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## **BRANDS AND BANDS: HOW MUSIC INFLUENCES FIRST IMPRESSIONS OF ENDORSERS AND BRANDS**

### **ABSTRACT**

The ability of music to create differentiating effects on subjects' impressions of product endorsers and brands of an advertisement were examined based on the theory of 'musical fit'. Subjects ( $N = 405$ ) listened to one of three versions of a radio commercial in which the music varied in each version. The music selections differed in style, tempo, rhythm, etc., but matched product and message of the commercial in terms of 'musical fit'. After listening to the commercial, subjects rated the endorser's personality via the external version of a personality inventory. Impressions of the brand were measured using Likert-type scales. The results concur with previous findings (Zander, 2006): depending on musical style, music can lead to significantly different impressions of the endorser as well as the brand.

**KEYWORDS:** *Music, memory, emotional reactions, brand perception, endorser perception, brand attitude*

### **1. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

#### **The power of music to evoke memories and emotions**

Music, composed with the purpose of selling consumer goods and services, makes up a fair proportion of the songs, jingles, and melodies encountered by the public on a daily basis. Whether we go shopping, listen to the radio, watch television, or surf the internet, we are likely to be exposed to music that is crafted with the explicit purpose of supporting sales (Jantzen and Graakjaer, 2009). Music communicates with our hearts and minds; it serves as a powerful connection into our emotions. According to Morris and Boone (1998), music is the language that has the greatest force of persuasion for consumers and one of its main objectives is to evoke emotions. This opinion is shared by other researchers (Alexomanolaki et al., 2006; Oakes and North, 2006; North et al., 2004; Yalch, 1991; Park and Young, 1986) who argue that, apart from fixing the memory in people's minds, music's main function in advertisement is to generate emotions.

Levitin (2007) lays out a possible neural basis for the relation between music and emotions. Levitin observed that the cerebellum, the most “primitive” part of our brain, typically associated with non-conscious timing and movement, appeared to take an active role in tracking the beat of a song, and more interestingly, the cerebellum becomes active in response to liking or finding music familiar. The cerebellum has strong connections to the amygdala, associated with memory of emotional events, and the frontal lobe, responsible for executive function. Levitin (2007) also explains that memory is so connected to the experience of music, that one could venture to say we wouldn’t have music at all if we didn’t have memory. With memory, our brains formulate schemas, the patterns, organization and rules of how music goes together. This occurs non-consciously early in development. From these schemas, are then born expectations of music. For instance, we are able to recognize the root of a scale/key of a song we are listening to, and when the notes stray away from this root, we anticipate a return to the root, a resolution (both for the music and for our psyche). It is anticipation and expectation derived from schemas that is key to the emotional drive of music. Our brains take enjoyment both in correctly anticipating where music will go, and in being pleasantly surprised when talented composers and musicians defy these anticipations (see Morton, 2007).

Additionally, Levitin posits that, like the responses to sexual stimulation and drug consumption, music increases the release of hormones in the brain, mainly endorphins (dopamine and adrenaline) and oxytocin, giving rise to activity in the circuits of the brain associated with the autonomous nervous system. It can faithfully produce physical reactions such as perspiration, sexual excitation and trembling or shivering in the spinal column. Levitin (2007) also examines the possible evolutionary origin and biological usefulness of music. A competing view, one that Darwin (1871) held, is that music was selected by evolution because it signals certain kinds of intellectual, physical and sexual fitness to a potential mate.

### **The musical effects in advertising**

The role music plays in advertising must be considered carefully because it attracts attention, transports implicit and explicit messages, generates emotions and helps one retain information. Previous explanations of musical effects in advertising can be attributed to three predominant concepts in advertising research (see Zander, 2006): the classical conditioning paradigm, the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) and the concept of musical fit.

*a) The classical conditioning paradigm*

Classical conditioning implies that pairing a product (neutral stimulus) with a well-liked piece of music (unconditioned stimulus) will produce an association between the two, and therefore a preference for the product (a conditioned response). One of the most popular experiments regarding the effects of music in advertising was Gerald J. Gorn's experiment (Gorn, 1982). In keeping to the classical conditioning approach, he paired a light blue or a beige coloured pen (neutral stimulus) with both well-liked and disliked music (unconditioned stimulus). Seventy-nine percent of the subjects chose the pen with music they liked – a conditioned reaction. Further studies by Bierley et al. (1985) and Tom (1995) supported Gorn's results, but other examinations (Allen and Madden, 1985; Pitt and Abratt, 1988) did not arrive at the same conclusions. It was not possible to create such conditioned responses for products of higher personal relevance like condoms. Middlestadt et al. (1994) doubted that studies using the classical conditioning paradigm could measure affective reactions to music. They found that music was able to spotlight different features of products, to influence the recipients' feelings, and as well to influence their beliefs. Scherer and Zentner (2001) defined the affective changes that music is supposed to produce in the listener and identified the determinants of the listening situation including the musical structure of the piece, relevant listener state and trait characteristics, and respective context.

*b) The ELM*

The ELM by Petty and Cacioppo (1981) and the involvement-concept connected with it examined the topic in more detail and provided an integral basis to explain contradictory findings. ELM postulates two ways of changing or creating one's attitudes: a central route and a peripheral one. In theory, attitudes are defined as general evaluations of ourselves, other persons, objects or facts. These general evaluations rely on behavioural, affective and cognitive experiences and influence our behaviour, our emotions, our preferences and our knowledge. Attitudes are influenced through the central route when one has the motivation, opportunity and ability to carefully process information about a product. Then, the likelihood of elaboration is high and the person is in a state of high involvement with the product. If there is no motivation, opportunity or ability to process the product information, the peripheral route of persuasion remains in the foreground. Here, attitudes are formed less by active thinking about the object and its characteristics than by positive or negative associations with the object caused by music. The person in this case is in a state of low involvement with the product and conditioning effects are more likely. In a state of high

involvement, the tendency of music to evoke emotion should disturb the recipients' purpose to elaborate the information within a commercial. The ELM was supported by several studies involving cues other than music (e.g. Petty et al., 1983; Stuart et al., 1987). Related musical effects were examined by Park and Young in 1986. As predicted by the ELM, music influenced subjects best in a state of lower involvement and disturbed subjects in a condition of high involvement. Recently, Olsen (2002) showed that information without sound is recalled better than information highlighted with music. Along the lines of the ELM, Chebat et al. (2001) described a model predicting that the effects of music on attitudes are moderated by cognitive processes (number of thoughts and depth of information processing). However, the authors warn that enhancing cognitive activity is no panacea, since they found that higher activity is associated with lower attitudes.

*c) The idea of musical fit*

MacInnis and Park (1991) argued that music that fits the ad, that interacts with the recipients' individual perception of its relevance or appropriateness towards the central ad message and product, may also have a positive effect on consumers in a state of high involvement: when elements of a stimulus set correspond with other items in the set, the individual parts are not perceived as separable, do not compete with one another for cognitive resources, and hence create 'emergent meaning'. In their experiment, the authors emphasized that music conforming to the commercial and its elements was able to change high-involvement consumers' attitudes positively because it literally 'undercoated' their convictions about the commercial's content. Thus, music here was less effective in influencing the attitudes toward the advertisement (as the classical conditioning approach would suggest) than by transporting and activating (further) relevant information. Hung (2000, 2001) considered the process by which consumers use music to create meanings. Her results indicated that the recipients' knowledge of cultural texts form a reference point for reading commercials. Music in congruent ads reduced 'noise' by reinforcing the connecting cultural context to communicate meanings (see also Mattila and Wirtz, 2001).

Different musical styles may provide different information for the same product. For example, either a rock song or a classical work could be used in a commercial for a car, which is considered as a typical high involvement product (Baker, 1993; Kroeber-Riel, 1993). The rock song would probably underline consumers' beliefs about the power, speed and competitiveness of the car, whereas the classical piece might emphasize beliefs about its interior trim, luxury and elegance. According to the idea of musical fit, both versions would

make sense in their aim to transport relevant information about the car because both are congruent. The focus of this study is to examine what exactly happens when appropriate pieces of music are selected.

## **2. OBJECTIVE AND HYPOTHESES**

How strongly can music that is fitting and message congruent influence a commercial? Can different product- and message-corresponding musical styles sway recipients' perceptions in different ways? The purpose of this study is to demonstrate how different but congruent musical styles can create different effects on our cognitions and emotions towards the content of an ad. Moreover, the product endorser as a person was rarely of interest in the previous literature. But is it not the endorsers who representatively come into contact with the consumer? Is it not they who give a product and a company an imaginary face with their look, their voice and their personality? And is music in the position to modify our perception of the endorser, which in turn affects our image of the product? Is music in the position to determine our first impression of a person and the related brand? How does music influence our appraisal of an endorser's personality and the perceived character of the brand?

The following are the hypotheses used in the study:

- *H1*: Different but fitting (congruent) music leads to different impressions of the product and endorser.
- *H2*: Different but fitting (congruent) music leads to different impressions of the brand.
- *H3*: There is coherence between the impression of the endorser and the impression of the brand.

## **3. RESEARCH DESIGN**

### **Subjects and Design**

In order to address the research hypotheses, personal interviews were conducted on a sample of 405 Spanish individuals (187 males and 218 females) aged 16 to 65, selected through random sampling (street interviews), and establishing age quota (50% between 16 and 40 years old, 50% between 41 and 65). 135 people were assigned randomly to each of the three groups.

An experimental design was chosen. Subjects were assigned to one of three versions of a radio commercial for a brand of mineral water with the fictitious name 'Avora'. The versions differed in the selection of music. A lively, joyful and easy-listening piece by Alec Gould

(1998) entitled 'Soft Shoe' was added to the commercial presented to group 1 (Music I). In the booklet accompanying the CD, the genre of this piece is described as 'entertainment' and 'amusing swing'. Group 2 listened to a different version of the commercial. Slow, calm and contemplative music was in the background. The title of Mladen Franko's (2001) composition is 'Worth to Remember'; it is described as an 'introspective, thoughtful piano ballad' (Music II). Despite being really different in character (see Table I), both pieces were considered as individually congruent with the commercial's content in terms of musical fit. Music I highlighted the refreshing and sportive aspect of the mineral water, whereas Music II emphasized its health and relaxation aspects. Group 3 was the control group and listened to a non-music version of the radio spot.

The decision on which two music pieces to use was made in collaboration with the experienced team of a professional advertising agency.

### **Variables measurement**

The development of measurement scales and indicators was based on the literature and several qualitative focus group sessions. Brand perception was measured as a multi-item construct on 10-point Likert scale (Osgood et al., 1957; Ertel, 1969; Aaker, 1997). On the other hand, to record data considering the test persons' impressions towards the endorser, the approved personality inventory *Gießen Test* (GT) (Beckmann et al., 1990) was used. Thus, the impression subjects had of the endorser was measured with a semantic differential scale of several bipolar antagonisms, with scoring from -3 to +3.

## **4. RESEARCH FINDINGS**

An analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed to test hypotheses H1 and H2. The results obtained are set out in Tables 2 and 3, respectively. These results allow us to confirm, firstly, that different but fitting (congruent) music leads to different impressions of the product and endorser (H1).

Thus, the results obtained highlight the existence of significant differences between the mean values obtained for each of the dimensions analysed (relating to the perception of the *endorser*) in each of the versions of the advertisement. Specifically, and in keeping with the concept of "musical fit", the subjects who listened to the version of the advertisement with music I (*Soft Shoe*), with greater tonality and faster tempo, perceived the *endorser* as happier and more nervous, restless, impatient, youthful, sporting, enthusiastic and daring, compared to the second musical version (*Worth to Remember*). On the other hand, the individuals exposed

to this second version of the advertisement, with less tonality and slower tempo, perceived the *endorser* as calmer and more relaxing, patient, delicate, sympathetic, understanding, disciplined, mature and more trustworthy, compared to musical version I.

Likewise, the results obtained also confirmed hypothesis 2; that is, different but fitting (congruent) music leads to different impressions of the brand. In this case, significant differences were also noted between the mean values obtained for each of the constructs analysed (relating to the perception of the endorser) in each of the versions of the advertisement. While the subjects exposed to the first version of the advertisement (*Soft Shoe*) perceived the brand as more energetic, exciting, refreshing, youthful, sporting and festive, compared to the second version, the music II (*Worth to Remember*) created a more delicate, soft, relaxing, mature, natural and healthy impression of AVORA.

On the other hand, to check the coherence between the impression of the endorser and the impression of the brand (H3), bivariate correlation was used. The results achieved allow us to confirm this hypothesis. Both the positive and negative correlations obtained are set out below:

- E.P. (Endorser perception): nervous, restless – B.P. (Brand perception): relaxing, calm ( $r = -.261, p = .000$ )
- E.P.: delicate, weak – B.P.: delicate ( $r = .190, p = .002$ )
- E.P.: languid, depressed – B.P.: enthusiastic, energetic ( $r = -.197, p = .001$ )
- E.P.: youthful – B.P.: youthful ( $r = .236, p = .000$ )
- E.P.: delicate, weak – B.P.: sporting, vigorous ( $r = -.130, p = .032$ )
- E.P.: mature – B.P.: mature ( $r = .186, p = .002$ )

## 5. CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

The most important discoveries of this study complement the current state of research. Music has the ability to modify the impression that listeners of a radio commercial have of the product and endorser. Attributes like youthful, calm and level of understanding were attached differently to the same endorser depending on the style of the music chosen.

Furthermore, impressions of the brand could be manipulated by means of specific music pieces. Depending on the music used, the brand imparted either softness and silence or strength and arousal. The study was able to show that not only the differentiation between well-liked and disliked music, which was made in other studies, leads to different reactions, but also that different but *product-message-congruent* music in terms of the ‘musical fit’ approach has its own differentiating effects. For the advertising practitioner, the findings of



this study advise that it is not simply about creating general effects in terms of “let’s take some beautiful music to make people buy our stuff”. Under the condition of fit, music has to be considered and used in a more differentiated way.

Music plays a highly evocative role to create and reinforce associations and emotions with the brand. The advertiser should pay special attention to the appearance of elements that enable positive emotions to be linked with the endorser and the brand and avoid those that could trigger negative factors or rejection of the brand.

In addition, this paper concludes with an interesting observation that was made during talks that took place after the experiments. As in previous studies (Zander, 2006), when subjects listened to the alternative musical variant of the radio commercial after the execution of the experiment, they still considered the first version, which they had listened to twice during the experiment, as more suitable for the product and its advertisement. One could conclude that a connection between a piece of music and a commercial is quickly learned (‘mere exposure’). Products advertised seem to be identified rather quickly with a certain piece of music. It’s music that makes a brand identifiable.

**TABLE 1**  
**Description of the music pieces used**

<b>Music I: “Soft Shoe”</b>	<b>Music II: “Worth to Remember”</b>
<i>Composer:</i> Alec Gould (1998) <i>Style:</i> Amusing swing <i>Key/harmonization:</i> 79% major <i>Tempo:</i> 115 beats per minute; constant	<i>Composer:</i> Mladen Franko (2001) <i>Style:</i> Piano Ballad <i>Key/harmonization:</i> 56% minor <i>Tempo:</i> 70 beats per minute; ritardando (last 2 bars)

**TABLE 2**  
**Mean Value Differences (perception of product endorser; H1)**

		<b>Music I (Soft Shoe)</b>	<b>Music II (Worth to Remember)</b>
<b>(-3) Relaxing, calm / Nervous, restless (+3)</b>	Mean	1,16	-1,69
	F.	235,817	
	Sig.	,000	
<b>(-3) Immature / Mature (+3)</b>	Mean	0,90	1,76
	F.	21,399	
	Sig.	,000	
<b>(-3) Vigorous, sporting / Delicate, weak (+3)</b>	Mean	-0,47	0,36
	F.	17,389	
	Sig.	,000	
<b>(-3) Obstinate / Sympathetic, understanding (+3)</b>	Mean	0,47	1,44
	F.	35,711	
	Sig.	,000	
<b>(-3) Discipline / Indiscipline (+3)</b>	Mean	-0,83	-1,67
	F.	24,046	
	Sig.	,000	
<b>(-3) Impatient / Patient (+3)</b>	Mean	-1,04	1,16
	F.	105,472	
	Sig.	,000	
<b>(-3) Reliable, trustworthy / Unreliable (+3)</b>	Mean	0,79	-0,13
	F.	21,958	
	Sig.	,000	
<b>(-3) Happy / Sad (+3)</b>	Mean	-0,24	0,55
	F.	15,408	
	Sig.	,000	
<b>(-3) Enthusiastic, energetic / Languid, depressed (+3)</b>	Mean	-0,77	0,45
	F.	36,453	
	Sig.	,000	
<b>(-3) Old / Youthful (+3)</b>	Mean	1,05	-0,97
	F.	114,424	
	Sig.	,000	
<b>(-3) Bold, daring / Shy, reserved (+3)</b>	Mean	-0,27	0,41
	F.	14,918	
	Sig.	,000	

**TABLE 3**  
**Mean Value Differences (brand perception; H2)**

		<b>Music I (Soft Shoe)</b>	<b>Music II (Worth to Remember)</b>
<b>Soft</b>	Mean	5,13	6,30
	F.		27,873
	Sig.		,000
<b>Delicate</b>	Mean	5,24	6,56
	F.		37,008
	Sig.		,000
<b>Relaxing, Calm</b>	Mean	5,35	6,81
	F.		37,309
	Sig.		,000
<b>Mature</b>	Mean	5,37	6,09
	F.		6,756
	Sig.		,010
<b>Natural</b>	Mean	6,13	6,79
	F.		7,755
	Sig.		,006
<b>Healthy</b>	Mean	6,24	6,86
	F.		7,084
	Sig.		,008
<b>Energetic</b>	Mean	5,37	4,10
	F.		25,238
	Sig.		,000
<b>Exciting</b>	Mean	4,71	3,53
	F.		21,509
	Sig.		,000
<b>Refreshing</b>	Mean	6,24	5,39
	F.		10,911
	Sig.		,001
<b>Sporting, vigorous</b>	Mean	5,21	4,03
	F.		20,567
	Sig.		,000
<b>Youthful</b>	Mean	5,06	3,95
	F.		18,274
	Sig.		,000
<b>Festive</b>	Mean	4,80	3,27
	F.		34,971
	Sig.		,000

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