

DGM Doctoral Training Workshop 2018

The effect of song titles on music evaluation

Introduction

Titles of aesthetic objects are important. Imagine an art exhibition where four identical plain red paintings are placed next to each other. The only difference between them is that they are presented with different titles. One painting is called “The Israelites Crossing the Red Sea,” another “Kierkegaard’s mood” and the other two titled “Red Square” and “Nirvana”. It seems to be difficult to suppress immediate associations and accordingly Danto (1981) describes the function of titles for aesthetic objects: “A title is more than a name: frequently it is a direction for interpretation or reading, which may not always be helpful” (p. 3). The influence of titles on art appreciation and evaluation has been largely studied in the world of visual arts, and presenting pieces of art with titles has demonstrable effects on the understanding and interpretation (Leder, Carbon, & Ripsas, 2006; Millis, 2001; Russell, 2003; Swami, 2013), visual exploration (Hristova, Georgieva, & Grinberg, 2011; Kapoula, Daunys, Herbez, & Yang, 2009), and liking (Belke, Leder, Strobach, & Carbon, 2010; Gerger & Leder, 2015; Millis, 2001; Russell, 2003; Swami, 2013) of artworks.

However, the influence of titles and artist names on the perception and appreciation of pieces of music has been studied considerably less. Hence, the present experiment aims at determining to what degree artist names and song titles can affect the evaluation of novel pieces of popular music. While there may be various linguistic factors that can potentially play a role for the effect of titles on music perception and evaluation, the present study only targets processing fluency as one heuristic principle that has been shown to play a crucial role in human judgment and decision making (see Reber, Schwarz, & Winkielman, 2004, for a review). Processing fluency refers to the human tendency to evaluate information that is easy-to-process more positively than similar but more difficult-to-process information. There is evidence in the published literature showing that easy-to-process stimuli are believed to be more frequent (Tversky & Kahneman, 1973), true (Reber & Schwarz, 1999), famous (Jacoby, Kelley, Brown, & Jascenko, 1989), likable (Reber, Winkielman, & Schwarz, 1998), and familiar (Whittlesea & Williams, 1998) than similar but less-fluent stimuli. Shah and Oppenheimer (2007) applied the principle of fluency to the evaluation of financial stocks, finding that when stocks were presented with easy-to-pronounce names, they were evaluated more positively than when presented with hard to pronounce names. This kind of manipulation is known as linguistic fluency (Alter & Oppenheimer, 2006; Whittlesea & Leboe, 2000) and the motivation of this experiment is to apply the same principle to study the effects of title and artist name on the evaluation of music.

Experimental Details

The experiment consists of listening to four excerpts (about 15s each) from instrumental rock songs that are presented along with Turkish-sounding titles and artist names. Participants are asked to make judgements on three 7-point rating scales that capture behavioural aspects of music evaluation from different perspectives. In addition, data on basic demographics, languages spoken, and musical training

background (Musical Training subscales from the Gold-MSI self-report inventory, Müllensiefen et al., 2014) are collected from each participant.

The Turkish-sounding song titles and artist names are taken from Shah and Oppenheimer (2007) where they served as names of fictitious Turkish brokerage firms. Two name-titles pairs (pair A and B) are easy to pronounce (for native English speakers) and considered linguistically fluent. The other two pairs (C and D) are difficult to pronounce and therefore linguistically disfluent.

Songs were taken from the Getty database of royalty-free music and have been validated in terms of their comparability with commercially released music from the same genre (Rentfrow, Goldberg, & Levitin, 2011).

Using a Latin Square design, the four name-title pairs are randomly combined with four different song excerpts. Due to the Latin Square design there are only four combinations of name-title pairs and songs and each participant is randomly allocated to one of these four stimulus combinations. In each of these four combinations, the presentation order of the stimuli is randomised for each participant.

The data is collected through the Qualtrics survey platform. The data of the experiment is available in the 'long-format' as well as in the 'wide format' and has individual columns to represent participant-ID (sequence of random letters), song (1,2,3,4), fluency of title-name pair (F for fluent, D for disfluent), and three columns containing the rating scale data (R_1 = "commercial success", R_2 = "recommendation to friend", R_3 = "concert attendance"). In addition, basic demographics (Gender is coded: 1 = male, 2 = female, 3 = other) and the Gold-MSI musical training scores are given in separate columns with repeated values for each participant.

In line with the above rationale, the primary aim of this empirical report is to assess the influence of linguistic fluency on music evaluation while also controlling for the effect of the individual song excerpts. Note that an assumption of the Latin Square design is that the experimental factors (song, title-name pair) do not interact.

A secondary hypothesis regards the moderation of linguistic fluency effect by musical training background.

Empirical report write-up

Refer to the presentation on how to write up an empirical report in APA style and use the information provided in this handout as a starting point for your introduction.

Consider how you would expect evaluative ratings to be affected by the linguistic fluency of the names and titles presented along with song excerpts and formulate a precise hypothesis. Also formulate a hypothesis regarding influence of musical training background in this experiment.

Give a complete method section, drawing on the information provided, but avoid plagiarising. Download the data onto your laptop and use your preferred program to carry out the data analysis. In the results section, give a summary of the data and perform the appropriate statistical tests. Also include a plot (or two plots) to display the results graphically.

Provide a brief discussion that summarises the empirical findings and places them in the context of your hypotheses and the relevant literature discussed in the introduction. Add an abstract at the start, but write this last. The report should not exceed 1500 words (excluding figures/graphs/references).

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