

We don't like unfamiliar music, even though we claim we do, study finds

July 23 2013, by Neil Schoenherr

We are constantly bombarded with a seemingly limitless amount of new music in our daily lives. But why do we keep coming back to that one song or album we couldn't get enough of in college?

New research from Washington University's Olin Business School shows that although consumers say they prefer to listen to unfamiliar [music](#), their choices actually belie that preference.

The study, "The Same Old Song: The Power of Familiarity in Music Choice," could have implications for marketers and the playlists, events, venues and products which they choose to advertise.

"In three studies, we examined the power of familiarity on music choice and showed that familiarity is a more important driver of music choice than more obvious, and commonly tested, constructs such as liking and satiation, i.e., being 'sick of' certain music," says Joseph K. Goodman, PhD, associate professor of marketing at Olin and co-author of the study, along with Morgan Ward of Southern Methodist University and Julie Irwin of University of Texas at Austin.

"Our results suggest that the emphasis on novelty in the music domain, by consumers and people often protesting the current state of the [music business](#), is probably misplaced," Goodman says. "In the marketplace, and in our pilot study, consumers say that they want more novelty when in fact their choices suggest they do not."

The study shows that consumers pick music they are familiar with even when they believe they would prefer less familiar music.

Goodman suggests that based on the findings marketers should continue to promote what is familiar to [consumers](#), even though it might not be the most liked. In addition, managers and artists should not underestimate the power of familiarity when promoting their music.

He says that though the studies show the importance of familiarity in music, it also shows that there is a place for new music as well. Consumers have a need for both novel and familiar music, and they especially prefer familiar music when they are busy working or doing cognitively demanding tasks.

Goodman says that the success of services like Pandora and Spotify will continue because they not only play personalized familiar favorites, but they also introduce people to new music with familiar musical elements.

Provided by Washington University in St. Louis

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