Does the Fame of Artists influence preferences in Art?

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ABSTRACT

Do artists and their fame have any impact on the art preferences of humans? Our hypothesis suggests that people are biased in their preferences in art when they are aware of the artist. We conducted an experimental research in a between-subjects manner to contest our hypothesis. We constructed two surveys, one that was a control and the other served to aid our hypothesis with the name of the artist as our variable. For this research, we decided that we would have our participants choose between works made by 19th century artists. The works were compared based on the subject matter of the art and the styles incorporated. We collected a total of 48 responses for each survey and our results disprove our hypothesis. People are more likely to be influenced by other factors instead of the artist's name and fame when having preferences in art.

INTRODUCTION

The 19th century was an important and influential era for art as artists incorporated modern styles of realism and impressionism. Some of the most famous artists of all time have sprung from this era for their works involving these styles such as Vincent Van Gogh, Claude Monet and Edgar Degas to name a few. During this period of time there were evidently other artists who incorporated similar art styles and structures but are far lesser known. We look into the artists of the 19th century because of the lasting impact of the styles and works of this era in the field of art.

Art is something that humans have always had a subjective preference in [4]. People find themselves drawn to works of art without any backing except for an inner voice that urges them to have an inclination towards it. There are various known factors that do influence people when asked to make a choice between two works of art, such as, aesthetics, color palette [2], style of art, subject matter, fame of the artist, etc. [3]

Our work involves experimental research in art of which there are very few similar works. In Tavares' work [5], we note that the spheres of art, science and research are not that far apart and that artistic research does indeed have a huge scope. We acknowledge the importance of artistic research via our work and aim to obtain significant findings pertaining to the field of art.

Over time, people have appreciated and observed art in museums [1], galleries and digital platforms. One thing that has intrigued us is to understand if there is any effect of the name of the artist on preferences of art. Our hypothesis states that "The fame of the artist influences people in making decisions about their preferences in art". To put this to test, we conducted two surveys where our variable element was the name of the artist. Visibility of the artist's name when viewing their work [6] could prove to be significant in altering the preferences of the artwork. The works of well known artists from the 19th century are compared with works of lesser known artists of the same time period to see if the fame of the artist truly carries any value to the works. And to find out the factors that could affect people's art preference.

METHODS

We aim to investigate whether the availability of the name of the artist will affect people's preference on artworks, and the depth of influence. In this section, we describe how we designed and customized our experiment to evaluate our hypothesis, how we distributed and conducted it, and why we chose our experimental design and the procedures.

Design

The basic framework for our experiment was an artificial "artwork preference ranking" created in the form of a survey where participants would rank 12 pairs of artworks created by 6 different artists from the 19th century. All the artists were selected based on the similarity and movements of their art, but each pairwise comparison happens between two artists from different ends of the spectrum to the other in terms of popularity. For instance, *Vincent van Gogh* was compared with the less famous *Paul Cezanne*, where both are post-impressionist painters that excel at portrait and still life paintings. Unbeknownst to the participants, we used the "multiple-worlds" experimental design. Participants were either exposed to the "nameless" condition, where they had no information on who the painting belongs to, or the "named" condition, within which the name of the artist was displayed beside the corresponding painting.

The participants, although not aware of these multiple worlds, were told that they were participating in a study of "preferences in art from the 19th century". After providing their informed consent, participants completed a brief survey that collected simple demographic information such as age, gender, etc. We also asked participants to evaluate themselves on both theoretical and practical aspects of art. Next, participants were sent to a series of pairwise comparisons of two paintings to give out their preferences. And then, finally, were presented with a multiple-choice question asking about reasoning behind their choices.

The independent variable of our experiment is the visibility of artists' names. And the dependent variable is the influence it poses over participants' preference on artworks, which is being measured by both the time difference and choices. We adopted a between-subjects approach where each participant is only exposed to a single version of our survey.

Participants

The survey was made available for 4 days. It was distributed in two fashions – via family & friends of the researchers and an online survey. On November 4 we published the "named" version of our survey on the subreddit *'/r/SampleSize/'* on the social media platform *Reddit*, a community dedicated to scientific, fun, and creative surveys with more than 173,000 users. Starting from November 6,

we shared the "nameless" survey with our close friends and families to get preliminary results. We received a total of 64 responses, out of which 48 provided substantial answers to our research questions. Therefore, the size of our study sample was 48 participants. Looking at the demographics (age, gender, background in art) we obtained the following information. For the "nameless" condition, the participant age brackets were: 18-24 years (37.5%), 25-34 (54.17%), and 45-54 (8.33%). 10 were male (41.67%), and 14 were female (58.33%). The average level of expertise that participants reported on the theoretical aspect of art was 4.54 (SD = 2.57), and 5.45 (SD = 2.54) on practical implementation of art. For the "named" condition, the participant age brackets were: 18-24 years (58.33%), 25-34 (20.83%), 35-44 (16.67%), and 45-54 (4.17%). 7 were male (29.17%), and 17 were female (70.83%). The average level of expertise that participants reported on the theoretical aspect of art was 3.65 (SD = 2.58), and 4.96 (SD = 2.46) on practical implementation of art.

RESULTS

The Background Difference

The "Named" group is designed as the control group, while the "Nameless" group, which the artists' name is offered beside the related artworks, is considered the experimental group. The background information of all 48 participants (24 people in each group) was listed in Table 3. And it indicates for both two groups, the female participants are more than the male participants (*Named: 70.83%>29.17%; Nameless: 58.33%>41.67%*). In Table 3, the knowledge degree of art refers to the experience with the theoretical and historical aspects of art. The implementation degree of skill means the experience with the practical implementation of art. Compared with the nameless group, the named group has more female participants and a relatively lower average degree of art knowledge and implementation.

Effect of name on art preference

Table 1 indicates that the nameless group *(N = 24)* was associated with the number of votes on famous artists' artwork *M = 6.74 (SD = 1.82)*. The named group' *(N = 24)* was associated with fewer votes on famous artists' artworks *M = 6.33 (SD = 1.735)*, and the Mean value and Std. Deviations were very close to the nameless group. To test that the fame of the artist influences people in making decisions about their preferences in art, an independent sample t-test was performed. And the number of votes on famous artists' paintings from each participant was adopted as the measurement. As shown in Table 1, the assumption of homogeneity of variances was tested and satisfied via Levene's **F** test, *F(46) = .263, p = .610*. The independent samples t-test indicated a not significant effect, *t (46) = .811, p = .422 (two-sided)*. Thus, the number of votes of famous artists' artworks from the nameless group and named group was similar and did not significantly differ.

Effect of name on time spent on making choice

Independent samples t-test was used to test whether the display of the artist's name of the paintings was associated with mean time consuming on choosing between two artworks. From Table 2, the nameless group *(N=24)* was associated with the average chosen time to spend on each artwork comparison *M =8.54 (SD = 4.48)*. By comparison, the named group *(N =24)* was associated with numerically more average time spent on making choices *M = 17.66 (SD = 15.95)*. And Levene's *F* test means that variances cannot be assumed as equal, *F(46) = 11.10, p = .002*. The independent sample t-test was associated with a statistically significant effect, *t (26.61) = -2.70, p = .006*. Thus, the invisibility of the name of the art painting was associated with a statistically significantly lower mean time consuming on choosing the painting in a comparison group.

Affected Factors for Art Preference

All participants have at least one motivation or affected factor when they consider their art preference. The experiment offered four known dimensions: color palette and aesthetics, subject of the painting, fame of the artist, and style of work. The frequency of known factors in the named group and nameless group is shown in Table 4. From the table, the frequency of each dimension on the named group and nameless group are similar, and the "Fame of the artist" was in the lowest votes in both groups (*4.65% in the nameless group, 2.27% in the named group*). While the "Color Palette and Aesthetics" gained the most recognition (*41.86% in the nameless group, 43.18% in the named group*). The "Subject of the Painting" and "Style of Work" both have around 20% votes in each named and nameless group.

Fewer participants gave open-ended answers in both groups (named and nameless). And most of them considered the emotion and content conveyed as an important aspect.

"Colors and aesthetics are important, but so too is the style and what the creative choices suggest and convey, and how much I enjoy the subject matter." (PR8)

"Strength of emotion conveyed." (PR11)

"Sense of story I can feel." (PR27)

Two participants mentioned the fame of the artist was excluded from their art preference motivation.

"I don't care about the fame of the artist." (PR8)

"My personal preferences. Sometimes it's color, sometimes it's style, sometimes it's just 'what would I rather hang in my house". It never has anything to do with the fame of the artist because that isn't something I care about, though sometimes an artist is famous for a reason." (PR30)

DISCUSSION

From both of the surveys, we notice that there is no significant impact of the fame of the artist. We find this via the t test and the responses stated by the participants. A notable inference from the survey is that it is the color palette and aesthetics that have a greater impact on preferences of art in comparison to the subject matter or the fame of the artist. Although these results were self reported by participants, one could assume that this is indeed what participants make their choices on.

Participants took a considerably longer time viewing art when the names were displayed. This is an interesting observation as one could assume that the extra time spent could be for simply reading the artist's name or paying closer attention to the work based on the name of the artist or even just by chance. Although this could aid our hypothesis, we have observed from our analysis that the hypothesis has proven to be false.

Table 1: Relationship between the visibility of the artist's name of the paintings and the preference towards artworks (through Independent T-test).

Group Statistics

	surveyType	N	Mean	Std.Deviation	Std.Error Mean
number of votes on famous artists' artwork	Nameless	24	6.75	1.824	.372
	Named	24	6.33	1.736	.354

Independent Sample Test

		Levene's Test		t-test for Equality of Means							
						Significance				95% Confidence Interval	
		F	Sigma	t	df	One-sided p	Two-sided p	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
number of votes on famous artists' artwork	Equal variances assumed	.263	.610	.811	46	.211	.422	.417	.514	-.168	1.451
	Equal variances not assumed			.811	45.889	.211	.422	.417	.514	-.168	1.451

Table 2: Relationship between the visibility of the artist's name of the paintings and average time spent on making a choice between two artworks (through Independent T-test).

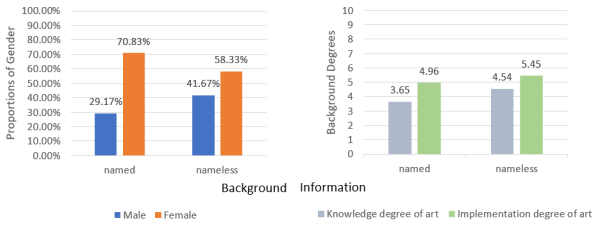
Group Statistics

	surveyType	N	Mean	Std.Deviation	Std.Error Mean
average chosen time	Nameless	24	8.5383	4.48309	.91511
	Named	24	17.6604	15.94594	3.25495

Independent Sample Test

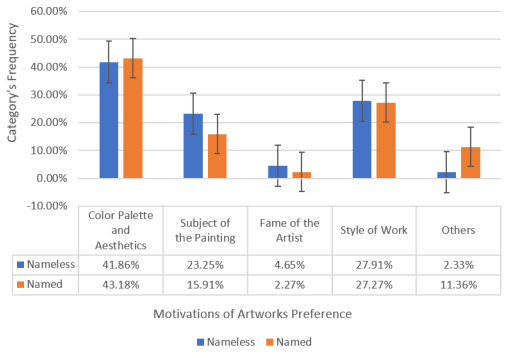
		Levene's Test		t-test for Equality of Means							
						Significance				95% Confidence Interval	
		F	Sigma	t	df	One-sided p	Two-sided p	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
average chosen time	Equal variances assumed	11.10	.002	-2.70	46	.005	.010	-9.12	3.38	-15.93	-2.32
	Equal variances not assumed			-2.70	26.61	.006	.012	-9.12	3.38	-16.06	-2.18

Table 3: Background Comparison of Participants Between "Named" Group and "Nameless" Group. Based on 48 participants (24 in each group).



We chose works of 19th century artists to ensure that most participants, regardless of their experience with art, would be able to identify at least some of the popular works. That being said, we did observe that participants had a lower average to average skill level with respect to theoretical and practical implementation of art. As researchers, we made our best attempts in ensuring that none of the other elements in the art would hinder the choices made by the participants. Each pair of artworks were chosen based on similarity of subject, style and in some cases, the color palette. Every well known artist was compared with a lesser known artist who incorporated similar styles and depicted similar subjects in their works. With respect to this measure, the data collected proved

Table 4: Background Comparison of Participants Between "Named" Group and "Nameless" Group. Based on 48 participants (24 in each group).



that the control variable, i.e. the artist's name, did not quite have much of an impact on the preferences.

Reviewing our initial points of discussion regarding the research topic, we see there is a marked difference in our assumptions versus the outcome. It is probable that due to our small sample size, we did run the risk of having our research resulting in a type II error. It is interesting to note that some of the other reasons that people provided for their choices in art were the sense of story, emotional impact and the likeness of the art if it were to be displayed at their house. The motivations indicate that people are less likely to conform to a single reason when it comes to a preference in something as subjective as art.

Limitations and Future Work

The current study suffers from a number of limitations. The artworks that were being compared in this study were handpicked by ourselves based on the similarity and movements of the art style. As a result, it is possible that some of the paintings we selected are universally famous and the artist could be inferred in the "nameless" condition. To tackle this limitation in future studies, we would include more niche and lesser-known artworks from famous artists to counterbalance this effect. Also due to the technical limitation of our questionnaire software, we were not able to randomize the order of questions without sacrificing the availability of data on submission time.

The participants who answered the "named" condition in this study were randomly drawn from a subreddit, whereas the "nameless" condition was shared with our close friends and families. It is highly possible that these groups differ in distribution of demographics, which might lead to certain groups being more knowledgeable on both theoretical and practical aspects of art than the others. In the future studies, replications using varied demographic samples may be informative in exploring the influence of the fame of artists on preference of art. Also, to establish a benchmark on artworks, additional unbiased ratings should also be collected in future studies to supplement self-reported questionnaires; for instance, reviews from both art professionals and the general public.

CONCLUSION

Our research suggests that the fame of the artist poses no significant influence on the preference over artworks. To our surprise, the preference is more impacted by the color palette and aesthetics of the painting itself. There are several things that are different about the artworks and we are not sure which of these lead to the similarities and differences in the results that we observed. On the other hand, the time participants took viewing the art to make a judgement is significantly longer when the name of the artist is displayed. We presume that the name serves as a supporting factor in the decision-making process when participants are making an assessment.

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