

Perceptions and Distinctions: Differentiating Modern and Vintage Amplifiers Among Audio Enthusiasts in Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

Audio enthusiasts nowadays listen to or stream their music through digital devices which makes their listening more towards digital consumption. The sound appreciation towards digital consumption has simplified the listening experience in the context of the sound values and managing the digital playback devices. The digital appreciation integrates microchips to replicate vintage sound appreciation in the context of the amplifier to make it more compact and streamline the vintage sound listening experience. Therefore, this study aims to examine the perceptions and distinctions between modern and vintage amplifiers among audio enthusiasts in Malaysia. This study used a qualitative approach using self-administered questionnaires involving a total of 21 Malaysian audio enthusiasts aged between 25 to 70 years old, with a focus on a single question aimed at capturing their perspectives on amplifier differentiation. The collected data was analyzed to identify common themes and patterns regarding the distinctions between modern and vintage amplifiers. The results show that there are perceptions and distinctions of audio enthusiasts in Malaysia in terms of sound, aesthetic and design, functionality as well as price. Ironically, this study will redound to society's benefit especially to the audio enthusiast in Malaysia, including academia, researchers and hi-fi audio manufacturer due to the findings that have practical implications for manufacturers and audio enthusiasts seeking to understand the nuanced differences between modern and vintage amplifiers.

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Contribution/Originality: This study examines perceptions and distinctions between modern and vintage amplifiers among Malaysian audio enthusiasts. Through qualitative questionnaires, common themes related to sound, aesthetics, functionality, and price are identified. The findings have practical implications for manufacturers and audio enthusiasts, providing insights into the differences between these amplifier types.

1. Introduction

The world of audio enthusiasts is filled with individuals who have distinct preferences and criteria when it comes to selecting amplifiers for their audio systems. Among these preferences, the differentiation between modern and vintage amplifiers has been a topic of great interest. Modern amplifiers boast cutting-edge technology and digital features, while vintage amplifiers hold a unique appeal with their nostalgic aesthetics and analog sound characteristics. Understanding how audio enthusiasts differentiate between these two types of amplifiers is valuable for manufacturers, retailers, and enthusiasts themselves.

The primary objective of this study is to investigate how audio enthusiasts in Malaysia differentiate between modern and vintage solid-state amplifiers, considering the various advantages of amplifiers in general. By focusing on this specific geographic context, we can obtain localized perspectives and preferences from audio enthusiasts in the area. Notably, this study specifically emphasizes solid-state amplifiers over tube amplifiers for several reasons. Solid-state amplifiers are highly preferred by many audio enthusiasts due to their reliability, efficiency, and consistent performance. Moreover, they are generally more cost-effective and require less maintenance compared to tube amplifiers. Additionally, solid-state amplifiers are known for their ability to deliver accurate and transparent sound reproduction, making them well-suited for a wide range of audio applications, including recording studios, live performances, and home audio setups. By concentrating on solid-state amplifiers, this study aims to delve into the perceptions and criteria used by individuals in Malaysia to differentiate between modern and vintage amplifiers. Ultimately, the study seeks to provide valuable insights into the preferences and perspectives of Malaysian audio enthusiasts specifically regarding this amplifier.

2. Literature Review

The differentiation between modern and vintage solid-state amplifiers has been a topic of interest in the field of audio technology, with significant implications for both users and the audio industry. Modern solid-state amplifiers represent the latest advancements in amplifier design and technology, incorporating cutting-edge components and sophisticated circuitry. These amplifiers prioritize accuracy, transparency, and versatility, aiming to provide users with a precise and faithful reproduction of the audio signal (Klippel, 2018). The advancements in modern solid-state amplifiers have led to improvements in technical performance, such as low distortion levels, extended frequency response, and high-power output. These features cater to the diverse needs of users in various audio applications, including recording studios, live performances, and home audio systems.

On the other hand, vintage solid-state amplifiers carry a unique charm and character that resonates with audiophiles, enthusiasts, and musicians. These amplifiers originated from earlier eras, showcasing the craftsmanship and design principles of the time. Vintage

solid-state amps are known for their warm, rich, and sometimes slightly coloured sound reproduction. They often utilize discrete transistors and high-quality components, emphasizing attention to detail in circuit design. Vintage amplifiers evoke a sense of nostalgia and connect users to the rich history of audio technology (Van Wyk & Booyesen, 2021).

The effects of modern and vintage solid-state amplifiers extend beyond individual users and have implications for the audio industry. Modern solid-state amplifiers have contributed to the advancement of audio technology, driving innovations in circuit design, component manufacturing, and digital connectivity (Ballou, 2015). The precision and versatility of modern amplifiers have facilitated the development of complex audio systems and contributed to the growth of various audio industries, including music production, broadcasting, and entertainment. Moreover, the convenience and compatibility of modern amplifiers with contemporary audio sources and systems have made them a popular choice among users and an essential tool for professionals in the audio industry.

Vintage solid-state amplifiers, on the other hand, have created a niche market within the audio industry. The unique sonic characteristics and vintage aesthetics of these amplifiers have attracted a dedicated community of enthusiasts, collectors, and musicians. The demand for vintage amplifiers has influenced the market, leading to the emergence of specialized retailers, restoration services, and a secondary market for vintage audio equipment (Murray, 2016). The popularity of vintage amplifiers has also sparked the interest of manufacturers and audio engineers, who have sought to replicate the sonic qualities and aesthetics of vintage designs in modern amplifiers, creating a hybrid category known as "vintage-inspired" amplifiers.

In conclusion, the differentiation between modern and vintage solid-state amplifiers has significant effects on users and the audio industry. Modern amplifiers offer technical precision, versatility, and convenience, catering to the diverse needs of users in various audio applications. Vintage amplifiers, with their unique sonic characteristics and nostalgic appeal, attract a dedicated community and have influenced the market, leading to the growth of specialized services and the emergence of vintage-inspired designs. Understanding the differential between modern and vintage amplifiers is crucial for users, manufacturers, and professionals in the audio industry, as it helps shape preferences, inform product development, and drive innovation in audio technology.

3. Methodology

To investigate how audio enthusiasts in Malaysia differentiate between modern and vintage amplifiers, an interview was designed specifically targeting this research question. The interview aimed to capture the perspectives and criteria used by respondents in evaluating and distinguishing between these two amplifier types. The interview consisted of a series of questions related to amplifier differentiation, with a focus on the key factors, characteristics, and preferences that participants considered when comparing modern and vintage amplifiers.

The target audience for this study was audio enthusiasts residing in Petaling Jaya, Malaysia. To ensure a representative sample, a combination of convenience sampling and snowball sampling methods was employed. The initial participants were recruited through local audio enthusiast forums, social media groups, and audio-related events. The

interview was conducted online using a secure and user-friendly platform. Participants were provided with a link to the interview, which they could access and complete at their convenience. The interview questions were designed to be easily understandable and took approximately 30 to 40 minutes to complete. Participants were assured of the anonymity and confidentiality of their responses to encourage honest and open feedback. The data obtained were then analyzed using thematic analysis to identify common themes, patterns, and insights related to amplifier differentiation between modern and vintage amplifiers. The analysis provided a comprehensive understanding of the factors, characteristics, and preferences that shape their choices and preferences.

4. Findings and Discussion

In total, 21 audio enthusiasts from Petaling Jaya participated in the interview, providing valuable insights into their perceptions and preferences regarding the differentiation between modern and vintage amplifiers. Among the 21 participants, 20 were males and the majority were in the ethnic group of Malays (14). The demographic characteristics of the participants are shown in [Table 1](#). The interview was conducted among a group of 21 audio enthusiasts, aimed at understanding their preferences for vintage and modern amplifiers.

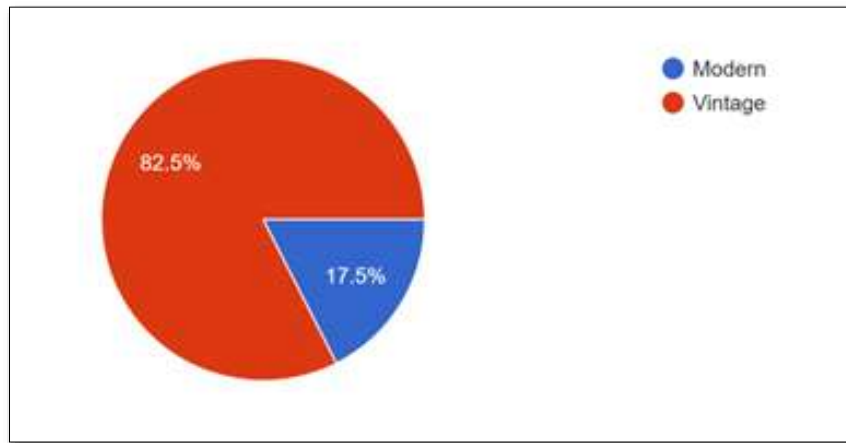
Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of the Participants (N= 21)

No	Gender	Age	Ethnic	Modern / Vintage Amplifier
1.	Female	25	Malay	Vintage (Pioneer amp)
2.	Male	31	Malay	Vintage (Yamaha amp)
3.	Male	33	Malay	Vintage (Cyrus amp)
4.	Male	34	Malay	Modern (Naim amp)
5.	Male	41	Malay	Vintage (technics amp)
7.	Male	44	Malay	Vintage (Sansui amp)
8.	Male	45	Malay	Vintage (Sony amp)
9.	Male	47	Malay	Vintage (Luxman amp)
10.	Male	53	Malay	Vintage (VTL Manley amp)
11.	Male	55	Malay	Vintage (Leak amp)
12.	Male	60	Malay	Vintage (NAD amp)
13.	Male	60	Malay	Vintage (Quad amp)
14.	Male	69	Malay	Vintage (Sansui amp)
15.	Male	42	Indian	Vintage (Quad amp)
16.	Male	56	Indian	Vintage (Nakamichi amp)
17.	Male	50	Chinese	Modern (Jeff Rowland)
18.	Male	52	Chinese	Modern (Pioneer amp)
19.	Male	59	Chinese	Vintage (Accuphase amp)
20.	Male	65	Chinese	Modern (SMSL amp)
21.	Male	70	Chinese	Vintage (Luxman amp)

The result revealed that 82.5% of the participants are using vintage amplifiers, while the remaining 17.5% are using modern amplifiers as shown in [Chart 1](#). The high percentage of participants using vintage amplifiers suggests a strong preference for the classic audio experience provided by these amplifiers. Vintage amplifiers are often associated with warm and rich sound, which can be attributed to the use of vacuum tubes in their design ([Verfaillie et al., 2011](#); [Wilmering et al., 2013](#)).

Additionally, vintage amplifiers are often seen as aesthetically pleasing and can add to the vintage charm of a listening room. On the other hand, the smaller percentage of participants using modern amplifiers highlights the presence of a group of audio enthusiasts who appreciate the technological advancements and contemporary features offered by these amplifiers. Modern amplifiers are often equipped with features such as wireless connectivity, digital signal processing, and built-in equalizers, which can enhance the audio experience in various ways (Piatier, 1988).

Chart 1: Participants sage of modern and vintage amplifiers



The sound is perceived as a differentiating factor between modern and vintage amplifiers, as shown in Table 2, focusing on the different ethnic backgrounds, namely the Malays, Chinese and Indian communities. The Malay participants, with a majority owning vintage amps, perceive sound as the differentiating factor between modern and vintage amps. This could be influenced by their appreciation for the warm and rich sound characteristics commonly associated with vintage amplifiers (Verfaillie et al., 2011; Wilmering et al., 2013). The vintage amplifiers may offer a nostalgic appeal and a distinct sound signature that resonates with their cultural preferences and music choices (Théberge, 1997).

Table 2: Sound as Differentiating Factor Based on Ethnics

Ethnic	Sound as Differentiating Factor	Total Participants
Malay	Yes	6
Chinese	Yes	4
Indian	Yes	1

There is a mix of vintage and modern amplifier owners among the Chinese participants. This suggests a diversity in sound preferences within the group. Some Chinese may prefer vintage amplifiers due to their potential association with traditional and classic audio equipment. On the other hand, those owning modern amplifiers may value the technological advancements (Piatier, 1988; Théberge, 1997), cleaner sound reproduction (Verfaillie et al., 2011; Wilmering et al., 2013) and potentially greater versatility offered by modern amplifiers (Mulder, 2015; Julien, 1999). Meanwhile, the Indian participants who own vintage amplifiers, perceive sound as the primary differentiating factor between modern and vintage amplifiers. This preference for vintage amps may be influenced by a cultural appreciation for the warmth, tonal characteristics, and harmonics that vintage amplifiers are known to deliver (Mulder, 2015). Vintage amplifiers might resonate with

traditional Indian music genres and preferences, which often emphasize organic and natural sound qualities.

Thus, the perception of sound as a differentiating factor between modern and vintage amplifiers can be influenced by cultural backgrounds and preferences. The Malay respondents' preference for vintage amplifiers could be tied to their appreciation for warm and rich sound qualities, while the Chinese respondents' ownership of both vintage and modern amplifiers suggests a diversity in sound preferences within the group. The Indian respondents' exclusive ownership of vintage amplifiers may reflect their cultural affinity for the tonal characteristics and organic sound qualities offered by vintage equipment. These cultural influences and personal preferences contribute to the perception of sound as a key factor for differentiation between modern and vintage amplifiers among the participants from different ethnic backgrounds.

The aesthetic and design are also perceived as a differentiating factor between modern and vintage amps, as shown in [Table 3](#). The 2 Malay participants who owned vintage amplifiers appreciate the aesthetic and design elements associated with vintage equipment. The classic and retro look of vintage amplifiers may align with their aesthetic preferences, adding a sense of nostalgia and uniqueness to their audio setup. The absence of modern amplifier ownership among the Malay participants indicates that the aesthetic and design aspects of vintage amplifiers are significant factors for them when choosing audio equipment ([Smith, 2008](#)).

Table 3: Aesthetic and Design as Differentiating Factors Based on Ethnic

Ethnic	Aesthetic and Design as Differentiating Factor	Total Participants
Malay	Yes	2
Chinese	Yes	2
Indian	Yes	2

The two Chinese participants have a mix of vintage and modern amplifier ownership. One respondent owns a vintage amplifier, while the other owns a modern amplifier. This indicates diversity in aesthetic and design preferences within the Chinese group. The participant who owns the vintage amplifier may value the classic aesthetic and unique design associated with vintage equipment. On the other hand, the participant who owns the modern amplifier may prioritize a sleek and contemporary design that complements their audio setup ([Wilmering et al., 2013](#)). Similar to the Malay participants, both the Indian participants also own vintage amplifiers. This suggests that they also appreciate the aesthetic and design aspects of vintage equipment. The classic and timeless look of vintage amplifiers may resonate with their cultural preferences and complement their audio setup. The absence of modern amplifier ownership among the Indian participants indicates that the aesthetic and design elements of vintage amplifiers are crucial considerations for them when selecting audio equipment.

Hence, the Malay, Chinese, and Indian participants suggest that aesthetics and design play a significant role in the differentiation between modern and vintage amplifiers. The Malay and Indian participants who owned the vintage amplifiers emphasize the aesthetic and design elements associated with vintage equipment. The Chinese participants show a diversity in preferences, with a mix of vintage and modern amplifier ownership, indicating varying aesthetic and design preferences within the group. These results highlight the importance of aesthetic and design considerations when differentiating

between modern and vintage amplifiers among participants from different ethnic backgrounds.

On top of that, functionality is also perceived as a differentiating factor between modern and vintage amplifiers, as revealed in [Table 4](#). One Malay participant found owns a vintage amplifier and considers functionality as the differentiating factor. This shows that he prioritizes the functional capabilities and features offered by vintage amplifiers. He may value the simplicity and straightforward operation of vintage equipment, which aligns with his audio needs and preferences ([Piatier, 1988](#)).

Table 4: Functionality as Differentiating Factor Based on Ethnic

Ethnic	Functionality as Differentiating Factor	Total Participants
Malay	Yes	2
Chinese	Yes	3
Indian	Yes	1

Meanwhile, the two Chinese participants own the modern amplifiers and highlight functionality as the differentiating factor. This indicates that they prioritize the advanced features, technological advancements, and versatility offered by modern amplifiers ([Mulder, 2015](#); [Julien, 1999](#)). The emphasis on functionality suggests that they value the ability to connect various audio sources, customize sound settings, and potentially integrate the amplifiers into modern audio systems ([Piatier, 1988](#)). The Indian participant who owns a vintage amplifier also considers functionality as the differentiating factor. This suggests that he appreciates the functional capabilities and user-friendly nature of vintage equipment. He may prioritize ease of use, reliability, and the ability to reproduce sound in a way that complements audio preferences ([Piatier, 1988](#)).

The result highlights the significance of functionality as the differentiating factor between modern and vintage amplifiers. The Malay participant values the functional capabilities of vintage amplifiers, while the Chinese participants prioritize the advanced features and versatility of modern amps. Similarly, the Indian participant appreciates the functional aspects of vintage amplifiers. These results indicate that functionality plays a crucial role in the preferences and choices of participants from different ethnic backgrounds when differentiating between modern and vintage amplifiers.

Then, price is also perceived as a differentiating factor between modern and vintage amplifiers, as revealed in [Table 5](#). The Malay participant owns a vintage amplifier and considers price as the differentiating factor. This suggests that affordability and cost-effectiveness play a significant role in their decision-making process. The preference for vintage amplifiers might be driven by the relatively lower price compared to modern amplifiers with advanced features ([Bode, 1984](#)). The Malay participant prioritizes finding a suitable audio solution within their budget, leading them to choose a vintage amplifier. The Indian participant also owns a vintage amplifier and also considers price as the differentiating factor. This indicates that he also values affordability and cost-effectiveness in their audio equipment choices. Similar to the Malay participant, the Indian participant may have opted for a vintage amplifier due to its relatively lower price compared to modern alternatives. The consideration of price highlights the importance of finding a suitable audio solution that fits their budget.

Table 5: Price as Differentiating Factor Based on Ethnic

Ethnic	Price as Differentiating Factor	Total Participants
Malay	Yes	1
Chinese	No	0
Indian	Yes	1

Thus, the result shows that price plays a significant role in the differentiation between vintage and modern amplifiers. Both the Malay and Indian participants prioritize affordability and cost-effectiveness when selecting audio equipment. The preference for vintage amplifiers in these situations could be attributed to their relatively lower price compared to modern amplifiers. However, due to the limited number of participants in this category, we cannot draw specific conclusions regarding their preferences for vintage or modern amplifiers based on price.

5. Conclusion

The study highlights the key factors that audio enthusiasts in Malaysia consider when differentiating between modern and vintage solid-state amplifiers. Sound quality emerged as the most significant factor, with a majority of the participants prioritizing it in their decision-making process. This indicates that the sonic performance and characteristics of amplifiers hold paramount importance for audio enthusiasts in this region (Smith, 2008). The interface design was the second most important factor and indicating the significance of visual appeal and user-friendliness in amplifier differentiation. Functionality and price were found to have relatively lower importance in their differentiation process.

The significance of differentiating between modern and vintage amplifiers lies in the understanding of audio enthusiasts' preferences and priorities when making purchasing decisions. Manufacturers can leverage these findings to develop amplifiers that meet the specific demands of audio enthusiasts in Malaysia. By focusing on sound quality and interface design, manufacturers can create products that cater to the desire for superior audio performance and visually appealing designs. Additionally, understanding the relatively lower importance of functionality and price can help manufacturers allocate resources effectively and align their product offerings with market demand.

This study opens up potential future directions for further exploration in this area. It would be valuable to conduct more in-depth studies that delve into the specific aspects of sound quality that audio enthusiasts prioritize when differentiating between modern and vintage amplifiers. Additionally, investigating the reasons behind the lower importance of functionality and price could provide insights into the unique preferences and considerations of audio enthusiasts in Malaysia. Moreover, exploring the intersection of amplifier differentiation with other variables, such as music genres or specific user demographics, could provide a more nuanced understanding of the factors influencing preferences. The practical relevance of this study extends to various stakeholders within the audio industry. Audio enthusiasts gain insights into the factors to consider when selecting amplifiers that best suit their preferences. Manufacturers can utilize these findings to inform product development and marketing strategies, leading to tailored offerings that resonate with the target audience. Additionally, retailers can provide informed guidance and recommendations to customers based on their individual preferences and priorities.

In conclusion, this study has shed light on the main considerations of audio enthusiasts in Malaysia when differentiating between modern and vintage amplifiers. The findings regarding sound quality, interface design, functionality, and price have practical implications for audio enthusiasts, manufacturers, and the wider audio industry. By understanding and addressing these factors, stakeholders can enhance customer satisfaction and drive innovation in the market, ultimately elevating the audio experience for enthusiasts in Malaysia and beyond.

Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate

This study is conducted according to the American Psychological Association's research ethical procedures. UTAR Scientific and Ethics Review Committee has granted ethical approval for this study (U/SERC/223/2022).

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Conflict of Interest

The authors reported no conflicts of interest for this work and declare that there is no potential conflict of interest with respect to the research, authorship, or publication of this article.

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