

Language laboratory: Communication of statistics and data  
business analytics

# THE ANATOMY OF A HIT

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DATA STORYTELLING GROUP PROJECT



# SCENARIO

We are commissioned by **Rolling Stone**, one of the most influential cultural magazines in the music industry, to create a data-driven feature for their digital platform. The goal is to **reveal the underlying structure of today's most popular music on Spotify** — not through opinion or taste, but through data. As release dates are not included in the dataset, rather than focusing on historical evolution this project will analyze the “Anatomy” of popular tracks on Spotify.

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Rolling Stone’s editorial team envisions a **visually rich, scroll-based narrative** — something that speaks to their curious, culture-aware, digitally native readers, while keeping the visual tone aligned with their journalistic aesthetic.

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The final piece should blend statistical clarity with cultural storytelling, helping readers not only see what defines a hit, but why it matters in today’s algorithmic music landscape.





# THE AUDIENCE



## EMERGING MUSICIANS BEDROOM PRODUCERS

Very high interest in music creation  
Low/medium undersatanding of music analytics

**Short attention span:** expect stimulation and immediate feedback

**High interest in topic:** strong desire to improve their music

**Interest in angles:** Practical “what should I change in my song?”

**Motivation:** Improve track quality, follow trends, increase chances of virality

## CULTURE-INTERESTED YOUNG ADULTS CASUAL MUSIC LISTENERS

Medium familiarity with popculture  
Low familiarity with audio features

**Medium attention span:** as long as visuals are engaging

**High interest in topic:** want to understand cultural/music trends

**Interest in angles:** “What defines today’s sound”

**Motivation:** Curiosity, learning, cultural discovery.



# DATA QUESTIONS



## The "TikTok Brain"-Effect

Do shorter songs outperform longer ones in the streaming era?



## The Pop Singularity

Are the boundaries between genres blurring into one universal sound profile?



## The Power of Profanity

Does the "Parental Advisory" warning act as a barrier to entry, or is it actually a magnet for higher popularity?

## The Anatomy of Success

Can we construct the average shape of a modern hit?



## 1. What Makes a Hit? (Intro + Hook)

Frame the central question (“What defines a hit today?”) and set tone to pull readers into the story

- Present the dataset: 169k tracks, 20+ audio & metadata variables.
- Explain the mission: dissect the anatomy of today’s most popular songs.

## 2. The Popularity Spectrum (Distribution of Popularity)

Popularity column to show:

- Histogram of popularity
- What “being popular” means in Spotify terms

**Goal:** The reader realizes that hits are rare and worth exploring.

## 3. Feature-by-Feature Anatomy of Popular Tracks

- Highlight how features like duration, valence and explicit rating distinguish high- and low-popularity tracks.
- Answers the questions about the “TikTok brain” and the power of profanity

# FORMAT & STRUCTURE: SCROLLYTELLING

## 4. Genre Fingerprints: Do Genres Still Sound Different?

Uses average audio features per genre to reveal:

- whether genres maintain unique profiles or overlap
- Directly answers the pop singularity question

## 5. The Hit Blueprint: Synthesizing the Findings

Combines the insights to visualize the profile of a popular track:

- common feature combinations
- which genres dominate in popularity

This section visually constructs:  
“This is the average shape of a modern hit.”

## 6. Why It Matters: The Takeaway

Connects insights to streaming culture:

- Explores how streaming algorithms influence song structure
- Examines the tension between artistic freedom and data optimization

THANK  
YOU

