



# Advertising effects of songs' nostalgia and lyrics' relevance

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – When using popular music in advertising, the songs' release period (nostalgia) and the lyrics' relevance to the product are two important characteristics but neglected in previous music-related studies. The purpose of this paper is to investigate the effects of these two variables on consumers' responses to advertisements.

**Design/methodology/approach** – A  $2 \times 2$  experimental design was used to examine the effects of a song's period and the lyrics' relevance. The hypotheses were tested with a structural equation analysis.

**Findings** – Previously heard old songs have positive ad effects due to evoking consumers' good moods or by generating more favorable nostalgia-related thoughts. High-relevance lyrics facilitate the production of favorable ad execution-related thoughts, which improve ad attitude directly and indirectly through good moods.

**Research limitations/implications** – Only undergraduate students are sampled. Further, the experiment focuses solely on music-dominated ads for low involvement products.

**Practical implications** – For advertising targeting the young generation, the use of a popular song released during their childhood can elicit feelings of nostalgia and lead to good moods as well as favorable brand attitudes. Such effects, can be strengthened by high-relevance lyrics.

**Originality/value** – Placing a previously heard popular song in a TV ad can evoke nostalgic feelings and generate favorable ad effects even when the product and other ad design elements are not related to nostalgic themes. The persuasion mechanism of nostalgia follows a dual-route process, in which the cognitive route seems to be more influential than the affective route. The importance of lyrics' relevance is demonstrated to the extent that its impact on brand attitude can exceed that of song's nostalgia.

**Keywords** Nostalgia, Cognition, Affective psychology, Music, Memory, Consumer behaviour

**Paper type** Research paper

## 1. Introduction

Music is regarded as an important advertising background characteristic (Allan, 2006). Popular music, because of its connection to our daily lives, is universally used in ads to transfer messages. When watching TV, it is almost impossible not to be inundated by the profusion of popular music in ads. In the USA, 86 percent of prime-time television ads contain some type of music, and among these, 14 percent contain popular music (Allan, 2008). In Taiwan, examples include Elva's new song "WOW" and parts of its music video combined with a Volkswagen car ad and a Dancing online-game ad, award-winning pop singer Jolin Tsai's "Let's Move It" in a Toyota commercial, and singer-songwriter Alexander Wang Leehom's songs used as promotional singles for Sony Ericsson's various new models. In all of these examples, the integration of popular music and advertising, often called perfect marriage of commerce and art (Billboard, 2003), has successfully captured the attention of youth, and improved advertising effects (Shea, 2004).

The wide use of music in advertising practices has led to a rich body of literature examining the effects of advertising music. Research topics have ranged from musical structural elements such as volume, tempo, and timbre to non-structural elements such as music fit and likeability (e.g. Alpert *et al.*, 2005; Lavack and Thakor, 2008; Oakes,



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2007). However, relatively few studies have focused their attention on popular music – as such, the distinctive characteristics of popular music have been neglected (Oakes, 2007).

Popular music differs from other kinds of advertising music, such as jingles and needle drop (Scott, 1990), in at least two aspects. One is that popular music recorded by singers for albums, movies, or dramas are broadcast on a massive scale for a fixed period of time (Shuker, 1994); therefore, it is easier to connect period-relative memories that affect audience's advertising responses. Second, as compared to needle drop without lyrics or jingles whose lyrics are written for a particular ad, Taiwanese popular music lyrics are usually written based on love themes (Shaw and Su, 2001). Therefore, in terms of the use of popular music in advertising, the songs' release period and the lyrics' relevance to the product are the two important characteristics but neglected by previous music-related studies.

Investigating a song's period can help to advance the understanding of consumer nostalgia. Only a small number of empirical studies have examined nostalgia's influence within the advertising context (e.g. Baker and Kennedy, 1994; Muehling and Sprott, 2004; Pascal *et al.*, 2002), and several research gaps remain. For example, it has been shown that embedding verbal nostalgic cues in advertising can evoke nostalgic feelings and favorable attitudes (Muehling and Sprott, 2004; Pascal *et al.*, 2002), but the underlying mechanism of such nostalgic effects has not been discussed. Moreover, the research scopes of previous nostalgia-advertising studies have been restricted to printed ads, verbal nostalgic cues (i.e. headlines and ad copy), and products with an inherent nostalgic component (e.g. roll films and DVD players). The effects of other types of nostalgic cues in other advertising media for additional product contexts remain unknown. The current study aims to fill these gaps by employing popular songs from different time periods to manipulate nostalgia within the TV advertising context, so that the nostalgic effect of auditory cues can be empirically tested and the mediating process of nostalgia advertising can be explored in greater detail.

Further, this study examines the effects of lyrics' relevance to advertised products. Lyrics perform many functions in ads (Murray and Murray, 1996); companies often use the lyrics of a song to help deliver advertising messages, such as the Microsoft Windows 95 operating system ads that used the Rolling Stones' "Start Me Up," and those for the XP operating system that featured Madonna's "Ray of Light." However, most research on advertising music has focused on the music itself, with special emphasis on its emotional/sensual properties and effects, while neglecting the role of lyrics and failing to recognize the importance of the semantic content of lyrics (Hung, 2000; Scott, 1990). Accordingly, this study aims to fill this research gap as well.

In summary, this study explores the effects of using popular music in advertising. Specifically, this paper examines the impact of two characteristics of popular music – song period and lyrics' relevance – on cognitive and affective responses, which in turn affect advertising effectiveness. Due to the rising cost of licensing popular music for advertisements, the selection of appropriate songs for products and ads is an important concern for advertisers. The findings of the current paper provide firms and ad agencies with suggestions regarding ad song decisions, so that the "right" song can be used in the "right" ad to ensure optimal efficiency.

## 2. Popular music and advertising effects

Popular music is arguably one of the most polarizing forms of mass communication (Allan, 2006). Middleton (1990) defines it as well-favored music for ordinary people. In

addition, it is a commercial culture product that entertains and inspires a large portion of society by providing meaningful and chronological reference points (Allan, 2006). Many advertisers use popular music in their ads in order to resonate with consumers, get them to attend to the ads, help differentiate their brand, and boost sales. For example, Pepsi and Michael Jackson, the “King of Pop,” struck a 5 million US dollar endorsement partnership in November 1983. Following the airing of the Pepsi ad featuring Michael’s “Billie Jean,” Pepsi sales grew to 7.7 billion US dollar in 1984, and they also experienced a considerable increase in market share – even as Coca-Cola’s market share dropped (Herrera, 2009). Due to this successful experience, the trend of Pepsi signing music stars as spokespeople has carried on into the twenty-first century. Madonna, the “Queen of Pop” and the most successful solo artist (Billboard, 2008), who has licensed her songs to a variety of products including soft drinks (Pepsi), perfume (Estee Lauder), shampoo (Unilever), and casual wear (Gap). As mentioned above, in 2001, Microsoft allegedly paid a huge amount of money for the rights to use Madonna’s “Ray of Light” in an ad campaign to launch the Windows XP operating system because the lyrics of the song brought the spirit of the product to life (vanHorn, 2001). Recently, some companies have even used songs of optimism in ads to soothe economic worries and create branded hope (Moran, 2009), such as CK One using Jamie Burke’s “We Are One” and Starbucks using MC Yogi’s “Grassroots Movement.”

There are two dominant theory approaches to the study of advertising music: the classical conditioning approach (e.g. Gorn, 1982; Kellaris and Cox, 1989) and the affective response approach (e.g. Mitchell, 1986; Park and Young, 1986). Although these conceptualizations of music are different, both imply that exposure to advertising music may evoke automatic, affective responses. According to the former, affective responses are viewed as overt behaviors, such as a smile, while for the latter, they are viewed as internal feelings or states that cannot be cognitively perceived.

Advertisements that include well-known popular music or music that is highly personally relevant for the listener lead to greater attention to the ad and greater memory of both the ad and the brand information as compared to ads that employ less well-known or less personally relevant songs (Allan, 2006; Kellaris *et al.*, 1993). In addition, in the elaboration likelihood model, music is perceived as a peripheral cue that can evoke consumers’ positive emotions (Stout and Leckenby, 1988). As the majority of TV commercial viewers are classified as having low advertising involvement, music’s ability to stimulate emotions makes it an effective persuasive tool. Oakes (2007) reviews studies focusing upon cognitive and affective response to advertising music and classifies previous studies into ten original definitions of music/advertising congruity (e.g. valence, genre, and image). There is a coherent pattern in which increased music/advertising congruity contributes to enhanced brand attitudes, purchase intent, and recall facilitation.

### 3. Conceptual model

This paper examines the effects of both the song’s period and the lyrics’ relevance on consumer ad and brand attitudes with an emphasis on the mediating process of ad attitude formation. According to the integrative attitude formation model (MacInnis and Jaworski, 1989), exposure to ad stimulus leads to viewers’ cognitive and affective responses, which in turn affect attitude formation processes. Thus, the authors of the current paper infer that the persuasive effects of the song’s period and the lyrics’ relevance on consumer ad attitudes are mediated by their cognitive responses (i.e. various thoughts) and affective responses (i.e. mood); relevant hypotheses are developed and posited below.

### 3.1 *Song's period and nostalgia*

Nostalgia is a form of positive thinking and mixed emotions, generated for things, persons, or experiences from the past (Baker and Kennedy, 1994). Holak and Havlena (1992) examine possible themes and subjects for nostalgic reflection and find that while visible things (e.g. clothes and toys) can constitute the subject of nostalgia, invisible stimuli (e.g. songs and movies) can also evoke nostalgic feelings. Baker and Kennedy (1994) suggest that a piece of music often has a connection with certain events in an individual's life; the playing of a song from the past may bring back memories of an earlier time of laughter and friendship with childhood companions. As such, songs from different periods may be associated with varying degrees of nostalgia. Previously heard old songs may link to past memories and generate more nostalgia-related thoughts and feelings. Below, the authors refer to a song's nostalgia-inducing ability as the song's nostalgia, which is affected by the song's period.

Ads containing nostalgic cues usually cause the audience to retrieve pleasant rather than unpleasant memories/associations. They automatically filter out thoughts that are unpleasant to maintain or enhance individual self-identity, generating a more positive valenced set of thoughts (Muehling and Sprott, 2004). Further, since nostalgia refers to a desire for the past (Holbrook, 1993) and reflects an individual's positive affect for the past, it is capable of eliciting a variety of positive emotional responses within consumers, including warmth, joy, and gratitude (Holak and Havlena, 1998). Therefore, the authors of the current paper infer that a previously heard old song, as compared to new song, should evoke more positive nostalgia-related thoughts and a higher degree of good mood within the individual, and hypothesize:

- H1. When a popular song is used in an ad, a previously heard old song will generate more positively valenced nostalgia-related thoughts as compared with a similar but new song.
- H2. When a popular song is used in an ad, a previously heard old song will elicit a higher degree of good mood as compared with a similar but new song.

### 3.2 *Lyrics' relevance to the product*

Lyrics have many substantial functions in ads, including developing empathy, gaining attention, communicating attribute and benefit information, and subtly conveying cultural values (Murray and Murray, 1996). Additionally, the content of lyrics can communicate two broad types of meanings:

- (1) product meanings, such as concrete attributes, abstract attributes, and functional consequences of product uses (Bettman, 1979); and
- (2) indirect, self-related meanings, such as psychosocial consequences of product use and personal values (Murray and Murray, 1996).

This study defines lyrics' relevance in terms of the degree of match between the lyrics and the advertised product. Pomerantz (1981) proposes that when elements of a stimulus set complement other items in the set, the individual parts are not perceived as separable and do not compete with one another for cognitive resources, which facilitates overall message processing and message learning. Thus, in TV advertisements, the fit between the central ad message and the advertising song lyrics can affect ad processing. It has been found that when more product information is included in a moving melody, more information can be retained (Roehm, 2001). Olsen and Johnson (2002) also suggest that the presence of meaningful background lyrics has

a significant positive impact on recall for product information through enhancing attention to the advertisement. The authors of the current paper further hypothesize that because high-relevance lyrics better communicate the product attributes and functional consequences or benefits of product uses (Bettman, 1979; Murray and Murray, 1996) as compared to low-relevance lyrics, they will be more informative and helpful for consumers to make judgments regarding product quality, and thereby generate more positive ad execution-related thoughts; thus, it is hypothesized that:

- H3.* Lyrics' relevance has a positive influence on the valence of ad execution-related thoughts.

### *3.3 Cognitive responses, affective responses, and attitudes*

Attitudes toward the advertisement consist of central and peripheral antecedents. Central antecedents are consumer cognitive responses during ad exposure, including message-relevant thoughts (Miniard *et al.*, 1990; Lord *et al.*, 1995) and ad execution thoughts (MacKenzie and Lutz, 1989). Mood, attitude toward the advertiser, and attitude toward ad execution are considered as peripheral antecedents of ad attitudes (Miniard *et al.*, 1990; Lord *et al.*, 1995). Thus, ad-related cognition affects ad attitudes (MacKenzie *et al.*, 1986). When consumers have more positive thoughts toward an ad, they tend to like the ad more. As such, the following is hypothesized:

- H4.* The more positively valenced the ad execution-related thoughts, the more positive the attitude toward the ad.

Thought elicitation is a way of attempting to capture a stream of mental consciousness. Researchers can use consumer thought structures and valences to infer about their beliefs, attitudes, and values (Dickson and Sauer, 1987). Peters (2000) suggests that positive/negative or approving/critical thoughts have an influence on attitudes. Although nostalgia-related thoughts are not directly related to ads, they are evoked by advertising songs, and may include partial thoughts about ads (e.g. "The ad uses an old song I heard in my childhood"). Therefore, they can also affect ad attitude, as hypothesized:

- H5.* The more positively valenced the nostalgia-related thoughts, the more positive the attitude toward the ad.

Further, many studies have shown that ad-evoked emotions strongly influence ad attitude (Aaker *et al.*, 1986; Batra and Ray, 1986; Burke and Edell, 1989). According to the affect-as-information model, people tend to use their mood as information through a "how do I feel about it?" heuristic when they are evaluating a stimulus (Petty *et al.*, 1993). Mood states appear to bias evaluations and judgments in a similar direction to mood; simple pleasant (or unpleasant) feelings can yield a more (or less) favorable attitude. Because good mood can be described as a cheerful, peaceful, and energized state of mind (Berkowitz, 1987; Watson *et al.*, 1988), this paper hypothesizes:

- H6.* The higher the degree of good mood, the more positive the attitude toward the ad.

This paper also explores the relationship between cognition and affect. According to the cognitive appraisal theory of emotions (Lazarus, 1991), people decide what to feel after interpreting what has happened. As such, the sequence is as follows: an event provokes thinking, which influences simultaneous arousal and emotion. Therefore, it is hypothesized that ad execution-related thoughts, which are induced by the ad and thus a primary cognitive appraisal, lead to emotional responses; when the net valence of ad

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execution-related thoughts is positive, it means the ad itself has positive consequences, leading to the creation of positive emotions (i.e. good moods):

*H7.* The more positively valenced the ad execution-related thoughts, the higher the degree of good mood.

Finally, many scholars have explored the relationship between ad attitude (Aad) and brand attitude (Ab), and find that Aad affects Ab strongly, especially when ad/product involvement is low (MacInnis and Jaworski, 1989; MacKenzie *et al.*, 1986; MacKenzie and Lutz, 1989). In light of these findings, the following is posited:

*H8.* The more positive the attitude toward the ad, the more positive the attitude toward the brand.

## 4. Method

### 4.1 Subjects, design, and procedures

This study selected undergraduate students as the sample for three reasons. First, students are the major target market for popular music and represent heavy listeners; ads targeting students often feature popular music (Shea, 2004). Second, Holbrook and Schindler (1989) state that people develop preferences for various popular music styles during late adolescence or early adulthood, and these preferences usually persist for the rest of their lives; therefore, exploring the musical tastes or the responses toward the advertising music of late-adolescent undergraduates is important and meaningful, as it may also be applied in terms of predicting their music preferences for the rest of their lives. Third, students' homogeneity, particularly with respect to age, helps clarify the effects of the experimental variables, as the targets of nostalgia and general levels of nostalgic consumption experienced by different consumers may change over time, and are therefore associated with age (Holbrook, 1993).

A  $2 \times 2$  between-subject factorial experiment was conducted in Taiwan. The two independent variables were:

- (1) the song period manipulating subjects' degree of nostalgic feelings; and
- (2) the lyrics' relevance to the product, manipulated in terms of a higher or lower degree.

Two products (cookie bar and chocolate) were used in the experiment to increase the generalizability, resulting in eight experimental cells. A convenience sample of 276 Taiwanese undergraduates (48.5 percent male vs 51.5 percent female, resembling the distribution of the student population) participated in the study for extra credits. Mean age of the sample was 19.7, with a range of 17-23. Participants came from a variety (47) of academic departments. A large portion (47.4 percent) of them were freshmen. Participants were randomly assigned to the various cells.

The experiment was conducted in a classroom style setting. After a brief welcome and introduction session, participants were instructed to watch a TV commercial. Questionnaires were administered immediately after exposure to the commercial.

### 4.2 Stimuli development

This study created four versions of a TV commercial for a cookie bar (chocolate) with the brand name Fran (Dove). Commercials were identical except for the popular songs contained within the commercials. The songs aired throughout the duration of the

commercial (30 s). The verbal message of the commercial was, “Tease your lips (My favorite chocolate)” as a caption displayed on the screen.

The commercials and the songs were selected following two pretests. In the first pretest, 47 undergraduates were given a list of 26 Mandarin pop songs that were either released close to the experimental period (i.e. new songs), or from ten years ago, when the respondents were in elementary school (i.e. old songs). These 26 songs were collected based on the following two criteria:

- (1) consisted of similar structural features, such as loudness, tempo, mode, and tonality (Alpert and Alpert, 1990); and
- (2) were hit songs from popular albums, in an attempt to ensure above-moderate familiarity on the part of the participants, since nostalgic feelings are less likely when consumers are clueless as to the period the song relates to.

Participants in the first pretest rated each song’s nostalgia-inducing ability on a seven-point scale (Pascal *et al.*, 2002) composed of five items: “reminds me of the past,” “makes me feel nostalgic,” “makes me think about when I was younger,” “brings back memories of good times from the past,” and “reminds me of good times in the past.” In addition, song familiarity and likeability were also measured to control for confounding effects. Participants rated song familiarity on a three-item, seven-point scale (Roehm, 2001) consisting of “not at all familiar/highly familiar,” “don’t know it well at all/know it very well,” and “don’t recognize it right away/recognize it right away.” Referring to Holbrook and Schindler (1989), likeability was evaluated on a seven-point scale for one item: “I dislike it a lot/I like it a lot.”

Based on the results of the first pretest, nine songs that differed in terms of nostalgic ability but similar in terms of familiarity ( $p = 0.366 > 0.05$ ) and likeability ( $p = 0.475 > 0.05$ ) were selected. A second pretest of another 47 undergraduates was conducted to select old and new songs whose lyrics are high- or low-relevance to the advertised product. In the second pretest, the nine songs selected from the first pretest were paired with four foreign (Japanese or Korean) commercials with different advertising products. The experimenter distributed one sheet of lyrics for the nine songs to the participants and then played the nine songs one after the other to increase the participants’ familiarity with the lyrics. Then the four commercials were shown one after the other in silent mode – no words or music was present. As each commercial played, participants wrote down the advertised products and then evaluated their relevance to the lyrics of each song on a four-item, seven-point scale (Garretson and Niedrich, 2004) composed of the following: “It makes sense for the lyrics to be featured with this product,” “I think that pairing the lyrics with this product is appropriate,” “I think that the lyrics are relevant for this product,” and “Together, the lyrics and this product represent a very good fit.”

From the second pretest, a Korean commercial for a cookie bar, a Japanese commercial for a chocolate, and four songs (old/new  $\times$  high/low relevance) were selected as the experimental stimuli. Table I shows the means of these four songs in terms of nostalgia-inducing ability, relevance, familiarity and likeability. An example of high-relevance lyrics is, “Affections are as changeable as synthetic chocolates/But each selection is full of happiness/. . ./Love ninety-nine/Sweet in the heart for a long, long time/Taste your tender and perfect mouthfeel/. . .;” an example of low-relevance lyrics is, “Please give me the power of love/Let us be crazy for love/. . ./When true love shines/Nobody can obstruct/. . .” The original audio of the ads was replaced with the four songs to create the experimental ads for each product.

### 4.3 Measures

**4.3.1 Cognitive responses.** Referring to Wright's (1980) thought listing procedure, participants were asked to spend 1-3 min listing all thoughts that came to mind as they viewed the ads, and then evaluate their thoughts as positively, negatively, or neutrally valenced. Two trained raters independently classified each thought into one of the following categories: product-related, ad execution-related, nostalgia-related, or miscellaneous (Muehling and Spratt, 2004). Inter-rater reliability (Perreault and Leigh, 1989) for the four categories was 0.88, with disagreements resolved by discussion. The valenced index of ad-related/nostalgia-related thoughts was calculated by subtracting the number of negative ad-related/nostalgia-related thoughts from the number of positive ad-related/nostalgia-related thoughts.

**4.3.2 Affective responses.** Adapted from Olsen and Pracejus (2004), positive mood was measured by a four-item, seven-point scale ( $\alpha = 0.78$ ) consisting of "happy," "joyful," "informed," and "warm."

**4.3.3 Attitudes.** Ad attitude was measured using a four-item, seven-point scale ( $\alpha = 0.94$ ) that consisted of "good/bad," "favorable/unfavorable," "positive/negative," and "pleasant/unpleasant" (Pascal *et al.*, 2002). Brand attitude was also assessed using a four-item, seven-point scale (Pascal *et al.*, 2002) including "good/bad," "like very much/dislike very much," "favorable/unfavorable," and "valuable/worthless" ( $\alpha = 0.93$ ).

**4.3.4 Manipulation check.** A five-item, seven-point scale for evoked nostalgic feelings (Pascal *et al.*, 2002) was used to test the nostalgia-inducing ability of the old/new song manipulation ( $\alpha = 0.90$ ). In addition, the manipulation of lyrics' relevance to the product was measured by a four-item, seven-point scale ( $\alpha = 0.94$ , Garretson and Niedrich, 2004). The measurement items for nostalgia and relevance are described above in the section detailing the two pretests.

## 5. Results

### 5.1 Manipulation-check results

Manipulation checks were performed using  $2 \times 2 \times 2$  analyses of variance. As expected, subjects rated nostalgic feelings as higher in the old- ( $M = 4.03$ ) than in the new-song ( $M = 3.00$ ) conditions ( $F(1, 268) = 26.706, p < 0.01$ ), and rated lyrics' relevance as higher in the high- ( $M = 4.18$ ) than in the low-relevance ( $M = 2.62$ ) conditions ( $F(1, 268) = 62.787, p < 0.01$ ). Referring to MacInnis and Park (1991), this paper used manipulation-check measures to represent nostalgia and relevance because they captured the effects of perceived nostalgic feelings and lyrics' relevance, and therefore provided a more sensitive test of the hypotheses. However, the factor "product category" did not affect the checks for nostalgic feelings ( $F(1, 268) = 0.393, p = 0.531 > 0.05$ ) or lyrics' relevance

	New songs		Old songs	
	High relevance	Low relevance	High relevance	Low relevance
Nostalgia-inducing ability	2.90 <sup>b</sup>	3.05 <sup>b</sup>	3.80 <sup>a</sup>	4.10 <sup>a</sup>
Relevance to the cookie bar	3.95 <sup>a</sup>	1.99 <sup>b</sup>	4.29 <sup>a</sup>	1.55 <sup>b</sup>
Relevance to the chocolate	4.23 <sup>a</sup>	2.90 <sup>b</sup>	4.68 <sup>a</sup>	2.93 <sup>b</sup>
Song's familiarity	4.83 <sup>a</sup>	4.64 <sup>a</sup>	4.56 <sup>a</sup>	4.47 <sup>a</sup>
Song's likeability	3.92 <sup>a</sup>	4.10 <sup>a</sup>	4.28 <sup>a</sup>	3.90 <sup>a</sup>

**Note:** Numbers with different superscripts within each row are significantly different from each other at  $p < 0.05$

**Table I.**  
Means of four  
experimental songs from  
two pretest results

( $F(1, 268) = 0.934, p = 0.335 > 0.05$ ) and was therefore dropped for the purpose of simplicity. Thus, this study combined the measures of the cookie bar and the chocolate to create the overall product measures.

5.2 Model specification – tested model

Hypothesis testing was conducted with the entire sample set using a structural equation analysis by a maximum-likelihood estimation procedure using LISREL 8.3. This study used the summated scales of indicators to represent each exogenous and endogenous construct. Perfectly indicated constructs were not assumed. Following Susskind *et al.* (2003), each factor loading was set at the square root of the reliability for the index, and the associated error term was set at one minus the reliability, then multiplying by the variance. Since valenced sets of ad execution-related thoughts and nostalgia-related thoughts were measured with a single item rather than a summated index, their reliability was set at 0.85. Table II shows the means, standard deviations, and measurement correlations.

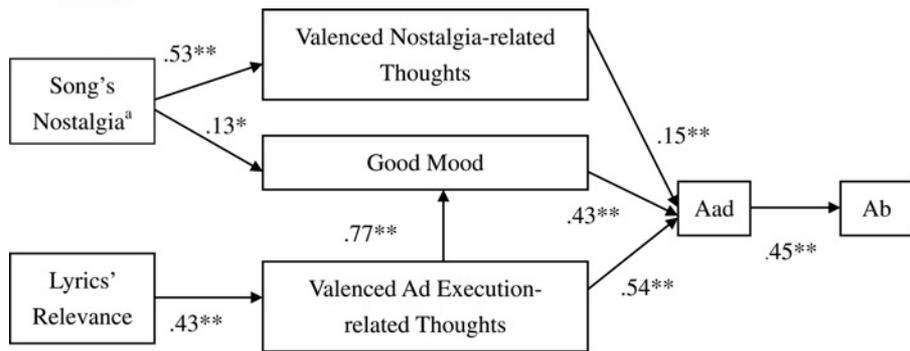
5.3 Main-effects model

Estimation of the structural paths was initially implemented to test the main-effects model (specified in Figure 1). This model resulted in an acceptable fit for the data

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(1) Brand attitude	1.00	–	–	–	–	–	–
(2) Ad attitude	0.41	1.00	–	–	–	–	–
(3) Good mood	0.27	0.69	1.00	–	–	–	–
(4) Net-A	0.23	0.58	0.45	1.00	–	–	–
(5) Net-N	0.22	0.24	0.13	0.16	1.00	–	–
(6) Nostalgic feelings	0.20	0.24	0.17	0.13	0.41	1.00	–
(7) Lyrics' relevance	0.33	0.33	0.30	0.23	0.06	0.13	1.00
Mean	4.38	4.21	4.74	3.71	4.41	3.45	3.39
Standard deviation	1.15	1.38	1.12	1.87	1.13	1.57	1.71

**Table II.**  
Bivariate correlations,  
means, and standard  
deviations

**Notes:** Net-A, valenced index of ad execution-related thoughts; Net-N, valenced index of nostalgia-related thoughts



**Figure 1.**  
Observed effects of  
nostalgia and relevance  
(main-effects model)

**Notes:** <sup>a</sup>Song's nostalgia is induced by song's period; \* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.005$  (for one-tail)

( $\chi^2 = 29.97$ ,  $df = 12$ ,  $\chi^2/df = 2.50 < 3$  (Bagozzi and Yi, 1988), NNFI = 0.93 > 0.90, CFI = 0.96 > 0.95, GFI = 0.97 > 0.90, RMSEA = 0.070 < 0.08, SRMR = 0.063 < 0.08 (Hu and Bentler, 1999; McDonald and Ho, 2002)). In accordance with Labovitz (1968), a 0.10 standard for statistical significance was adopted while assessing all structural coefficients. This criterion was reasonable because the influential direction was known.

#### 5.4 Results of the main-effects model

Consistent with *H1*, the previously heard old songs generated more positively valenced nostalgia-related thoughts than did the new songs ( $\gamma = 0.53$ ,  $t = 70.33$ ,  $p < 0.005$ ). The old songs also had a significant positive effect on good mood ( $\gamma = 0.13$ ,  $t = 1.78$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), supporting *H2*. In support of *H3* and *H4*, high-relevance lyrics, as compared with low-relevance lyrics, created more positive valenced thoughts about ad execution ( $\gamma = 0.43$ ,  $t = 5.42$ ,  $p < 0.005$ ), and the valenced ad execution-related thoughts had a positive effect on ad attitude ( $\beta = 0.54$ ,  $t = 3.41$ ,  $p < 0.005$ ). Further, having more favorable nostalgic thoughts significantly improved ad attitude ( $\beta = 0.15$ ,  $t = 3.25$ ,  $p < 0.005$ ), supporting *H5*.

As anticipated, good mood improved ad attitude ( $\beta = 0.43$ ,  $t = 3.02$ ,  $p < 0.005$ ), supporting *H6*. As for the relationship between cognition and affect, the results demonstrated that a valenced set of ad execution-related thoughts had a significantly positive effect on good mood ( $\beta = 0.77$ ,  $t = 70.11$ ,  $p < 0.005$ ), supporting *H7*. Finally, ad attitude had a positive effect on brand attitude ( $\beta = 0.45$ ,  $t = 7.31$ ,  $p < 0.005$ ), lending support to *H8*.

The authors also compared the total effects of nostalgia and lyrics' relevance on ad attitude and brand attitude. The total effect of nostalgia was 0.14 ( $t = 3.11$ ) on ad attitude and 0.06 ( $t = 2.87$ ) on brand attitude. The total effect of relevance was 0.37 ( $t = 5.91$ ) on ad attitude and 0.17 ( $t = 4.64$ ) on brand attitude. Referring to Eriksson *et al.* (2000) and McAlexander *et al.* (1994), the total effects of relevance were greater than those of nostalgia, denoting that the variation in relevance, as compared with nostalgia, had a greater influence on ad attitude and brand attitude. Further, after applying Steiger's (1980) method to compare the effect sizes (i.e. correlation coefficients) of the two independent variables on ad and brand attitude, the results also revealed that the nostalgia and relevance correlations with brand attitude were significantly different,  $r = 0.20$  vs  $r = 0.33$  ( $T_2 = 1.728$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), respectively. Thus, relevance was more influential than nostalgia, especially for brand attitude. Furthermore, although song nostalgia did affect ad attitude and brand attitude by generating positive valenced sets of nostalgia-related thoughts (i.e. cognitive path) or arousing good moods in consumers (i.e. affective path), after comparing the total effects of different paths (0.080: cognition vs 0.056: affect), the results show that the cognitive path was more influential.

## 6. Discussion

### 6.1 Conclusions and theoretical implications

Several conclusions can be drawn from the experiment results. First, placing a previously heard popular song in a TV ad can evoke nostalgic feelings in Taiwanese young adults. The older the song is, the more nostalgic feelings are likely to be evoked. This finding is in line with results from previous qualitative studies in consumer nostalgia (Holak and Havlena, 1992; Holbrook and Schindler, 2003) and provides empirical evidence within the advertising context. It also expands the research scope of advertising nostalgia (e.g. Muehling and Sprott, 2004; Pascal *et al.*, 2002) by demonstrating that an old song can give

a flavor of nostalgia to an ad, even though the focal product, ad theme, or ad copy/story does not contain inherently nostalgic components.

Second, persuasion of nostalgia follows a dual-route process – a cognitive route through nostalgia-related thoughts and an affective one through good mood. Old songs tend to arouse consumers' good mood and generate positively valenced nostalgia-related thoughts, which lead to favorable ad attitude and brand attitude. The mediating paths of nostalgia's advertising effects are: Nostalgia → Good Mood → Aad → Ab and Nostalgia → Net-N → Aad → Ab. The latter path is more influential than the former, and the two paths seem to be mutually independent. To the best of the authors' knowledge, this study is the first to explore the mechanism through which nostalgia influences ad and brand attitude in both cognitive and affective manners.

Furthermore, the use of highly relevant lyrics generates more favorable ad execution-related thoughts, which directly affect ad attitude or indirectly improve ad attitude through good mood. The mediating mechanisms are: Relevance → Net-A → Aad → Ab and Relevance → Net-A → Good Mood → Aad → Ab. The results of the total effects and significance test of correlation coefficients show that lyrics' relevance has a greater effect on consumer brand attitudes than does nostalgia. These findings demonstrate the role of lyrics' relevance to the product in affecting ad effects, echoing the importance of music/advertising congruity (Oakes, 2007). Furthermore, this paper finds that "music's" relevance to the central ad message (e.g. Leong, 2005; MacInnis and Park, 1991) is different from "lyrics" relevance to that the same – they have different mediating mechanisms (i.e. affect dominated vs cognition dominated).

Although Reisenwitz *et al.* (2004) suggest that a positive relationship exists between age and proneness to nostalgia, and Holbrook and Schindler (1991) posit that consumer responses are generally susceptible to nostalgic feelings starting at age 24, the results of the current study suggest that even for undergraduates between the ages of 17 and 23, previously heard popular songs released when they were attending elementary school can still evoke obviously nostalgic feelings, thereby enlarging the scope of target consumers for nostalgia ads.

### 6.2 Managerial implications

For practitioners, this study provides several useful suggestions in terms of designing ads or changing consumer attitudes. First, if companies want to use a TV ad to evoke nostalgic feelings in an audience, they can simply feature a familiar old song in the ad. It is not necessary for the ad theme, product, story, or performers to be related to nostalgia or recollection components, nor does the song need to be very old. Songs that were popularized ten years previously are "old" enough to evoke nostalgic feelings.

Second, when companies want to induce consumers' good mood, there are two useful methods. They can use old/nostalgic songs. If they want to avoid considerations about the song period, they can also employ songs with high-relevance lyrics that have indirect effects on mood, too.

Third, if companies want consumers to generate better ad attitudes and brand attitudes, they should select old songs with high-relevance lyrics. If it is difficult to find appropriate songs with both characteristics, lyrics' relevance should be the primary consideration. According to a content analysis of local commercials in Taiwan, music is embedded in over 80 percent of commercials; 13 percent of these include lyrics, but only 12 percent of the lyrics are relevant to the advertised products (Huang and Xu, 2002). In other words, many companies in Taiwan do not understand the importance of lyrics' relevance when choosing ad songs. This paper demonstrates that high-relevance

lyrics are more persuasive than low-relevance ones, so companies should pay more attention to lyric relevance.

Finally, although Havlena and Holak (1991) indicate that the current boom of nostalgia-based products and ads is targeted largely at baby boomers and other mature consumer groups, this paper finds that nostalgia is not restricted to mature consumers. Undergraduate students can also feel nostalgic and respond favorably to nostalgic ads. Therefore, when targeting the youth market, nostalgia appeals may represent a viable option. In current practice, advertisers often cooperate with recording companies to combine singers' latest songs in the ad to attract a young audience. The results in this paper suggest that popular songs released ten years ago may also serve their needs.

### 6.3 Limitations and future research

This study has certain limitations. First, only undergraduate students are sampled; however, their responses to nostalgia may be different from consumers in other age brackets. Previous research has suggested that a positive relationship exists between age and proneness to nostalgia (Reisenwitz *et al.*, 2004); old or mature consumer groups may have stronger responses to nostalgia advertising than young adults. Therefore, future studies should consider investigating the responses of different-aged consumers toward nostalgia appeals.

Second, the experiment focuses solely on music-dominated ads for low involvement products, which represents a subsection of all TV commercials. When ads contain more verbal product messages and songs are limited to background effects, consumers may attend to the product messages rather than the background music. In addition, for high-involvement products, consumer ad processing is more likely to follow a central route, where advertising music is usually considered a peripheral cue and has a weaker impact on ad and brand attitudes (MacInnis and Jaworski, 1989). Therefore, future studies can explore the generalizability of the findings of the current paper by re-testing the effects of experimental variables for high-involvement products.

Third, this study is restricted to popular songs with a lively tone, which are related to infatuation and happiness. Sad songs that pertain to lovelorn themes, sentimental wounds, or lonely feelings are not explored. Future research can investigate what emotions within songs or what kinds of music (e.g. popular, country, rock) are most suitable in terms of song period and lyrics' relevance to display their effects. In addition, this experiment uses more familiar popular songs. Since the elicitation of nostalgic feelings requires familiarity, a never-heard old song may not be able to produce the same effects as those revealed in this study. Finally, this study selects old songs that were popularized ten years ago. It would be interesting to note any differences with a study that employs songs from 15 or 20 years ago across a similar sample. This would provide more information regarding the optimal time delay between a song's release date and the time it becomes most effective in terms of arousing sentiment. Further research on each of these issues is warranted.

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Songs' nostalgia  
and lyrics'  
relevance

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