

The Effects of Music Congruency and Lyrics on Advertisement Recall

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ABSTRACT

Music has been widely used in advertising because it is believed to improve recall of the advertised product. In this study we examine the effects of vocal music versus instrumental music on advertisement recall. We hypothesized that the instrumental version of a song will lead to better recall than would the vocal version. The instrumental version should prompt the participants to generate the lyrics in their head, leading to better recall. We also examined the effect of music and product congruency on advertisement recall. Participants listened to songs that were either related to the product (i.e., congruent) or that were unrelated to the product (i.e., incongruent). We hypothesized that the congruent condition will produce higher levels of recall than the incongruent condition because the participants will be able to form a connection between the product and the music, allowing the message to be communicated more effectively. This study utilized 76 students from the University of Wisconsin LaCrosse. Each participant listened to an advertisement and was asked to recall the advertisement immediately and one week later. Results show immediate recall was greater than delayed recall; however, there was no significant difference in recall between the conditions. Possible explanations are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

Music in advertising can be used to attract the listener's attention, carry the advertised product's message, and act as a mnemonic device. Music also creates excitement and adds energy to the message being conveyed in an advertisement. Clearly, advertisers view music as having sales potential. Stewart and Furse (1986) reported that music was present in 42% of the 1,000 television advertisements they examined. Presumably, music is used so often in advertising because it serves to enhance memory – serving as a mnemonic device. Music in advertising is used to help consumers remember information about the target product in the advertisement.

Advertisers enhance the memorability of their advertising slogans by presenting them in the form of musical jingles. Musical jingles are simply music with lyrics. The musical lyrics and melodies in jingles interact and help listeners retain lyrical information about the advertised product in their long-term memory (Wallace, 1994). The jingle is encoded into the listener's brain where it can be later retrieved through memory recall (Wallace, 1994). If the individual were to sing along with the song it would produce a powerful effect on their emotions, grabbing their attention, and further causing them to identify the product with the message being conveyed. Therefore, songs are an effective way to communicate a concept or idea in a memorable way (Yalch, 1991).

More information about a product can be encoded into memory if the listener is familiar with the music used in the advertisement because this allows the listener to generate any missing lyrics from memory. Familiarity with music allows advertisers more freedom in advertisements to either present an instrumental version of a song, without the lyrics, or a vocal version of a song, with the lyrics so individuals will not have to spend cognitive energy remembering the song. However, exposure to an instrumental version of a popular song can further enhance the encoding of memory by forcing the consumer to generate the lyrics of the song that carry the advertising message (Roehm, 2001). Self-generated information is typically remembered better than information that is merely perceived (Mulligan, 2002). Indeed, many cognitive studies suggest that material on which individuals elaborate or generate additional thought is material that is best remembered at a later date (Roehm, 2001). Simply listening to the song in the advertisement requires less generative work and can instead involve more passive reception of the ad's lyrical message.

Roehm (2001) tested the effects of using a vocal versus an instrumental version of a popular song on recall of an advertisement. Recall was measured by the number of specific lyrics from the song that were applied to the product. Roehm found that participants who were not familiar with the song scored higher on recall when they listened to a vocal version of the song. Participants who were highly familiar with the song recalled more if an

instrumental version was used. Roehm argued that participants who were highly familiar with the song and heard just the melody actually generated the lyrics themselves, which led to higher recall.

While music is capable of communicating meanings of advertising messages on its own, in radio advertisements music is accompanied by a voiceover, which advertises the target product (Hung, 2000). Thus, the effect of music in advertising is also determined by its relationship with the product being advertised. Listeners use all auditory information available to them to communicate meanings. One interesting area of research regarding advertising, is the effect of music in congruent or incongruent radio advertising. In congruent radio advertisements the music is complementary to the product being advertised and therefore reinforces the two connecting elements to further communicate the advertisement message (Hung, 2000). The two complementary elements interact and communicate a deeper meaning to the listener. With an incongruent message the music and product being advertised evoke different meanings which cause the listener to pay attention to one or the other of the two elements, failing to make any connection between their meanings and further splitting their attention.

Hung (2000) explored the role of congruency in advertising by matching two coffee commercials with music that was either congruent or incongruent with the advertised product. Hung's results showed that the congruency or incongruency of the music and the product played a very large role on how the advertisement was perceived. For example, one of the commercials was set in a café and played moderate tempo, background music, which evoked a sense of a trendy business setting. When Hung changed the background music to a slower tempo that sounded more tropical, the participants thought that the commercial was about secret meetings or nonconformists. Participants associated coffee more strongly with the business setting so they remembered the product more strongly after watching the commercial with the moderate tempo music.

The current study combined the variables of congruency and presence or absence of lyrics. Recall of information contained in the advertisement was measured using a series of three questions. We hypothesized that an over additive interaction of the two variables will occur, such that instrumental version (absence of voice) that is congruent with the product would lead to the highest level of recall. We also predicted that there would be a main effect of instrumental music on recall because the instrumental version should prompt the participants to generate the lyrics in their head. Finally, we predict that music that is congruent with the product would produce higher recall, because participants should be able to connect the product to a familiar context.

METHOD

We solicited 76 University of Wisconsin-La Crosse undergraduate students to participate in our study. Each condition contained from 18 to 20 of these 76 participants. Most of the participants came from the introductory psychology course for which they received extra credit. Most of the participant pool was European American.

Participants signed up for one of the four conditions. Each participant listened to three radio advertisements. Two major independent variables were manipulated. First, the type of music was manipulated - the advertisements featured either vocal or instrumental music. Second, the congruency of the music was manipulated to be either congruent with the product or not. Consequently, there were four conditions (congruent, vocal; congruent, instrumental; incongruent, vocal; incongruent, instrumental). Participants were asked to listen to three advertisements closely. Two were filler advertisements and the third was the target advertisement. The target advertisement featured the same product, online banking. The specific product was selected according to the criteria that participants were likely to have had previous experience of advertising of the product. The first of the two filler advertisements was about a trophy collecting hobby store. The second filler advertisement was about an antique clock store. The filler advertisements were chosen based on the assumption that the participants had no previous exposure to the advertisements.

Four different versions of the target radio advertisement were prepared. Each version of the advertisement featured the same message spoken by the same male radio employee accompanied by either music that was congruent with the advertisement in an instrumental version of a song, music that was congruent with the advertisement in a vocal version of the same song, music that was not congruent with the advertisement in an instrumental version of a different song, and music that was not congruent with the advertisement in a vocal version of that same song. The congruent song used in the experiment was 'I Want Money,' by the artist Calloway and the incongruent song used was 'Here Comes the Sun,' by the Beatles. Each group first listened to the same filler advertisement, followed by the target advertisement, and then to the same second filler advertisement. Immediately after listening to the series of ads participants were tested on recall of information contained in the advertisements. Only recall of information in the target ad was analyzed, however information on all three advertisements was asked in order to eliminate any biases toward the purpose of the experiment.

Recall of information in the target advertisement was measured using three questions. First, participants were asked to recall the type of products in the advertisements. Participants were then asked to recall the specific brands

of the products. Following, participants were asked to recall any specific information in the advertisement (e.g. a slogan). Finally, participants were asked of any other thoughts or comments on the advertisements.

In order to test for long term memory retention of information contained in the target advertisement participants were asked to come back one week later. Participants were again asked the same four questions on the three advertisements they heard from the previous week. Participants were also asked an additional five series of opinionated questions, pertaining solely to the target ad, that were measured on a 7-point scale ranging from 1, low, to 7, high. As a manipulation check, participants were asked to rate the extent to which the song or message was congruent with the product in the advertisement. To determine whether the participant was familiar with the music participants were asked if they had ever heard the music played in the target advertisement, and also to rate their familiarity of that music. Participants were also asked to rate their liking of the advertisement, and how likely they were to use the product in the advertisement.

RESULTS

Recall was measured based on the correctness of each answer and the correct position of the answer (not confusing the target advertisement with the filler advertisements). If the answer was correct and had correct placement, it received a score of 1. If the answer was correct but placed incorrectly, it received a score of half of a point. Since there were three questions (product type, brand name, and any other specific information), the highest possible score was three.

We used a 2 (congruency) x 2 (lyrics) x 2 (recall session) between-subjects factorial ANOVA to test the relationships between the congruency or incongruency of music and product, and the presence or absence of lyrics. The main effect of congruency was not significant $F(1, 72) = .16, p > .05$. The main effect of lyrics was not significant $F(1, 72) = .34, p > .05$. The interaction between congruency and lyrics was not significant $F(1, 72) = .52, p > .05$. The first recall session was significantly higher than the second recall session $F(1, 72) = 50.46, p < .05$. Participants mean recall for the first session was 2.32. Mean recall for the second session was 1.56.

The participants were also asked to rate characteristics of the advertisements on a one through seven likert scale. Participants that listened to the noncongruent advertisement were significantly less familiar with the song than participants that listened to the congruent song $F(1, 72) = 8.79, p < .05$. The mean familiarity for the noncongruent song was 2.05, while the mean for the congruent song was 3.27. The overall mean for song familiarity was 2.64. There were no significant differences in how well the song fit the advertised product, all $p > .05$; the congruent mean was 3.32 and the noncongruent mean was 3.28. There were no significant differences in how likely a participant was to use the advertised product, all $p > .05$; the overall mean was 2.37. There also were no differences in how much the participants liked the advertisement based on what condition they were in, all $p > .05$; the overall mean was 3.67.

DISCUSSION

Recall of the advertised product found no effect of either variable. It was hypothesized that overall the advertisement paired with the congruent music would enhance recall of information contained in the ad versus noncongruent music. No effect found could be the result of many factors. For one, both songs had the same musical rhythm to them. They were both upbeat songs that would equally catch the listener's attention to an advertisement. Perhaps only the lyrics of the songs were either congruent, or noncongruent with the banking advertisement, but the musical tone of the songs were not. Alternatively, there could have been a lack of congruency between the music and the voiceover in the advertisement. Both of the songs were upbeat, however the voiceover in the background was downbeat and monotone. It has been reasoned that connotations of certain musical styles interact better with the connotations of certain types of voiceovers featured in the same ad, further enhancing recall of the information provided by the voiceover (Stewart & Furse, 1986). In our study there was no difference in the participant's ratings for how well each song fit the product in the ad. In other words, participants in all conditions rated the song in the advert as equally congruent to the product in the ad. This further is why no significant differences were in recall for information of the product in the congruent and noncongruent conditions.

It was also hypothesized that instrumental versions of a song, especially when using the congruent music, would enhance recall of the information contained in the ad. Our research did not support this data and perhaps for an undoubtful reason. The theory behind the instrumental version of the songs enhancing recall was that it forced the listener's to provide the missing lyrics in their head, making them more intuitive to the advertisement (Roehm, 2001). How are listeners suppose to generate the missing lyrics in their head if they are not familiar with the song? We assumed the two songs chosen for the experiment would be familiar to the majority of the participants, but our research indicated that overall only half of the participants were familiar with the songs. Even further, the

familiarity of the two songs were rated differently. Participants were significantly more familiar with the congruent song than the noncongruent song. This alone, would produce confounding results. Also, the rating of familiarity of the song in the advertisement was only asked on the second recall session, one week after the advertisement was heard. Perhaps the participants did not remember the song used in the advertisement from the previous week and if the question were worded differently, such as containing the title of the song in it, the participants would have confirmed that they were in fact familiar with the song.

In future research this confounding variable needs to be controlled. A pilot study testing the familiarity of the songs that are intended to be used in the experiment should be done. This would further assure that the participants will be familiar with the songs used in the experiment. Also in future research the participant's familiarity of the song should be rated immediately after listening to the song, before they forget the song used in the advertisement.

Other variables measured in our research were the likelihood of purchasing the product in the ad, and the participants liking of the ad. The data obtained from these variables also give some insight as to why we received the results that we did. Participants gave a slightly higher rating for their likelihood of purchasing the banking product when it was paired with the congruent music versus the noncongruent music, however the difference was not significant. In previous research these differences were found significant and something to consider (Hargreaves, Law, Mackenzie, & North, 2004). They claimed that music congruency to the product in the ad is beneficial because it produces more emotional responses to the ad (Hargreaves, Law, Mackenzie, & North, 2004). This cannot be considered in our experiment because the participants did not detect a difference in congruency between the two songs and the product.

Participants in all four conditions rated their liking for the advertisement equally, and also on the lower end of the rating scale. This finding may have also contributed to the results obtained on recall of the banking ad. According to previous research, musical congruence with a product in an ad promotes liking for that advertisement (Hargreaves, Law, Mackenzie, & North, 2004). If the participants did not detect differences in congruency to the ad between the two songs, then they will probably not rate their likings for the ad differently either.

It is clear why no effect of either variable was found significant in the present research. There was no difference found in the participant's ratings for how congruent each song was with the banking product. Also, most participants were not familiar with either song used in the advertisements, inhibiting them from generating the missing lyrics during the instrumental versions of the songs. In future research involving the interaction of product and music congruency, and the presence or absence of lyrics in advertising these interferences with hypothesized results should be more greatly controlled.

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