom or feelings of isolation, and a framework for building relationships. A key factor in the great importance of music is its ability to provide both entertainment and therapeutic benefits which serve as a source of enjoyment and a powerful healing tool for individuals seeking various purposes in treatment. Thus, the use of music as an organized assistance in the treatment of mental disorders such as anxiety, depression, and schizophrenia has shown to be advantageous in alleviating symptoms (Fancourt et al., 2016; McCaffrey et al., 2011; Mössler et al., 2011; Erkkilä et al., 2011 as cited in Rebecchini, 2021). Moreover, lyrics, a fundamental part of songs, perform a significant function by effectively conveying a purposeful message to listeners. The lyrical content of songs from distinctive genres can display either positive or negative sentiments relying upon the songwriter's viewpoints. For example, according to Kury et al. (2020), positive lyrics include esteem for oneself, self-determination, friendship, and love relationships. In contrast, negative lyrics include violent assault (physical assault, murder, or self-harm), non-violent assault (robbery, gambling, or destruction), and utilization of inappropriate language (swear words, racism, or sexual harassment). However, it was found that happy songs only increase positive effects despite not decreasing negative effects, while sad songs diminish both positive and negative effects (Cambell et al. 2021 as cited in Magraner et al., 2023).

Song lyrics may have an emotional impact on listeners (Brand et al., 2019; DeWall et al., 2011). According to Twenge et al. (2019), the percentage of emotional disorders, suicide attempts, and suicide death rates increased between 2008 and 2017. The increased rates of mental health illnesses might potentially have an influence on the content and themes of songs during a particular period. Looking at the top Billboard R&B/hip-hop songs from 1946 to 2010, it was found that songs tended to feature lyrics with less focus on leisure or enjoyment during difficult circumstances (Eastman & Pettijohn, 2019). According to Kresovich et al. (2021), the number of song references to depression and suicide increased significantly over time. Work, personal relationships, and environmental circumstances were among the stresses that appeared alongside references to mental health in rap lyrics. Moreover, Yeung (2023) stated the existence of COVID-19 had a particularly strong impact on behavior and emotions since many individuals

had never been forced to stay at home for an uncertain period of time. In 2020-2021, the COVID-19 pandemic affected the mental health of several impacted groups. Even though the COVID-19 public health emergency ended in 2023, it is well understood that the disease has created stress such as fearfulness and concern for themselves in impacted groups because of quarantine and adjustments in their way of life (Son et al., 2020). Widespread socioeconomic damage developed. Even in the beginning phases of the pandemic, it became obvious that music could play a role in how individuals coped with socioeconomic difficulties (Putter et al., 2021). A growing amount of popular music with mental health themes can result in increased mental health empathy and decreased mental health stigma (Gerbner, 1998). Thus, Cheong-Clinch (2019) explained that popular music artists may communicate unique messages that can help encourage behaviors and mindsets regarding mental health among listeners. Using music as a systematic and purposeful assistance can provide individuals with a safe and supportive environment to explore and process their emotions, thoughts, and experiences which ultimately promote self-awareness and personal growth. On the other hand, misuse of music has the potential to create a negative impact on the individual who listens to music. It is crucial to comprehend the appropriate use of music to avoid unfavorable outcomes that might be detrimental to individuals.

According to Manueke et. al. (2022) and Satriani (2022), studies in the field of connotative meanings in song lyrics provided valuable insights into the emotional impact of language in music within comprehensive concepts. While denotative meanings provide a literal narrative, it is often connotative meanings that provide a signified expression of a secondary meaning apart from the primary meaning, which offers a significant message to listeners associated with the feelings and emotions of a word (Rao, 2017). In pragmatic terms, it is the study of linguistic terms that focuses on how language contributes beyond literal meanings or is indirectly spoken. For example, the denotative meaning of the word "Blue" often refers to a color. Nevertheless, in the connotative context, the connotative meaning of the word "Blue" represents feelings associated with sadness and desperation. Connotative meaning includes positive, negative, and neutral connotative meanings (Alley, 2018 as cited in Satriani, 2022; Gaiman, 2020 as cited in Manueke et. al., 2022). According to Alley (2018 as cited in Satriani, 2022), positive connotative refers to a word with a smooth feel, making someone feel at ease or having a positive meaning. For example, the connotative meaning of the word "On top of the world" refers to joyful feelings as positive meaning. Besides, Alley (2018 as cited in Satriani, 2022) mentioned that a negative connotative is a word

that causes dread, sadness, disappointment, and other negative emotions, as well as negative feelings or feelings that have a bad meaning. For example, the connotative meaning of the word “Carrying the weight of the world” refers to being burdened with problems. A neutral connotative is when a word says what it means with a neutral point of view, and there is no attached positive or negative connotation (Gaiman, 2020 as cited in Manueke et al., 2022). For example, the connotative meaning of the word “Spending my dough” refers to money. However, there is a notable research gap in the specific exploration of connotative meanings, as the study primarily focuses on one artist (Gee et al., 2022; Harsetiani, 2022; Lestari & Nitisari, 2022; Manueke et al. 2022; Masriyah et al., 2019; Satriani, 2022) The aspect remains unexplored, and there is an opportunity to enhance the results through further analysis and in-depth discussion on this point.

With the focus on connotative meanings, the main aim of the research is to analyze and compare the connotative meanings of selected songs from two periods: 2008 to 2017 referred to as the first period, which shows an increasing rate of emotional disorders, suicide attempts, and death rates, and 2018 to 2022 referred to as the second period, during which the COVID-19 pandemic occurred. This study will cover 100 selected songs from Billboard's Year-End Charts Hot 100 songs. The first period will contain the top 5 songs in a total of 50 songs and the second period will contain the top 10 songs in a total of 50 songs. This study aims to contribute to the diverse relationship between linguistics, cultural differences, and music by providing an insightful and comprehensive analysis of how connotative meanings influence interpretation and connection with song lyrics.

Literature Review

1. Connotative Meanings

According to Manueke et al (2022), the definition of connotative meaning refers to the communicative significance of an expression that extends beyond its basic conceptual content. It goes beyond a literal reference to a word and alludes to its features and meaning in the real world. The connotative meaning refers to the associations connected to a specific word, or emotional implications associated with the term itself. There are three types of connotative meaning. According to Gaiman (2020 as cited in Manueke et al, 2022), positive connotative meaning refers to a word that creates a positive emotional response. For example, the word “go-getter” means someone ambitious or someone who is curious as “youthful.” Negative connotative

meaning refers to a word that portrays something in a negative way. For example, the word “go-getter” could be regarded as an overachiever while curious people may be described as “childish.” Neutral connotative meaning refers to a word with a neutral point of view. For example, the statement “he is ambitious” means a person strives for success, without regard to whether the goal is good or bad.

2. Connotative Meanings in Songs

The connotative meanings can be found in literary works including songs which are used to convey implied meanings through song lyrics to listeners (Satriani, 2022). The majority of songs written in English have ambiguous lyrics which make it difficult for listeners to understand the author's point of view in context. Furthermore, according to Manueke et al. (2022), the study focused on the connotative meanings found in the lyrics of the songs which provide insights into the emotional suggestions and associations connected to the words used by Taylor Swift. The research analyzed 14 songs by Taylor Swift to identify and classify connotative meanings in the lyrics. The findings revealed that out of the 14 songs, there were 8 positive connotations, 45 negative connotations, and 8 neutral connotations. The dominant connotative meaning in Taylor Swift's selected songs was negative. However, the researcher didn't discuss further what could be the interpretation of the findings. Next, according to Satriani (2022), the research aims to identify the types of connotative meaning in Adele's song lyrics and the messages contained within them. The research findings reveal three types of connotative meaning: positive connotation, neutral connotation, and negative connotation. The most common type of connotative meaning found in Adele's song lyrics is negative connotation reflecting Adele's life experiences filled with misery. In addition, thematic references related to song lyrics can be inspired by the author's experience to convey points of view to listeners through songs whether they are happy or sad (Satriani, 2022). Furthermore, Kresovich et al. (2021) investigated the prevalence and nature of mental health themes in popular rap music. They found that the most common stresses referenced in rap songs about mental health are love, environmental conditions, and social conflict.

3. Songs Reflect Social Issues

Songs are a source of cultural understanding that reflects society's need to convey significant social meaning through song lyrics (Lonsdale, 2020). According to Pettijohn and Sacco (2009), the songs received higher ratings for having more significant content when they discussed

crucial issues. However, references to depression and suicide have increased significantly in recent years. It has been discovered that this trend corresponds with rising rates of anxiety, depression, and suicidal thoughts in the United States throughout this time period (Kresovich et al., 2021). Besides, songs can reflect the social and economic issues at that time. Park et al. (2024) studied how rap music can serve as a societal indicator. The findings showed that by analyzing the lyrics of 27,445 underground and mainstream rap singles from 1971 to 2016, themes in lyrics show a strong correlation with relevant social indicators such as crime rates, sexual assault, poverty, and DEA arrests. Furthermore, Pettijohn and Sacco (2009) mentioned that popular songs during difficult socioeconomic periods tend to focus on meaningful, comforting, and romantic themes that emphasize relationships, stability, and safety needs during difficulties. However, lyrics referencing enjoyment and relaxation are more often found in songs popular during positive socioeconomic periods.

Methodology

1. Data Collection

The initial stage of methodology comprises the careful selection of songs based on the popularity of music each year. It would be highly advantageous and effective in terms of both efficiency and academic depth to make the wise decision of referring to a reliable and trustworthy reference. This particular study refers to Billboard's chart as a result of its capacity to provide precise accurate and detailed information regarding the ranking of songs. The Billboard chart, with its precise ranking system, allows it to be utilized in this study to select songs that have been played by the majority of individuals according to statistics from each year. This includes a total of 100 songs which will be separated into 50 songs in two periods based on the top 10 and top 5 songs to compare and demonstrate how different the results are. Next, after selecting a total of 100 songs from 2008-2017 (the First Period) and 2018-2022 (the Second Period), selected songs will be listened to consider finding connotative meanings within song lyrics. This step in the research process might be slightly hard due to the chance that some selected songs may not possess any connotative meanings. Therefore, the task requires a comprehensive understanding of the cultural background and thematic contents of the songs chosen to get an insight into the understanding of this matter. Collected connotative meanings from song lyrics will be placed on the table. This table includes 2008-2017 (First Period) and 2018-2022 (Second Period) and the

meanings of each word or phrase. For example, the phrase “spending my dough” means “spending money” and has a neutral connotative meaning, the phrase “You so 2000 and late” means “being outdated and foolish” and has a negative connotative meaning, and the phrase “So let's set the world on fire means “being very successful and attracting attention” and has a positive connotative meaning. The purpose of this process is to ensure that several meanings associated with words and phrases will be readily accessible and understandable to avoid any confusion regarding the data for analysis in the next step.

2. Data Analysis

The connotative meanings are analyzed using a qualitative method. The data were collected from specific words and phrases in the song's lyrics that have connotative meanings. The researcher gathered the data by reading the lyrics to find relevant words and phrases and listing those that contain connotative meanings for each track. Then connotative meanings will be classified into 3 categories which contain positive, negative, and neutral connotations based on Leech (1974 as cited in Manueke et al. 2022). Moreover, linguistic analysis involves this process with a detailed reading of every sequence of lyrics to identify the meanings of words and phrases. Cultural variations among song lyrics can be thoroughly explored and analyzed in conjunction with the field of linguistics due to the extensive variety of vocabulary. The analysis of the diversity of meanings in words and phrases will be examined from the perspective of cultural and linguistic contexts to comprehend the specific meanings conveyed in song lyrics to be properly and critically examined without any ambiguity. After the completion of the classification of connotative meanings, data analysis in exploring thematic differences in songs is required to identify reoccurring themes and variations as adapted from the studies by Kresovich et al. (2021) and Kury et al. (2020) and then to determine the most used themes within selected songs. Despite the possibility for variation and diversity amongst the several themes, the dynamic exploration of relationships and the principles of the way of living life remains a constant influence throughout the analysis. With a finished table of data, this can be conveyed through charts and a table of numbers for further analysis. For example, pie and column charts are utilized in this study to see how diverse the numbers and percentages are. Thus, the results will be considered for interpretation in the context of the linguistic field, the emotional connections, and cultural differences which contribute to a comprehensive understanding of how connotative meanings are used within the lyrics in music across distinct time periods.

Results

After collecting and analyzing the data from 100 songs, it was found that in the first period (2008-2017) there were 99 expressions containing connotative meanings and in the second period (2018-2022) there were 69 expressions containing connotative meanings (See Appendix). Results are divided into two parts. The first part involves a number of connotative meanings used in selected songs compared between two time periods. The second part involves a number of thematic references in selected songs compared between two periods.

1. Connotative Meanings

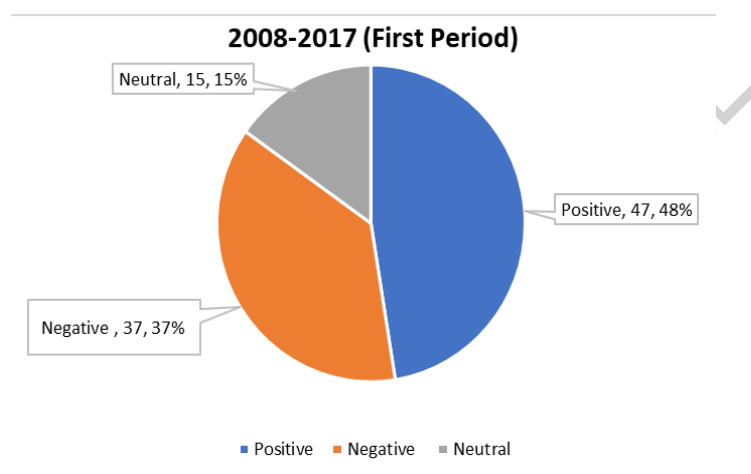


Figure 1 The Connotative Meanings between 2008 and 2017

A total of 100 selected songs from Billboard's chart in the first period (2008-2017) show the number and percentage of connotative meanings used in songs. Results are presented in Figure 1. Positive connotative meanings are found 47 times or 48 percent. Negative connotative meanings are found 37 times or 37 percent. Lastly, Neutral connotative meanings are found 15 times or 15 percent. The dominant type in the first period is positive.

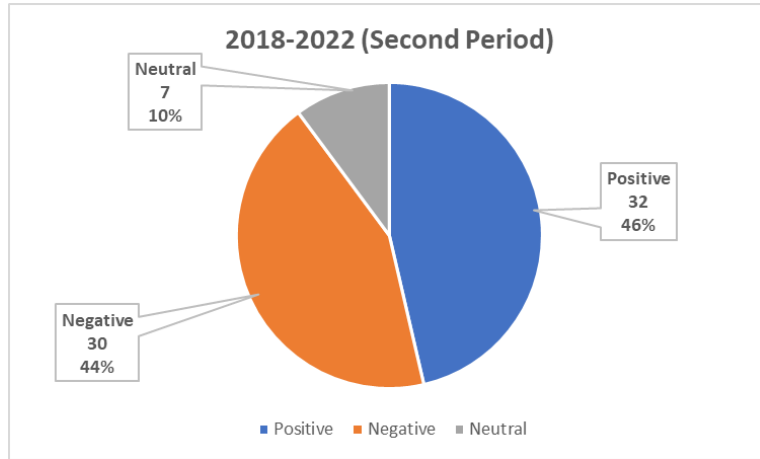


Figure 2 The Connotative Meanings between 2018 and 2022

A total of 100 selected songs from Billboard’s chart in the second period (2018-2022) show the number and percentage of connotative meanings used in songs. Results are presented in Figure 2. Positive connotative meanings are found 32 times or 46 percent. Negative connotative meanings are found 30 times or 44 percent. Lastly, neutral connotative meanings are found 7 times or 10 percent. The dominant type in the second period is positive but only two percent more than the negative type.

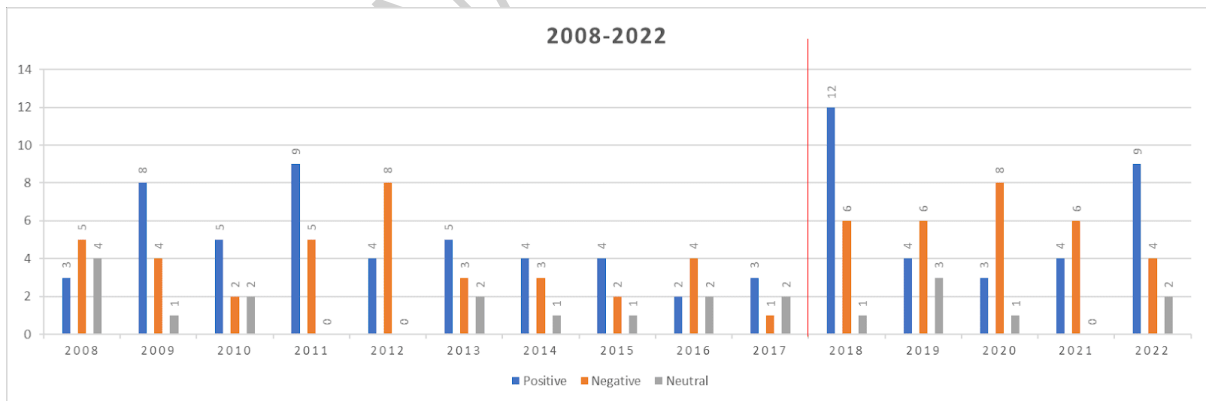


Figure 3 The Connotative Meanings between 2008 and 2022

Figure 3 comparatively shows that in the first period, from 2008 to 2017, positive connotations are mostly dominant. However, during the second period, the years 2018 and 2022 particularly stand out with positive connotations as the prevailing type. However, from 2019 to 2021, negative connotations take precedence.

2. Thematic References

Tables of thematic references are divided into 3 types: positive, negative, and neutral connotative meanings in 2 periods.

Table 1 Positive References in 2008-2017 (First Period)

Categories of Positive	Words/Phrases	Meaning
Coming of Age	roses have thorns	Nothing is perfect and a person will have flaws as they grow up.
Fight for Life	Like the ceiling can't hold us	Rising against the challenges and breaking free from the limits
Romantic Relationships	My heart melts into the ground, Found something true	Beginning to feel a very strong, deep love
Compliment	That shirt's hella dope	Extremely awesome
Happiness	At least you'll fall on top of the world	The state of being happy or delighted
Self-worth	Baby, you're a firework	Extremely special in one's own way

Thematic references which are positive in the first period are presented in Table 1. This table comprises six themes in the selected songs. The first theme is **Coming of Age** (e.g., the phrase “roses have thorns” means nothing is perfect and a person will have flaws as they grow). The second is **Fight for Life** (e.g., the phrase “Like the ceiling can't hold us” means rising against the challenges and breaking free from the limits). The third is **Romantic Relationships** (e.g., the phrase “My heart melted to the ground” means beginning to feel a strong love for someone). The fourth is **Compliment** (e.g., the phrase “That shirt's hella dope” means extremely awesome). The fifth is **Happiness** (e.g., the phrase “At least you'll fall on top of the world” means the state of being happy). The last is **Self-worth** (e.g., the word “Baby, you're a firework” means extremely special in one's own way).

Table 2 Negative References in 2008-2017 (First Period)

Categories of Negative	Words/Phrases	Meaning
Heartbreak	But you didn't have to cut me off	Breaking up in a relationship
Sexist	no homo	Extremely offensive, anti-gay expression
Sexuality	'Cause I'm bluffin' with my muffin	Using the possibility of sex to seduce a guy
Drunk	but I can't see straight anymore	Unclear vision due to drunkenness
Sadness	and that feels so rough	The state of feeling bad
Life struggle	Made it from the bottom	Growing up through life without anything but in fact succeeded
Insult	He's too square for you	Being too conventional or conservative
Insanity	You're crazy and I'm out of my mind	The state of being insane or behaving crazy

Thematic references of the negative type in the first period are presented in Table 2. This table is comprised of eight themes. The first theme is **Heartbreak** (e.g., the phrase “But you didn't have to cut me off” means breaking up in a relationship). The second is **Sexist** (e.g., the phrase “no homo” is an anti-gay expression). The third is **Sexuality** (e.g., Man: “Are you going to put out tonight?” Women: “Nope, 'Cause I'm bluffin' with my muffin”). This means the woman is conning a guy with the possibility of sex. The fourth is **Drunk** (e.g., the phrase “but I can't see straight anymore” means unclear vision due to drunkenness). The fifth is **Sadness** (e.g., the phrase “Made it from the bottom” means growing up through life without anything but in fact succeeded). The sixth is **Life struggle** (e.g., the phrase “Made it from the bottom” means growing up through life without anything but in fact succeeded). The seventh is **Insult** (e.g., the phrase “he's too square

for you” means being too conventional or conservative). The last is **Insanity** (e.g., the phrase “You're crazy and I'm out of my mind” means the state of being insane or acting crazy).

Table 3 Neutral References in 2008-2017 (First Period)

Categories of Neutral	Words/Phrases	Meaning
Money	spending my dough	Money
Thoughts	And I wonder if I ever cross your mind	Coming into someone's mind
Shopping	I'm gonna pop some tags	Shopping for clothes or accessories
Communication	Hit me up	Asking for a date
Adventure	I know we loved to hit the road and laugh	Departing on a journey
Second Chance	'Cause I just need one more shot at forgiveness	A second chance for her forgiveness
Longevity	Baby, take it slow so we can last long	Don't hurry because we want an enduring relationship

Thematic references of the neutral type in the first period are presented in Table 3. This table is comprised of seven themes. The first theme is **Money** (e.g., the word “spending my dough” means money). The second is **Thoughts** (e.g., the phrase “And I wonder if I ever cross your mind” means coming into someone's mind). The third is **Shopping** (e.g., the phrase “I'm gonna pop some tags” means shopping for clothes or accessories). The fourth is **Communication** (e.g., the phrase “Hit me up” means getting in touch with me or asking me for money). The fifth is **Adventure** (e.g., the phrase “I know we loved to hit the road and laugh” means departing on a journey). The sixth is a **Second Chance** (e.g., the phrase “Cause I just need one more shot at forgiveness” means a second chance for her forgiveness). The last is **Longevity** (e.g., the phrase “Baby, take it slow so we can last long” means continuing for a long time or endurance).

Table 4 Positive References in 2018-2022 (Second Period)

Categories of Positive	Words/Phrases	Meaning
Friendship	'Magine if I never met the broskis	Brother or dude being there for me
Romantic Relationship	My sugarboo	Lover or boy/girlfriend
Happiness	You're the sunflower	You are my happiness
Support	And I'm down for you always	Supporting or helping you out
Fight for Life	'Til sundown when I come through	Surviving a dangerous or difficult situation

Thematic references of the positive type in the second time period are presented in Table 4. This table comprises five themes. The first theme is **Friendship** (e.g., the word “'Magine if I never met the broskis” means brother or dude being there for me). The second is **Romantic Relationships** (e.g., the phrase “My sugarboo” means lover or boy/girlfriend). The third is **Happiness** (e.g., the phrase “You're the sunflower” means you are my happiness). The fourth is **Support** (e.g., the phrase “And I'm down for you always” means supporting or helping you out). The last is **Fight for Life** (e.g., the phrase “'Til sundown when I come through” means surviving a dangerous or difficult situation).

Table 5 Negative References in 2018-2022 (Second Period)

Categories of Negative	Words/Phrases	Meaning
Sexuality	Why is the best fruit always forbidden?	Desiring sexuality that is not within moral or a feasible reach
Insults	fugazi	Fake
Annoyance	I know it pisses you off	Annoys you
Heartbreak	our love went cold	Feelings have changed toward one another
Life struggle	Baby, I know any storm we're facing	Facing problems
Lack of support	And then you pulled the rug from under someone	Suddenly removing important support from someone
Fear	give me the shivers	Making me feel very afraid

Thematic references of the negative type in the second period are presented in Table 5. This table comprises seven themes. The first theme is **Sexuality** (e.g., the phrase “Why is the best fruit always forbidden?” means desiring sexuality that is not within moral or feasible reach). The second is **Insults** (e.g., the word “fugazi” means fake “*Everybody fugazi, I'm just changing the channel*”). The third is **Annoyance** (e.g., the phrase “I know it pisses you off” means annoying you). The fourth is **Heartbreak** (e.g., the phrase “our love went cold” means feelings have changed toward one another). The fifth is **Life struggle** (e.g., the phrase “Baby, I know any storm we're facing” means facing problems). The sixth is **Lack of support** (e.g., the phrase “And then you pulled the rug out” means suddenly removing important support from someone). The last is **Fear** (e.g., the phrase “give me the shivers” means making me feel very afraid).

Table 6 Neutral References 2018-2022 (Second Period)

Categories of Neutral	Words/Phrases	Meaning
Communication	Just pourin' out admission	Telling all problems or feelings/ admitting fault to get back together
Alcohol	Yeah, breakfast at Tiffany's and bottles of bubbles	Referring to Champagne
Extravagance	My wrist, stop watchin', my neck is flossy	Showing off expensive items
Money	I just hit a lick with the box	Acquiring a large of money in a short amount of time

Thematic references of the neutral type in the second period are presented in Table 6. This table comprises 4 themes. The first theme is **Communication** (e.g., the phrase “Just pourin' out admission” means telling all problems or feelings and admitting fault). The second is **Alcohol** (e.g., the phrase “Yeah, breakfast at Tiffany's and bottles of bubbles” is referencing champagne). The third is **Extravagance** (e.g., the word “My wrist, stop watchin', my neck is flossy” means showing off expensive items). The last is **Money** (e.g., the phrase “I just hit a lick with the box” means acquiring a large amount of money in a short amount of time).

Conclusion and Discussion

This study first provides an insightful exploration into the connotative meanings within the lyrics of selected songs through systematic methodology including linguistic analysis, cultural differences, and emotional context between 2008 and 2017 (first period) and 2018 and 2022 (second period). Results of both periods found that the dominant type is positive. However, in the second period, negative connotative meanings are found more frequently from 2019 to 2021 although the dominant type is still positive. The findings then reveal that the study of the connotative meaning of the songs can relate to social issues and during tough socioeconomic times, songs are likely to contain more positive connotative meanings. According to Eastman and Pettijohn (2019), during challenging social and economic times, people find their way to seek out songs with lyrics referencing interpersonal connections and support from others against difficult social conditions. Next, the comparison and differences among thematic references can be utilized in the discussion for further analysis.

Findings 1 & 2 and the similarity of thematic references are analyzed regarding the situation at the time to see how the thematic references are influenced.

1. Finding 1: Dominant Type with Positive Meanings (First Period)

Finding 1 of the study shows the remarkable paradox identified by the results of connotative meanings in selected songs. Positive connotative meanings are found as the dominant type despite having increased rates of emotional disorders, suicide attempts, and deaths in the 2008 to 2017 period (Twenge et al., 2019). According to Pettijohn and Sacco (2009), during times of economic difficulty, lyrics displayed a greater frequency of personal pronouns and references to social development such as friendship and conversation which suggest an intensified desire for relationships during unpleasant situations. In difficult conditions, people tend to listen to music with lyrics involving interpersonal interactions and receiving support from others in tough social and economic conditions (Eastman & Pettijohn, 2019).

2. Finding 2: Dominant Type with Positive Meanings (Second Period)

Finding 2 of the study also confirms the expectation of positive connotative meanings as the dominant type. As unfavorable situations happened during the COVID-19 period, this might have influenced individuals to use music as a supportive tool to cope with emotional breakdowns. The COVID-19 pandemic was a time of physical and psychological strain, uncertainty, concern, and social isolation. It affected popular music's lyrical content as well as the intensity of people's

emotions and the overwhelming majority of interpersonal interactions (Blanco et al., 2020). However, according to Yeung (2023), everyone has an individual viewpoint on the pandemic or lockdown. While some felt sad or nervous, others may have simply been bored. People may have chosen to listen to positive or negative songs based on their mood or usual preferences.

Table 7 The Similarity of Thematic References in the Two Periods

Similarity of Categories		
Positive	Negative	Neutral
Fight for Life	Heartbreak	Money
Romantic Relationships	Sexuality	Communication
Happiness	Life struggles	
	Insults	

Thematic references are presented in Table 7. It can be noticed that thematic references possess similar connections to the themes which are found in the three categories from the two periods. This table comprises the similarity of thematic references in connotative meanings from 2008 to 2017 (First Period) and 2018 to 2022 (Second Period). There are three similar positive thematic references which are "Fight for Life", "Romantic Relationships", and "Happiness". There are four similar "Romantic Relationships", and "Happiness". There are four similar negative connotative meanings which are "Heartbreak", "Sexuality", "Life struggle", and "Insult". There are two similar neutral thematic references which are "Money" and "Communication". Some thematic references are related to other studies such as Romantic Relationships and Sexuality. For example, according to Putter et al. (2021), it is stated that various content analyses of popular music lyrics have investigated temporal variations in very particular topics including love (Romantic Relationships). In addition, Christenson et al., (2018) & Dukes et al. (2003) indicate an increase in the number of lyrics that are sexually explicit (Sexuality) over time. According to Eastman and Pettijohn (2019), they analyzed top Billboard R&B/hip-hop songs from 1946 to 2010. Their findings revealed that during tough socioeconomic times, songs are likely to contain more references to meaningful, comforting, and romantic themes.

Table 8 The Thematic References in the Two Periods

2008-2017 (First Period)		
Positive	Negative	Neutral
Coming of Age	Heartbreak	Money
Fight for Life	Sexist	Thoughts
Romantic Relationships	Sexuality	Shopping
Compliment	Drunkenness	Communication
Happiness	Sadness	Adventure
Self-worth	Life struggle	Second Chance
	Insults	Longevity
	Insanity	
2018-2022 (Second Period)		
Positive	Negative	Neutral
Friendship	Heartbreak	Money
Fight for Life	Life struggle	Communication
Romantic Relationships	Sexuality	Extravagance
Happiness	Annoyance	Alcohol
Support	Lack of support	
	Fear	
	Insult	

Thematic references are presented in Tables 7 & 8. From 2008 to 2017 (First Period), the positive thematic references of connotative meaning contain the Coming of Age, Compliments, and Self-worth categories. The negative thematic references include the categories Sexism, Drunkenness, Sadness, and Insanity. The neutral thematic references include Thoughts, Shopping, Adventure, Second Chance, and Longevity. From 2018 to 2022 (Second Period), the positive thematic references of connotative meaning contain Friendship and Support categories. The negative thematic references include Annoyance, Lack of Support, and Fear. The neutral thematic references are Extravagance and Alcohol.

Negative thematic references are found mostly in selected songs from the two periods. Despite the dominance of positive connotative meanings, a significant number of songs from both

periods prominently feature negative themes such as Heartbreak, Life Struggle, and Sadness. It can be noticed that music artists may write songs to convey and express how they feel. According to Napier and Shamir (2018), there was an important change toward a more negative tone in the lyrics of popular songs on the Billboard Hot 100 from 1951 to 2016, with a greater focus on emotions of anger, fear, and desperation in that time period. Negative results can come from negative references to mental health issues, such as imitation behavior in which listeners imitate dangerous actions such as suicide attempts (Phillips, 1974). However, according to Hoffner and Cohen (2017), positive references towards mental health awareness, treatment, or support could decrease stigma and improve motivation to seek treatment.

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Appendix

Year	Song Title	Artist	Word/Phrase	Connotative Meaning	Type of Connotative
2008	Low	Flo Rida	spending my dough	Money	Neutral
		Featuring T-Pain	Make it rain	Throwing out lots of cash to dancers	Neutral
			I'm makin' it snow	Throwing out diamonds instead of money	Neutral
	Bleeding Love	Leona Lewis	My heart melted to the ground	Extremely loving or beginning to feel love	Positive
			You cut me open	Hurting me badly	Negative
			Yet I know that their goal is to keep me from falling	Falling in love	Positive
Lollipop	Lil Wayne	no homo	Extremely offensive, anti-gay expression	Negative	
		Featuring Static Major	Shawty wanna hump	Engaging in sexual intercourse	Neutral
			ain't sh*t	Nothing special in you	Negative
Apologize	Timberland	I loved you with a fire	Intensively emotional love	Positive	
		Featuring OneRepublic	it's turning blue	Emotions like sadness and serenity	Negative
			I'm holding on your rope	Still in the relationship despite having disagreements	Negative
	2009	Boom	The Black	You so 2000 and late	Being outdated and foolish
Boom Pow		Eyed Peas	I'm on that next shit now	Being on the 'next level' compared to others	Positive

			Them girls go apesh*t	Becoming wildly excited or enthusiastic	Positive
Poker Face	Lady Gaga		No, he can't read my poker face	Being master at hiding true feelings	Positive
			Just like a chick in the casino	an attractive young woman	Positive
			'Cause I'm bluffin' with my muffin	Thinking about a woman despite having sexual intercourse with a man	Negative
Just Dance	Lady Gaga		but I can't see straight anymore	Unclear vision due to drunkenness	Negative
		Featuring Colby O'Donis	roses have thorns	Nothing is perfect and a person can have flaws to grow	Positive
			And we're all gettin' hosed tonight	Being screwed and out of luck	Negative
			Spend the last dough	Spending the last money	Neutral
I Gotta Feeling	The Black Eyed Peas		let's live it up	Having an exciting and enjoyable time at the party	Positive
			I know that we'll have a ball	Having fun	Positive
			we gotta rock	Describing someone awesome	Positive
2010	TikTok	Ke\$ha	I'm talkin' 'bout everybody gettin' crunk, crunk	The state of having a good time	Positive
			Boys try to touch my junk, junk	Touching a man's genitals	Negative
Need You Now	Lady Antebellum		And I wonder if I ever cross your mind	Coming into someone's mind	Neutral

Hey, Soul Sister	Train	And I'm always gonna	finding something very	Positive
		wanna blow your mind	exciting	
		I'm so glad you have a one-track mind like me	Thinking about a particular thing	Neutral
		like a virgin, you're Madonna	Very beautiful woman	Positive
California gurls	Katy Perry Featuring Snoop Dogg	The girl's a freak	Someone is strange or unusual and not like others	Negative
		We'll melt your popsicle	The flirty way to express admiration	Positive
OMG	Usher Featuring will.i.am	this was just like dynamite	The state of being excited	Positive
2011 Rolling In The Deep	Adele	There's a fire starting in my heart	The state of being angry towards someone	Negative
		Reaching a fever pitch	The state of being excited and agitation	Positive
		I'll lay your ship bare	Taking all valuable things away and destroying you	Negative
		reap just what you sow	Experiencing the result that you did in the past	Negative
Party Rock Anthem	LMFAO Featuring Lauren Bennett & GoonRock	She on my jock	Pursuing me aggressively and sexually	Negative
Firework	Katy Perry	Do you ever feel like a plastic bag	The state of being out of control or worthless	Negative

			You just gotta ignite the light	Inspiring couraging feelings	Positive
			Baby, you're a firework	Extremely special in one's own way	Positive
			After a hurricane comes a rainbow	Something good awaits after facing problems	Positive
E.T.	Katy Perry Featuring Kanye West		Lead me into the light	Bringing me hope and peace	Positive
			Your kiss is cosmic	Pleasurable and ecstasy kiss	Positive
			Boy, you're my lucky star	You bring good fortune and luck	Positive
Give Me Everything	Pitbull Featuring Ne-Yo, Afrojack & Nayer		At least you'll fall on top of the world	The state of being happy or delighted	Positive
			Put it on my life	Being absolutely sure of something	Positive
2012	Somebody That I Used To Know	Gotye Featuring Kimbra	But you didn't have to cut me off	Breaking up in the relationship	Negative
			Now and then I think of all the times you screwed me over	Doing something that has made my life very difficult	Negative
			and that feels so rough	The state of feeling bad	Negative
			No, you didn't have to stoop so low	An action considered below one's standards or dignity	Negative
Call Me Maybe	Carly Rae Jepsen		I threw a wish in the well	Any wishes would be granted	Positive
We Are Young	fun. Featuring		So let's set the world on fire	Being very successful and attracting attention	Positive

	Janelle Monae	We can burn brighter than the sun	Happiness found in even the smallest things	Positive	
		So let's raise a cup	Having so much fun together drinking	Positive	
Payphone	Maroon 5 Featuring Wiz Khalifa	All of our bridges burned down	Cutting ties with people	Negative	
		But even the sun sets in paradise	The most beautiful, perfect things must come to an end eventually	Negative	
		All those fairy tales are full of shit	Talking nonsense or rubbish	Negative	
		Made it from the bottom	Growing up through life without anything	Negative	
2013	Thrift Shop	Macklemore & Ryan Lewis Featuring Wanz	I'm gonna pop some tags	Shopping clothes or accessories	Neutral
			Nah, I'm just pumped	The state of feeling excited	Positive
			That shirt's hella dope	Extremely awesome	Positive
Blurred Lines	Robin Thicke Featuring T.I. + Pharrell	Hit me up	Getting in touch with me	Neutral	
		he too square for you	Being too conventional or conservative	Negative	
		Must wanna get nasty	Getting unpleasant or offensive	Negative	
Radioactive	Imagine Dragons	I'm waking up to ash and dust	The state of feeling of disappointment and disillusion	Negative	
		We're painted red to fit right in	Going out and enjoying yourself	Positive	
Can't Hold Us	Macklemore & Ryan	I shed my skin and put my bones	Putting a lot of effort into this	Positive	

		Lewis Featuring Ray Dalton	Like the ceiling can't hold us	Rising up against the challenges and breaking free from the limits	Positive
2014	Happy	Pharrell Williams	Clap along if you feel like a room without a roof	No limitation to live in life	Positive
	Dark Horse	Katy Perry Featuring Juicy J	Mark my words 'Cause I'm coming at you like a dark horse	Telling that something will happen in the future Little known contender that makes an unexpectedly good showing	Neutral Positive
			I'm sprung	Completely taken over by romantic interest	Positive
	All Of Me	John Legend	My head's under water	The state of being overwhelmed by a situation	Negative
			You're crazy and I'm out of my mind	The state of being insane or behaving crazy	Negative
	Fancy	Iggy Azalea Featuring Charli XCX	First things first, I'm the realest	Extremely authentic or exceptional	Positive
	Counting Stars	OneRepublic	Hope is our four-letter word	Being extremely rude and offensive	Negative
2015	Uptown Funk!	Mark Ronson Featuring Bruno Mars	I'm too hot (Hot damn)	Too pretty	Positive
	Thinking Out Loud	Ed Sheeran	it's evergreen	Remaining fresh	Positive

	See You Again	Wiz Khalifa Featuring Charlie Puth	I know we loved to hit the road and laugh But something told me that it wouldn't last Everything I went through	Departing on a journey Failing or being unsuccessful Experiencing a difficult or unpleasant situation	Neutral Negative Negative
	Trap Queen	Fetty Wap	Married to the money	Marrying to rich people	Positive
	Sugar	Maroon 5	Your sugar, yes, please	Your love	Positive
2016	Love Yourself	Justin Bieber	For all the times that you rained on my parade	Ruining my fun	Negative
	Sorry	Justin Bieber	I hope I don't run out of time 'Cause I just need one more shot at forgiveness Yeah, I know that I let you down	Getting enough time to finish something Second chance for her forgiveness Disappointing you	Neutral Neutral Negative
	One Dance	Drake Featuring WizKid & Kyla	Higher powers taking a hold on me Cause if you're down	Alcohol taking control of me Agreeing with me	Negative Positive
	Work	Rihanna Featuring Drake	You took my heart on my sleeve for decoration	Taking for granted the love you are giving	Positive
	Stressed Out	twenty one pilots	My name's Blurryface and I care what you think	Personifying insecurities, dark thoughts, and depression	Negative

2017	Shape Of You	Ed Sheeran	We push and pull like a magnet do	The forces of attraction between you and me	Positive
	Despacito	Luis Fonsi & Daddy Yankee	My sunrise on the darkest day	Given you hope at your lowest point	Positive
		Featuring Justin Bieber	You fit me tailor-made	Perfectly suitable	Positive
	That's What I Like	Bruno Mars	Baby, take it slow so we can last long	Continuing for a long time	Neutral
		Kendrick Lamar	Sex by the fire at night	Uncontrollable power of sexual desire	Neutral
2018	Humble.	Kendrick Lamar	Piss out your per diem, you just gotta hate 'em, funk	Making fun of or laughing at	Negative
	God's Plan	Drake	'Magine if I never met the broskis	Brother or dude being there for me	Positive
			God's plan, God's plan	Describing a good, lucky, or fortunate situation	Positive
	Perfect	Ed Sheeran	And in your eyes, you're holding mine	Causing me to feel love	Positive
			Now I know I have met an angel in person	Beautiful person	Positive
	Meant To Be	Bebe Rexha & Florida Georgia Line	I don't mean to be so uptight	The state of being worried or nervous	Negative
		Georgia Line	Kick your pretty feet up on my dash	The state of being relaxed	Positive
	Rockstar	Post Malone	I've been f*ckin' h*es and poppin' pillies	Having sex or drugs	Negative
		Featuring 21 Savage	Your wifey say I'm lookin' like a whole snack	Nice-looking person	Positive

Psycho	Post Malone Featuring Ty Dolla \$ign	I got homies, let it go, oh	Close friends	Positive
The Middle	Zedd, Maren Morris & Grey	Oh baby, why don't you just meet me in the middle?	Reaching a resolution that satisfies all sides of an argument	Positive
		Just pourin' out admission	Telling all problems or feelings	Neutral
In My Feelings	Drake	And I'm down for you always	Supporting or helping you out	Positive
		F*ck that Netflix and chill	A euphemism for engaging in sexual activity	Negative
		Because my Instagram is weak as fuck	Extremely funny	Positive
Girls Like You	Maroon 5 Featuring Cardi B	We spent the daylight tryna make things right between us	Fixing a situation or making it better	Positive
		'Til sundown when I come through	Surviving a dangerous or difficult situation	Positive
		But every other girl you meet is fugazi	Fake	Negative
		I play with this kitty like you play wit' your guitar, ah	Playing with vagina	Negative
		Why is the best fruit always forbidden?	Desiring sexuality that is not within moral or a feasible reach	Negative

2019	Sunflower	Post Malone & Swae Lee	I'm a wreck	The state of feeling terrible, devastated, depressed, exhausted	Negative
			losin' your grip	Becoming less confident and less able to deal with a situation	Negative
			You're the sunflower	You are my happiness	Positive
Without Me	Halsey	Feeling so high but too far away to hold me	The state of being extremely excited or happy	Positive	
Wow.	Post Malone	Now it's everybody flockin'	Hanging out with celebrities	Positive	
		I know it piss you off to see me winnin'	Annoying someone	Negative	
		Catch me on the block like I'm Mutombo (Wow)	Seeing you later	Neutral	
Happier	Marshmello & Bastille	In the cold light of day we're a flame in the wind	Describing something that is fragile and lasting a very short time	Negative	
7 Rings	Ariana Grande	Yeah, breakfast at Tiffany's and bottles of bubbles	Referencing to Champagne	Neutral	
		Been through some bad sh*t, I should be a sad b*tch	Experiencing a difficult time	Negative	
		My wrist, stop watchin', my neck is flossy	Showing off expensive items	Neutral	
Sucker	Jonas Brothers	Better than birds of a feather	Better than same kind or very much alike people	Negative	

			I'm a sucker for you	Liking something or someone so much that you cannot refuse it	Positive
2020	Blinding Lights	The Weeknd	I'm goin' through withdrawals	Being alone	Negative
	Circles	Post Malone	We couldn't turn around 'til we were upside down	The state of feeling confused or upset	Negative
			Feed the flame 'cause we can't let it go	Provoking further a debate or controversy	Negative
			our love went cold	Feelings have changed toward one another	Negative
	The Box	Roddy Ricch	Told 'em f*ck 12, f*ck SWAT	Screwing police	Negative
			I just hit a lick with the box	Acquiring a large of money in a short amount of time	Neutral
	Rockstar	DaBaby Featuring Roddy Ricch	And I'm ballin', that's why it's diamonds on my jersey	Living a lavish life	Positive
	Adore You	Harry Styles	I get so lost inside your eyes	Being fascinated by your eyes	Positive
			You're wonder under summer skies	A person that causes astonishment and admiration	Positive
	Life Is Good	Maren Morris	Let it rain 'cause you and I remain the same	Bad things happen	Negative
			Baby, I know any storm we're facing	Facing problems	Negative

	Someone You Loved	Lewis Capaldi	And then you pulled the rug	Suddenly removing important support from someone	Negative
2021	Levitating	Dua Lipa	My sugarboo	Lover or boy/girlfriend	Positive
			I know a galaxy	A place where love is limitless	Positive
			I see us written in the stars	Happening by a force that controls the future	Positive
Mood	24kGoldn Featuring iann dior		Fuckin' 'round, actin' brand new	Acting as if you are better than or treats your friends indifferently	Negative
			elephant in the room	Major problems or issues that people avoid discussing	Negative
Good 4 U	Olivia Rodrigo		But your apathy is like a wound in salt	Making an experience even more painful	Negative
Kiss Me More	Doja Cat Featuring SZA		Sugar, I ain't no dummy, dummy	A stupid or fool person	Negative
			P*ssy like holy grail, you know that	Something that you want very much to get or achieve	Positive
Drivers License	Olivia Rodrigo		God, I'm so blue, know we're through	The state of feeling feeling depressed or sad	Negative
Montero (Call Me By Your Name)	Lil Nas X		I caught it bad yesterday	Something bad happens like an unfortunate event	Negative
2022	Heat Waves	Glass Animals	You look so broken when you cry	The state of having low- self esteem and being unhappy	Negative

Stay	The Kid LAROI & Justin Bieber	Ain't no way that I can leave you stranded	You will never face a difficult situation without money or help from me	Positive
Easy On Me	Adele	Go easy on me, baby	Treating in a way that is not harsh or demanding	Positive
		Feel the world around me	Understanding my point	Neutral
Shivers	Ed Sheeran	I took an arrow to the heart	Expressing love	Positive
		Like my soul's on fire	Firing up your passion	Positive
		And when you're close up, give me the shivers	Making someone feel very afraid	Negative
First Class	Jack Harlow	(O-R-O-U-S, yeah)	From the word "Glamorous" means attractive or appealing	Positive
		You don't need Givenchy, you need Jesus	You do not need to live a life lavishly	Neutral
		Can't lie, I'm on Angus, Cloud 9	The state of being happy	Positive
Big Energy	Latto	I got that big, big energy (Uh-huh)	Believing in yourself and not letting anyone change your mind	Positive
		I can tell you got big d*ck energy (Uh-huh)	Unshakeable self- confidence	Positive
		Bad b*tch, I could be your fantasy	Living in a dream where you do romance and staying with your true love	Positive

Ghost	Justin Bieber	Youngblood thinks there's always tomorrow	Tomorrow will be there because that's all they've known in their short lives	Negative
Cold Heart (PNAU Remix)	Elton John & Dua Lipa	Cold, cold heart	Lacking affection or warmth	Negative

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