

# Research On the Impact of Pop Music In 2000s Films: Shaping Youth Culture Through Soundtracks

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**Abstract.** This research delves into the profound impact of pop music on youth-oriented films of the 2000s, examining aspects such as cultural representation, emotional connection, and financial gains. The introduction underscores the critical importance of this topic in understanding how media shapes youth culture and influences societal perceptions. By focusing on iconic films like "High School Musical" and "Mean Girls," the study illustrates how pop music is used to enrich narratives and captivate audiences, making it an integral part of the storytelling process. The analysis reveals several key issues, including cultural homogenization, the reinforcement of stereotypes, and the prioritization of commercialization over artistic integrity. These challenges highlight the need for a more thoughtful integration of music in films to avoid superficial portrayals and promote authenticity. To address these issues, the research recommends expanding the range of musical themes to reflect diverse cultures and experiences, breaking away from stereotypes to foster more nuanced character portrayals, and balancing commercial objectives with creative expression in future film productions. The conclusion emphasizes the significance of this research in guiding media practices toward greater cultural diversity in youth-oriented entertainment. By adopting these recommendations, filmmakers can create richer, more diverse content that resonates emotionally with audiences while also contributing positively to the cultural landscape.

**Keywords:** Pop Music; Youth Culture; 2000s Movies; Cultural Influence; Film Industry.

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Research Background

The symbiotic relationship between pop music and film is undeniable. Ramos revealed that 74% of the respondents found music crucial to their perception of a film, which proves the impact of music on the story [1]. Wei explains that music serves as a powerful narrative tool by heightening emotions, underlining character development, and establishing the film's overall atmosphere [2]. Among the young people, pop music resonates with the youth due to its relatable lyrics and catchy rhythms that serve to express the experiences and group identity of the young people [3]. As a result, the use of pop music in movies focused on young people became a great cultural and commercial success, especially in the 2000s [4]. The Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) highlights that soundtrack album sales rose by 27% from 2000-2005, a time when numerous youth films included chart-topping hits [5]. This period also witnessed the introduction of music streaming services such as Napster and iTunes, which changed the way people listened to music [6]. Pew research showed that by 2004, 63% of teenagers between 12-17 years were using the internet to download music, depicting a generation in tune with the digital music trends [7]. This change in the consumption of music also intensified the association between popular music and youth, making films that included these trends even more significant. Movies like "Mean Girls" released in 2004, with their soundtracks dominated by artists popular with young girls, became more than just entertainment [8]. They also oriented their cultural processes, such as the making and construction of fashion and social values.

Research on the intersection between pop music and youth films has its relevancy in both business and social contexts. In terms of commercial success, films that incorporate popular music have an average of 15% higher box office revenue [9]. For instance, the "Twilight Sage" saw its soundtracks topping the Billboard charts, with the first soundtrack selling over 2.5 million copies in the US alone [10]. In the social aspect, films shape the identity of the youth. Adolescents exposed to media

portraying specific music genres or fashion styles are more likely to adopt those trends [1]. As such, understanding how pop music is used in films can equip educators, parents, and policymakers to foster critical media literacy skills in young audiences, allowing them to engage with media content more consciously and critically. Therefore, this research aims to explore these dynamics critically, providing insights into how pop music in films can both shape and reflect youth culture.

### 1.2. Literature Review

Strobin concluded that the application of popular music in films enhances spectator involvement and emotional experience [3]. In their investigation, they focused on how music from popular contemporary songs that were incorporated into specific scenes could elicit a desired emotional response and complement the narrative. The study establishes that music not only increases the impact of the emotions towards a film but also helps in the development and advancement of the characters and the story.

Diehl described music’s function in narrative storytelling, noting that it can express emotions and messages that words may not tell [4]. The study sought to enlighten on the psychological repercussions of synchronization, asserting that the right choice of music can always influence the viewers and add to their movie-watching experience. This study highlights the importance of musical cues in establishing mood, tension, and character relationships.

Tan proposed that pop music in films serves as a cultural touchstone, connecting audiences with the zeitgeist of the era and reflecting societal trends [11]. According to the study, films that incorporate popular music turn into mass cultural products widely appreciated and accepted in many aspects of people’s lives, including their clothing, speech, and behaviour. It also adds extra cultural appeal and value to the film and makes it a valuable piece of popular culture [11].

Most scholars and articles have primarily focused on the direct economic returns and audience engagement occasioned by the integration of pop music in movies. They have targeted how music deepens feelings and marketability. However, fewer scholars have explored its long-term effects on culture, such as the homogenization of youth culture and reinforcement of stereotypes. There is a lack of in-depth analysis on how the repetitive use of certain musical themes influences the diversity of youth representation in films. This research aims to fill this gap by exploring both the positive and negative cultural implications of pop music in 2000s movies.

### 1.3. Research Framework

This study is structured to address the identified research gap by exploring the cultural and commercial impacts of pop music in 2000s movies targeting the youth audience (As shown in Table 1). First, the study will begin with a comprehensive case study analysis of iconic movies released in the 2000s, such as Mean Girls, High School Musical, and Twilight. The case study will investigate how their soundtracks shaped cultural resonance. Secondly, the study will then evaluate how the integration of music has shaped youth culture, including positive influences like enhanced emotional engagement and negative aspects such as the reinforcement of stereotypes and cultural homogenization. Third, the study will propose strategic suggestions for filmmakers and music producers on how to balance commercial objectives with cultural integrity.

**Table 1.** Gap and Research Framework

| Gaps       | Soundtracks Cultural Influence on Youth | Music Soundtrack Impact on Youth Socio-Cultural Life |
|------------|---|--|
| Key Points | Positive and Negative Aspects           | Strategic Suggestions                                |

## 2. Case Description

The 2000s were a pivotal point in the popular culture of entertainment as teenagers embraced the trend of incorporating pop music in movies. This case study focuses on three iconic films from this

era: High School Musical 2006, Mean Girls 2004, and Twilight 2008. The following films not only earned the necessary amount of money but also influenced the culture since those films became legendary, at least owing to their soundtracks.

The teen movie, “Mean Girls,” directed by Mark Waters, goes deeper into the life of the high school social clique system. Some of the film’s most popular songs are from popular music artists like Kelis’ “Milkshake” and Missy Elliott’s “Pass That Dutch” which play at the appropriate moments and serve to make the film more appealing to the targeted audience [8]. This helped make the film a cult icon for the 2000s generation as far as soundtracks were concerned.

“High School Musical”, starring Ashley Tisdale, Lucas Grabeel & Vanessa Hudgens, was directed by Kenny Ortega and is a Disney Channel original. Also important was the soundtrack, which consisted of songs such as “Breaking Free” or “We are all in this together”. The soundtrack also became a commercial success; it debuted at number one on the Billboard 200 and eventually sold four million copies in America alone [12]. Not only did the catchy tunes of the film appeal to the younger generation, but it also initiated a multi-series, sequels, stage production, and concert specials.

“Twilight” is a romantic fantasy movie produced by Meyer and directed by Catherine Hardwicke based on the novel by Stephenie Meyer [13]. The soundtrack eventually became very popular, with the album containing songs such as ‘Now’ by Paramore and ‘Uprising’ by Muse, which reached millions of sales. They have sold over 5 million copies in the country and reached platinum status. Besides underpinning the narrow, romantic outlook of the film, the music in Twilight evoked audience emotions, which, in a way, helped the film to become a phenomenon with fans all over the world.

These films exemplify how the strategic use of pop music can enhance a film’s narrative, resonate with its audience, and achieve commercial success. This case description sets the stage for a deeper analysis of the cultural and commercial impacts of pop music in 2000s movies targeting the youth audience.

### **3. Analysis of the Problem**

#### **3.1. Influence of Identified Case**

##### **3.1.1 Influence 1: Enhancement of emotional engagement through narrative-driven soundtracks**

Question: How does the integration of pop music as a narrative tool enhance emotional engagement in youth films?

A notable impact of pop music in the movies is on emotional appeal due to the use of story-based soundtracks. For example, songs such as ‘Breaking Free’ and ‘We’re All in This Together’ are not just insert songs but part of the plot in High School Musical [14]. They deepen the audience’s empathy towards characters and their arcs by mimicking their feelings and critical moments. This technique makes the view of beer more involved and makes the audience feel an emotional connection to the movie, which makes this technique a sign.

##### **3.1.2 Influence 2: Cultural resonance and identity formation among youth**

Question: In what ways does the use of pop music in youth-oriented films contribute to cultural identity formation among young audiences?

The use of pop music enhances cultural expression and youth identity in films. For instance, Mean Girls employs tunes like ‘Milkshake’ by Kelis to depict high school life, which is well comprehensible to adolescents [4]. Doing so creates an understanding that contributes to the development of the viewer’s cultural reference. Music has become a cultural icon as it affects fashion, language, and other societal aspects. This is true with regards to Mean Girls, which not only later influenced the youth culture through borrowed phrases and styles.

### **3.1.3 Influence 3: Commercial success through strategic music-film synergy**

Question: What are the commercial benefits of strategic synergy between the film and music industries in youth-oriented films?

Another significant factor is the compatibility and cross-selling between the film and music business markets. The songs included in the soundtrack, such as Paramore and Muse, proved to be popular, and the film attained platinum status. It is this synergy that generates other sources of revenue for both film and music through album sales, streaming, and concert tours. For example, High School Musical has gone further than just films; it has concert tours and merchandise, and this has displayed the powerful business model that is associated with incorporating popular music in films [14].

## **3.2. Problems Identified Analysis**

### **3.2.1 Problem 1: Homogenization of youth culture due to repetitive musical themes**

Question: How does the repetitive use of mainstream pop music in youth films contribute to the homogenization of youth culture?

One weakness discussed is the possibility of music creating a monotonous culture among young people since most songs have similar themes. It is probable to have limited representation of cultures when watching films such as Mean Girls or High School Musical due to referring to the same music genres and topics. This can act to the disadvantage of the youths by suppressing the diversity of youth culture and thus reducing the potential of young audiences to embrace a diverse array of musical and cultural events. However, through offering only a limited representation of youth culture in mainstream pop music films, the hegemonic discursive practice prevails and marginalizes other perspectives [15].

### **3.2.2 Problem 2: Reinforcement of stereotypes through music choice**

Question: How does the choice of pop music in youth films reinforce stereotypical portrayals of teenage behaviour and identity?

Pop music also perpetuates stereotypes in films that are primarily targeted at the youth. Finally, Mean Girls has certain songs that reflect stereotypical representations of high school groups and their hierarchy. Such portrayals can reinforce and even endorse rather stereotyped and chiefly negative perceptions of teenage conduct and selfhood. For instance, the song 'Pass That Dutch' by Missy Elliott is used in a scene that depicts the rebellious and vapid nature of the 'Plastics' clique in the film [16]. Such a music-video-style scene may also distort real-life relationships to simplistic representations that reinforce prejudice or stereotypes that are not healthy for the young audience to emulate.

### **3.2.3 Problem 3: Overemphasis on commercialization at the expense of artistic integrity**

Question: In what ways does the commercialization of film soundtracks impact the artistic and cultural integrity of youth-oriented films?

Another major one is complacency with the commercialization aspect, ignoring the artistic and cultural side. Peculiar examples of the success of such soundtracks include films such as Twilight and High School Musical, which clearly show the commercial viability of using popular music in films. However, the primary intention here is often commercial, which sometimes comes as a detriment to the artistic and narrative vision of the film. Film producers could be tempted to choose popular songs that will attract audiences and sell well on the market rather than songs that are best suited to the movie and the director's vision. This commercialization involves using the film as a marketing tool for music, thus taking away from the artistry of the film.

## **4. Suggestions**

### **4.1. Expanding Musical Themes**

Youth films need to progress and encompass a wider spectrum of musical topics. Instead of focusing mainly on pop music hits, filmmakers need to incorporate indie, alt, and global music. This, in some way, not only increases the number of films that present cultures other than the dominant one but also familiarizes youth with a more diverse choice of music. For example, if the organization wants to include indie rock or global music, it will be easier to connect because of the different cultural backgrounds [10]. This shift can be useful in breaking the monotonous pattern of youth culture that mostly attracts Western pop music so as to make films more culturally diverse.

### **4.2. Breaking Stereotypes**

Future films should endeavor to free the sounds from the domain of stereotypes. This is especially true because, through popular music, there are usually given certain clichés. For example, certain types of music are attributed to certain categories of people. In this manner, filmmakers can work across these stereotypes since the music selection can also be very diverse and relevant to the plot as well [11]. For instance, representing a multicultural cast of friends who listen to different types of music can effectively combat any prejudice. Furthermore, raising awareness about songs that are dedicated to social causes or individual challenges may contribute to presenting a more realistic representation of youths' issues.

### **4.3. Balancing commercial and creative goals**

The main conflict that tends to occur for filmmakers in the modern world is the conflict between the business side and the art side. I must admit that popular music can boost sales at the box office and soundtrack sales, but it is equally important to make sure that music is chosen to complement the plot and characters' growth rather than to see it as a profitable commodity [5]. There is a need for filmmakers to work hand in hand with music supervisors and composers to ensure that appropriate music from the corresponding category is composed in a bid to support the emotions of the film. This strategy could be useful in pursuing high artistry while at the same time satisfying the viewer's tastes. Also, licensing such less popular but still related theme songs may also be quite helpful in attaining this balance, mainly because of the differences in prices for recognizable tunes and less famous but quite appropriate ones.

### **4.4. Critical Media Literacy**

Targeted learners and policymakers ought to enhance the criticality of media consumption among young people. By considering music as an element of films and the methods of its influence on the cultural point of view, the spectator can be enlightened and become more conscious when watching the movies. Educational facilities and mass media classes may discuss how music affects viewers' moods and the plot of the movies. In this way, growing critical thinking skills enable the young generation to act as responsible consumers of the media to appreciate the artistic aspect of the media and how it impacts society [10].

### **4.5. Promoting Cultural Diversity**

Directors, especially movie producers, must ensure that the songs selected are compiled from the cultural background of the people. The authenticity of the film's setting and characters may be improved by having music from different cultures. For instance, the inclusion of songs that relate to traditional or, at least, non-Western' popular music can give a more truthful picture of the global youth culture [15]. It is a common trend in this practice not only to enhance a film's storytelling but also to play an important role in the conservation and promotion of different musical traditions.

#### 4.6. Partnering with New Generation of Artists

To ensure that the soundtracks produced are continually unique, temporary filmmakers should hire upcoming artists. It also fulfills the objective of the show by offering a way of presenting new talent and creating awareness of new music. Upcoming artists is able to produce fresh tunes and different approaches to the flicks that could be beneficial to the movie. Also, through these collaborations, individuals enhance the likelihood of the film's popularity and traffic to the work of the artists in question. For example, movies like "Twilight and High School Musical" success were contributed to their soundtracks that captured new artists who were unknown but are now famous

### 5. Conclusion

Technopop in the 2000s youth films impacted the assembly of the movies and culture and identities of the target population. Thus, pop music's involvement in youth films of the 2000s highly influenced the movies' popularity and the cultural construction of youth at the time. Nevertheless, the orientalizing of cultural tastes in mainstream pop music also strengthened conformity and stereotype representations of cultures outside of America and Europe within society. Developing the academic perspective, changing perceivers' expectations, and managing commercial and artistic objectives are important actions to promote more diverse films. It can also positively develop young audiences' critical media literacy and can act to become more conscious and a critical consumer of media content.

However, multiculturalism and cooperation with newcomers are one of the ways to get new ideas and make the movie plots more realistic. When filmmakers include a diverse range of genres and youths' musical preferences, they are able to depict rich and diverse youth culture that will help to improve the cultural discourse. Furthermore, the presence of cultural motility and working with young artists is a way of receiving a new agenda and improving the quality of foregrounded movies. By using a diversity of genres and diverse voices in music, filmmakers get to give a broader and more diverse representation of youth culture, hence sparking a better and more diverse culture.

Furthermore, the application of pop music to youth films is strategic; however, it comes with beneficial and detrimental consequences. In this way, future filmmakers will be able to build upon the traditions of incorporating music into motion pictures to increase the depth of the viewers' interactions on emotional and cultural levels while also expanding the representation and fostering critical thinking on the media's role in society. Such an outlook will not only yield positive impacts on the film industry but will also improve the quality and portrayal of different cultures in media.

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