

# Psychologists reveal the secrets behind song popularity

November 10 2022

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Psychologists have revealed some of the secrets of scoring a chart-topping, hit song.

JCU psychology lecturer Dr. Amanda Krause was a co-author of the new paper. She said several studies show that a concept or object is more popular when it's easier to process.

"We know for instance that instructions written in easier-to-read fonts make people feel they are better able to carry out these instructions.

"Similarly, there is research suggesting wine bottle labels with pictures are processed more easily than labels with text only and are also associated with higher purchase intent and perceived [product quality](#)," said Dr. Krause.

The researchers applied the notion of processing fluency (the ease with which information is processed) to the lyrics of more than 270 top five songs appearing on the United Kingdom chart for each week from 1999 to 2014.

The processing fluency of the lyrics was computer scored for readability, presence of rhyme, and complexity, and popularity was assessed in terms of peak chart position and duration on the chart.

"We found factors relating to the processing fluency of the lyrics predicted peak popularity but not their duration on the chart," said Dr. Krause

She said two of the processing [fluency](#) components were especially important.

"Songs with lyrics that were higher in Rhyme Saturation—the extent to which rhyme appears in the [song](#)—and Basic Lyric Readability Properties achieved a higher peak in the charts," said Dr. Krause.

But she said lyrics that were easier to process were not associated with

songs spending longer periods of time in the charts.

"The differing results concerning peak popularity versus duration suggest that easier [readability](#) and higher rhyme saturation in the lyrics are related to short-term spikes in popularity rather than popularity over more extended periods of time.

"It's tempting to speculate that this may arise because simple lyrics lead to the songs being quickly perceived as boring or repetitive, so that while the [lyrics](#) are quickly understood, they are also quick to lose their high level of [popularity](#)," said Dr. Krause.

The results are published in an article in the journal *Psychology of Music*.

**More information:** Sorcha Melvill-Smith et al, Song popularity and processing fluency of lyrics, *Psychology of Music* (2022). [DOI: 10.1177/03057356221118400](#)

Provided by James Cook University

Citation: Psychologists reveal the secrets behind song popularity (2022, November 10) retrieved 6 May 2024 from

<https://phys.org/news/2022-11-psychologists-reveal-secrets-song-popularity.html>

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