

Background Music and Consumer Response to Advertising

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As one of the most important creative elements, music is incorporated in more than 94% of advertisements (Allan, 2008). Music accounts for a significant commercial advantage in the context of advertising by producing favorable associations with the product/brand (Gorn, 1982), contributing to the message (Hung, 2000), and by attracting consumers' attention and enhancing message recall (Yalch, 1991). Laboratory and field experiments in the past four decades have indicated varied impacts of in-store music on consumer perception, evaluation, attitude, and behaviour. Indeed, while areas such as cinematic scores and atmospherics have received extensive academic attention (e.g., Kassabian, 2001; Garlin and Owens, 2006), research investigating the influence of background music in advertising is still relatively scant. Countless billions of dollars are spent annually on music by advertising agencies and client companies (Oakes, 2007). Music is ubiquitous in television, radio and cinema advertising, thus underlining the need for increased academic research.

Indeed, existing laboratory experiments in the past four decades investigated the effects of various characteristics of music such as key, tempo, texture, volume, taste, familiarity, arousal, and complexity (e.g., Kellaris and Kent 1992, 1993; Kellaris and Rice 1993; Oakes 2003; Alpert et al., 2005; North et al., 2016; Abolhasani and Oakes, 2017; Craton et al., 2017) on consumers in various marketing contexts. However, flawed conceptual underpinnings, flawed experimental procedures, incomplete information, an exclusive focus on artificial lab experiments, and most importantly, the fact that there is a lack of research in new contexts (new media) may be considered as the overriding issues with the existing music and advertising research.

The concept of musical congruity still remains complicated as evident in the frequently contradictory findings of previous research. There is clearly a lack of coherent articulation of the theoretical underpinnings of musical congruity in the context of advertising which have resulted in contradictory findings in this particular area of research. As far as the few existing studies on musical congruity in advertisements are concerned, the criteria upon which the effects of musical congruity have been explored are somewhat unclear and the boundaries between the application of the concepts and their link with particular responses from consumers are blurred. This clearly implies that there exists ambiguity in theorisation when applying congruity theories and models in the context of music and advertising.

Furthermore, there is a general gap in terms of the lack of qualitative research in music and advertising. In the existing music and advertising literature, the effects of background music are mainly measured using quantitative methods (Abolhasani et al., 2017). It is also reflected in the literature review of music in advertising by Oakes (2007) in which the highlighted studies are almost exclusively from a positivist, managerial perspective and the influence of music in advertising upon consumer identity is not addressed. Therefore, there is a need to investigate the effects of

background music in advertising through exploring consumers' lived experiences of musical consumption.

Taken together, these gaps in the literature provide a compelling reason to undertake further research into the effects of background music on consumers' affective, cognitive, and behavioural responses to advertising. Therefore, we welcome applications for PhD research in the area of music and advertising. We are interested in hearing from potential PhD students who have an interest in consumer behavior, and in particular exploring the effects of advertising upon consumer responses. The research may follow a mixed methods approach, involving the collection of quantitative and qualitative data. This will address the methodological gap, i.e. the almost exclusively positivist approach adopted by the existing research.

About the supervisors:

This PhD research would build on the current relevant study being carried out at the Open University by Morteza Abolhasani and Gordon Liu. [Morteza](#) is a Lecturer in Marketing at the Open University Business School. His main research interests focus on exploring consumer responses to background music in advertising as well as service environments. [Gordon](#) is a Professor of Marketing Strategy at the Open University Business School. Gordon's research focuses on the intersection of marketing, strategy and entrepreneurship with particular interest in topics surrounding innovation/new product development, strategic orientation/capabilities, and network/strategic alliance.

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