Do Song Titles Matter? The Effects of Linguistic Fluency and Emotionality on Evaluations of Music

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BACKGROUND

• Presenting pieces of art with titles has a significant effect on the understanding, visual exploration, and liking of artworks [1,2,3].
• To the best of our knowledge, there are no studies in the published literature that examined song title effects on aesthetic and value judgments of music.

AIM

To investigate to what extent titles presented with music have an impact on aesthetic and value judgments of music.

EXPERIMENT 1

Method
Participants: 48 English native speakers
Design & Materials: Mixed design
• Linguistic fluency (Table 1): 4 easy to pronounce names (fluent) and 4 hard to pronounce names (disfluent)
• 8 unfamiliar song excerpts (15s each)

Procedure
“*The main purpose of this study is to examine how people evaluate music made by Turkish amateur musicians*”

EXPERIMENT 2

Method
Participants: 100 native and non-native English Speakers
Design & Materials: Mixed design
• Emotionality (Table 2): 3 positive, 3 negative, and 3 neutral titles
• 9 unfamiliar song excerpts (30s each)

Procedure
“At the end unexpected free recall task: *Please write down as many songs as you can remember*”

RESULTS

Results Experiment 1
Figure 1. Music presented with fluent names was evaluated more positively than music presented with disfluent names (p = .037 in a general LME model with fluency).

Results Experiment 2
Figure 2. While negative titles resulted in the lowest ratings, neutral titles resulted in the highest ratings (p = .02 in the two significant models).

Figure 4. Music was significantly more liked when presented with titles than in their absence, regardless of the emotionality of the title (p < .001).

GENERAL DISCUSSION

• Results from two experiments show the relevance of song titles for the evaluation of music:
  - Experiment 1: the same music was evaluated more positively when presented with fluent names compared to disfluent names, which is in line with Processing Fluency [4].
  - Experiment 2: the emotional content of titles influenced participants’ judgements and also had an impact on participants’ memory for music, supporting the Affect Heuristic [5].

• The same music excerpts were more liked when presented with titles than in their absence, supporting the ‘making meaning brings pleasure’ hypothesis [3].
• It can be concluded that like any other human judgement, evaluations of music also rely on cognitive biases and heuristics that do not depend on the aesthetic stimuli themselves.

REFERENCES