

Navruz Karimov, a participant of the CABAR.asia School of Analytics conducted a study of the most popular topics in the songs of Tajik performers. Methods, results, and conclusions of this study in his article for CABAR.asia

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On the air of the Tajikistan national television and radio channels, “patriotic” songs about the achievements of the motherland and the values of independence are played most often. However, in the most popular Tajik songs, love remains the main theme.

Another peculiarity of popular Tajik songs is gender differences. Male singers are more egocentric in their work. In contrast to them, female singers often appeal to their lover and think more about his feelings.

We decided to analyze the data of video hosting websites Youtube, Topvideo and domestic music Internet portals in order to understand how the propaganda of “patriotic values”, which has been conducted by national radio and TV channels over the past few years, affects the tastes of the mass audience of Tajikistan.

Also, as part of our research, we drew parallels between modern Tajik songs and foreign hits for 2020. Western music has a strong influence and sets global trends. However, our analysis showed that Western trends did not have a significant impact on the lyrics of Tajik songwriters and on the genres used.

Similar studies of motives in musical art have already been carried out by foreign researchers. For example, in 2003, The Social Science Journal published an article [“Expressions of love, sex, and hurt in popular songs: a content analysis of all-time greatest hits”](#), in which a group of researchers analyzed the 100 most popular songs from 1958 to 1998 for the expression of love feelings in them. It turned out that in the 90s, the singers became freer, and even more individualistic. Women were singing more frequently about sex; furthermore, selfishness could be seen in their lyrics. Another trend at the end of the last century - more hit songs were sung by women and black performers.

## Research methodology

Based on data on listening and viewing Tajik songs and videos from 22 independent sources, we collected the weighted average TOP 20 Tajik music songs over the past 4 years and analyzed their content in order to identify musical preferences of Tajikistanis and gender differences of performers.

We identified the most common words in lyrics, and eliminated those words that do not carry [any special semantic meaning](#). The analysis was complicated by the presence of grammatical mistakes and dialect words in the lyrics. We had to translate all the songs into the literary Tajik language to detriment of rhymes, combine nouns with different declensions and verbs of different tenses in order to get more representative statistics of frequently repeated words.

## A weighted selection of popular Tajik songs:

1. Sadriddin Najmiddin - Namesha
2. Yulduz Usmanova, Shabanmi Surayo - Tarolla Dalli
3. Shakhlo Davlatova, Yahyochon Davlatov - Garibi
4. Download Shabnami Surayo - Guli guli
5. Download Farzonai Khurshed - Lali Badakhshan
6. Ismailjon, Farahmand - Ohi dili zori man
7. Sadriddin Najmiddin - Ruyo
8. Zulaikho Mahmadsheeva - Mamnunam
9. Farahmand Karimov - Layli-Layli
10. Farzonai Khurshed - Shart nest
11. Shabnami Surayo - Mast bisham
12. Zulaikho Mahmadsheeva - Dukhtaraki Farkhori
13. Kadami Kurbon - Azizam
14. Khuchastai Mirzovoli, Madina Aknazarova - Az man charo ranjidai
15. Nigina Amonkulova - Dilmoma
16. Zafar Ayubi - Sheri Akai Zafar
17. Akhliddin Fakhriddin - Ohi man ast
18. Farzonai Khurshed - Shim Shimi Boron
19. Azizbek Dzhuraev, Farahnoz - Zangirum
20. Kadami Kurbon - Malika kushti bobota

It turned out that Tajik artists mostly use the nouns “soul”, “heart”, “boy”, “night”, “love”,

“flower”, “lily”, “sin”, “dear”, “girl” and “friend”. As you can see, the songs are dedicated to the theme of love, which is the main object to praise in popular culture.

Of course, themes for musical compositions can be more specific, for example, about a certain social problem (poverty, violence), but love, beauty, romance are popular, because they concern the widest possible audience and remain timelessly relevant. The popularity of love themes is also affected by the attitude of Tajik society to music as a kind of entertainment. Thus, it can be assumed that the mass Tajik listener has little interest in political and social problems.

It is curious that men most often sing about their feelings using the pronoun “I” (112 times).

And women, in contrast to men, sing about their beloved one using the pronoun “you” (115 times) and mention themselves almost twice less than men – only 63 times.

This tendency is confirmed by the fact that women talk about the opposite sex three times more than men: the word “bacha” (boy) is repeated 51 times, while “dukhtar” (girl) – only 17 times. In other cases, the theme of love appears equally in the lyrics of both sexes.

The count of unique words showed that men use an average of 90.4 words per song, and women – 78.4 words, 13.3% less than men. After filtration of the text from words empty of meaning, the difference remains about the same – women use 12.7% fewer words than men. More details in the graph below.

On average, to write a hit song in the Tajik language, it is enough to use no more than 84 unique words, among which must be “soul”, “heart”, “boy”, “night”, “love”, “flower”, “lily”, “sin”, “dear”, “girl” or “friend”.

Note that in our selection there were slightly more women than men (by 6 percent).

The regional factor seems to play a big role. Almost half of the popular performers of our top were born in different parts of the Khatlon region.

## **Billboard’s “Year-End Charts Hot 100 Songs” for 2020.**

The modern music market is highly developed in the United States. It is this country that most often brings up artists who are getting placed in various ratings, join the halls of fame and receive the most prestigious awards. American performers are among the first to innovate the music industry and set the standards that the rest of the world is reaching out to.

Note that modern foreign charts partially reflecting the trends of the last decades of the 20th century, which were discovered in the mentioned 2003 study. The modern hits are referring to sex, and among the performers of such compositions there are many (or even most) blacks. However, there are fewer women in the top twenty most popular performers.

Comparing Tajik songs with the American [chart](#) will help to understand the differences and similarities in the musical content of two cultures – Western and Eastern.

Billboard’s Top 20 Popular Songs include:

1. The Weeknd - Blinding Lights
2. Post Malone - Circles
3. Roddy Ricch - The Box
4. Dua Lipa - Don’t Start Now
5. DaBaby, Roddy Ricch - Rockstar
6. Harry Styles - Adore You
7. Future, Drake - Life Is Good
8. Maroon 5 - Memories
9. Maren Morris - The Bones
10. Lewis Capaldi - Someone You Loved
11. Doja Cat - Say So
12. Gabby Barrett, Charlie Puth - I Hope
13. Jack Harlow, DaBaby, Tory Lanez, Lil Wayne - What’s Poppin
14. Tones And I - Dance Monkey
15. Megan Thee Stallion - Savage
16. Arizona Zervas - Roxanne
17. Justin Bieber, Quavo - Intentions

18. Billie Eilish - Everything I Wanted
19. SAINT JHN - Roses
20. Harry Styles - Watermelon Sugar

There are 17 men among the performers of Billboard “hot list” and only 6 women.

The lyrics of English-language songs were also filtered: parenthetical words, conjunctions, nouns empty of meaning were removed. There are more than a hundred of such “odd” words, some were borrowed from the [Github Gist](#), and verbs of different tenses were combined at the one tense.

Both men and women in their lyrics talk about themselves most often using the pronoun “I” (I), racist, sexist expressions are also popular. Racist expressions are used most often by men (44 times), and sexist - both by men (24 times) and women (23 times). In the lyrics of male performers, there is also a large amount of explicit content.

There are a lot of keywords that are usually used in love topics: “feel”, “hope”, “dance”, “love”, “sugar”, “baby”. However, Western artists also use other adjectives and verbs to describe their feelings, which apart from the context do not give the necessary understanding of the text.

The comparative lexical diversity of the lyrics of Western artists is confirmed by the average number of unique words, which is 130.7 per song. This is 36% more than the average number of words in Tajik songs. Male singers use an average of 135.9 words per song - by 15.5% more than female singers who use an average of 114.8 words per song.

This phenomenon is explained by the presence in the US chart of several compositions in the hip-hop genre, in which greater attention is given to the lyrics than to the musical components. The ability to manipulate words, come up with new rhymes and speed up the pace of recitative (flow) are highly valued in rap culture. Due to the high competition in the Western music industry, rap and hip-hop artists have to master their lyrics.

Cleansing English-language songs from “odd” words make the statistics dramatically fall. It turns out that men use only 98.4 unique words, while women use 77.1 (21.7% less than men). For Tajik female performers, this gap in the vocabulary is almost 2 times less and is only 12.7%.

## Conclusions

The weighted top of Tajik songs is more gender balanced, but lacks genre diversity. This might mean that the Tajik listeners give preference to pop and dance compositions.

On the contrary the Billboard “Year-End Charts Hot 100 Songs” represents synthwave, rhythm and blues, soul, hip-hop, country, alternative, etc. genres, which tells about the diversity of musical preferences among Western music listeners.

Returning to the hypothesis about the popularity of patriotic songs among the Tajik audience, we can say that the study does not confirm it. None of the songs of the weighted average top contains propaganda of “patriotic” sentiments. At least in the form in which they are understood by state television and radio channels.

The theme of most of the songs in both charts is the same - love. The difference is that Western rap artists sing more about sex and material success, and, unlike to Tajik artists, use explicit language.

The Tajik authorities seek to control the content of the songs and even try to limit the genre variety. For example, in early 2014, the former mayor of Dushanbe, Mahmadsaid Ubaidulloyev, [banned](#) the playing of non-traditional music on public transport that glorifies the criminal world, has sexual content and promotes “non-traditional Islam”. He also [placed](#) the rap and rock music as genres “alien to traditional and universal values.”

Musical art reflects sentiments, values and cultural differences. For greater accuracy of the conclusions in such studies, it is necessary to develop a system for assessing the popularity of songs, which should be based on data on sales of songs, the number of airplays on radio stations and streaming services. This method will make it possible to more accurately and deeper understand the important trends in the evolution of the cultural life of modern Tajik society.

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