

The power of

Music is invariably an after-thought in the creative process, but research shows that great soundtracks can add impact and, consequently, effectiveness to advertising

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Music has long played a big role in advertising, going right back to the radio jingles of the 1920s, but it has become increasingly important in recent years. Many of the most popular and effective ads of the past 10 years have been built around music. And advertising has become an important source of revenue and

publicity for musicians.

Last year was a particularly big year for music in British advertising (Figure 1), culminating in a number one hit for Gabrielle Aplin's *The Power of Love* as a result of its use in the John Lewis Christmas ad.

But does music really matter? Putting a pop song in your ad is clearly a good way to promote the artist, but does it actually help sell the client's product? If music does sell stuff, how does it work? And how can we make it work better? Given the cost of licensing music tracks, these are important questions, particularly for an agency like *adam&eveDDB* that is renowned for its use of music. That is why we've spent the past two years researching the effects of music in advertising.

Together with our colleagues from the Psychology Department at Goldsmiths, University of London and at our sister research agency Hall & Partners, we've looked at how music works, and how to measure its effects. And we believe the results have important implications, not just for how you use music, but for how you research advertising in general.

Although most people acknowledge the power of music, advertising agencies devote surprisingly little resource to it. Very few

have dedicated music or audio specialists, and the classic creative team of copywriter and art director tends to prioritise words and visuals over audio. Choosing music tends to be a fairly subjective decision, and is often only done after all other aspects of the ad are finalised.

The situation is similar when we look at the research literature. There are more than 48,000 articles on the Ware database, but only 10% of them mention music. And of those, only 29 (0.1 %) discuss the role of music in any detail.

However, what little research there is does suggest that music can have very positive effects. Music can help to gain attention, create desired moods, change the pace of an advertising narrative, facilitate brand and message recall, improve attitudes towards brands and, ultimately, influence purchase behaviour (for a summary of the research literature, see Best practice: Music in advertising, *Admap*, April 2003; Ware & Branthwaite, ESOMAR Marketing Research, 1997; Pak, ARF – Knowledge at Hand, 2012). In addition, data from Millward Brown's large pre-testing database shows that music can greatly enhance interest in and enjoyment of ads (Millward Brown Knowledge Point, 2008).



John Lewis is renowned for running highly emotional TV advertising, such as 'The Journey', in which music plays a central role

music

FIGURE 1: The TV ad music 'best of 2012'

MUSIC	AD	AGENCY
<i>In The House, In A Heartbeat</i> , John Murphy	Strongbow Pear Earn It	St. Luke's
<i>Run Boy Run</i> , Woodkid	O ₂ Priority Sports Powered By Nike+	VCCP
<i>Ho Hey</i> , The Lumineers	E.ON Energy Best Deal	DLKW Lowe
<i>Harder Than You Think</i> , Public Enemy	Channel 4 Paralympics Meet The Superhumans	4Creative
<i>Welcome Home</i> , Radical Face	Nikon I I Am	Jung Matt Spree
<i>Wish You Were Red</i> , Trailer Trash Tracys	Renault 4+	Publicis
<i>Never Tear Us Apart</i> , Paloma Faith	John Lewis Never Knowingly Undersold	adam&eveDDB
<i>Whispers and Stories</i> , Sniffy Dog	Volkswagen Polo Dad	adam&eveDDB
<i>Everything At Once</i> , Lenka	Microsoft Windows 8 Everything At Once	Crispin, Porter & Bogusky
<i>The Power Of Love</i> , Gabrielle Aplin	John Lewis, The Journey	adam&eveDDB

Source: www.tvadmusic.co.uk

Advertising practitioners understand the power of music (even though they seemingly devote little time to thinking about it) and so it comes as no surprise that around 90% of international TV ads use music (Applebaum & Haliburton, *International Journal of Advertising*, 1993).

But not every piece of music works for every ad, and industry as well as academic researchers agree that the fit between music and brand/ad is crucial. When music and brand/ad message are congruent, purchase intent goes up (Alpert, et al., *J Bus Res*, 2005; Oakes, *J Adv Res*, 2007), and visual recall of ad scenes and verbal recall of brand and message recall is better (North et al., *J App Soc Psy*, 2004). Conversely, when the music does not match the brand, or the ad, it can have little or even negative effects.

Madnnis and Park outlined this 'musical fit' hypothesis in 1991 (*J Con Res*) and it has since found a lot of support from academics

and market researchers alike (Hung, *J Adv*, 2000, 2001; Lavack, Thakor, and Bottausci, *International Journal of Advertising*, 2008; Zander, et al., *Advances Adv Res*, 2010).

But how can you tell if a piece of music fits an ad or a brand? This is usually treated as a subjective judgement, but there are psychological research tools that might help. In a study presented at last year's Audio Branding Congress (Müllensiefen et al., *Audio Branding Academy Yearbook*, 2013) we explored a new research tool – a bespoke 'semantic differential' – that measures the match between brands and music tracks and could potentially help with the music selection process.

To validate the tool, we set up an experiment where we chose different TV ads for the same orange juice brand and paired them with music that deliberately matched or mismatched the brand profile. We played these ads to consumers, who then rated

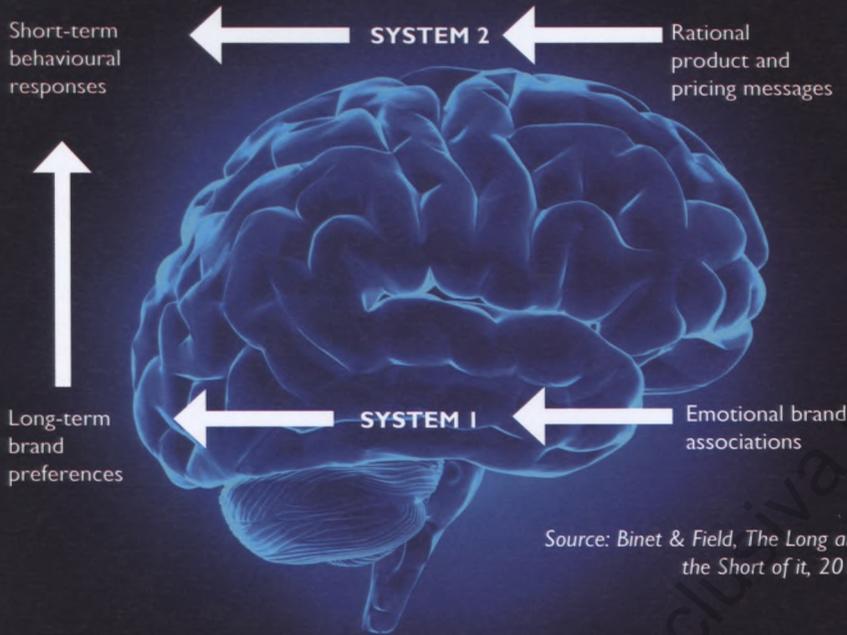
them using a questionnaire closely modelled on one widely used to pre-test advertising.

The results showed that the ads with music are much more effective than ads without it, and that choosing congruent music increases effectiveness even further. Overall, ads with congruent music are 16% more effective than ads with no music on the standard industry pre-testing measure.

This result demonstrates that music can have an effect on consumers' explicit judgements of an ad. But can music have other effects?

In recent years, researchers have become increasingly interested in the implicit effects of advertising. Robert Heath (*Seducing the Subconscious*, 2012) has shown that ads can influence consumers in ways that don't involve explicit messages, and which may be hard for them to articulate. Binet and Field (*Marketing in the Era of Accountability*, 2007; *The Long and the Short of it*, 2013) have shown

FIGURE 2: How emotional priming works



that ads that eschew explicit messages in favour of a more implicit, emotional approach tend to have very broad, long-term effects that make consumers more receptive to other more explicit forms of marketing (Figure 2). As a result, this 'emotional priming' tends to produce very large, long-term sales effects and big profits.

Heath demonstrates that, in addition to all the ways that music can enhance a commercial enumerated above, it is a brilliant vehicle for creating emotional reactions that attach directly to the brand to make it more desirable. But as Heath shows, implicit effects like this seem to require relatively little conscious attention, and may sometimes operate below the radar of consciousness altogether. That can make them hard to measure with conventional market research techniques like the pre-testing method in our first experiment.

Fortunately, new research methods are emerging which attempt to measure the implicit effects of advertising. Might these

shed further light on the effects of music?

To test this, we set up a second experiment, which we showcased at the 2013 MRS conference. We played a Volkswagen TV commercial to two samples of viewers. One sample saw the ad with and one without the music track. Both groups were then tested for the effect on brand perception, pre- and post-exposure, using two quite different methods.

The first method measured explicit attitudes, using a conventional questionnaire. The second method was a variant of the Harvard Implicit Attitude Test (IAT), developed by Hall & Partners. Rather than looking at how people answer questions about a brand, the IAT focuses on how fast they respond. This is important because the more deeply a view is held the faster the response; the longer the response takes the more ambiguous participants feel about their judgement. Measuring reaction times in this way allows us to go below the surface of explicit attitudes to look for deeper, implicit

effects on brand perceptions.

For the VW commercial that we tested, we found no significant effect on explicit brand perceptions. Consumers simply expressed the same views before seeing the ad and when retested the day after they saw the ad. This result on its own would suggest that the ad did not have any short-term effect on how consumers view the Volkswagen brand. This is hardly surprising for a strong brand like Volkswagen, whose image has been patiently built up through years of consistent advertising.

However, when we analysed the reaction-time data, we found that the ad did have a clear effect on implicit perceptions of VW, while leaving perceptions of other brands unchanged. In particular, we saw that the ad made VW seem like a more exciting brand. And once again we found that music enhanced this effect. Adding music to the ad increased the implicit brand effect by around 11%.

These two experiments clearly demonstrate that music can have a significant effect on how individuals respond to an ad and how they feel about the brand, even if these effects are not always explicit. But what about effects beyond the individual?

In the real world, advertising and brands work in a social context. People watch TV

FIGURE 3: Famous musical ads

Coke 'I'd like to teach the world to sing' (1971)

Hovis 'Bike' (1973)

Hamlet 'Bald Man' (1976)

Levi's 'Launderette' (1985)

Guinness 'Surfer' (1999)

Cadbury's 'Gorilla' (2007)

Hovis 'Go on lad' (2008)

T-Mobile 'Dance' (2009)

John Lewis 'The Journey' (2012)

ads together, and sometimes they may talk about them or even share them with their friends. Brands are often used in a social setting, and people occasionally recommend them to others. These social ripples can amplify the individual effects of advertising, and if they are large enough they can create 'herd' effects which are very large indeed (Mark Earls, *Herd*, 2007).

Binet and Field have shown that the most effective ads of all generally work at the social level, by making the brand and its marketing famous and getting people to talk about them. These 'fame' campaigns generally tend to be highly emotional, with very little in the way of an explicit product message, and it is striking how often music is central to their success (Figure 3).

Undoubtedly, the main way music contributes to fame is by heightening the emotional impact of the visuals – Hollywood has understood this effect ever since sound was introduced. But music can amplify effectiveness in another way, by generating free media exposure.

John Lewis's TV advertising exemplifies this effect very well. John Lewis is renowned for running highly emotional TV advertising in which music plays a central role. The songs featured in the ads have become very



FIGURE 4: Music makes TV ads more effective

	Number of cases	% cases reporting any very large business effects	Average number of very large business effects reported
Musical ads	21	93%	2.5
Other ads	142	73%	2.3
Difference		+28%	+20%

Source: IPA dataBANK, 2008-2012

popular, resulting in millions of radio plays, downloads and single sales. And interest in the songs has in turn prompted people to seek out the original John Lewis ads online, resulting in more than 10 million YouTube views. We estimate that this free media exposure may have increased the impact of the campaign by around 75% (Golding and Binet, Cannes Creative Effectiveness Awards entry, 2013).

So music can heighten our response to advertising, make us feel warmer toward the brand, and increase the chances that we will pass these feelings on to other people. But what about sales? YouTube views and Facebook 'likes' are all very well, but the ultimate aim of most advertising is to sell product. Anecdotally, music seems to feature in many of the most effective campaigns, but there is almost no published research on the sales effects of music.

However, the IPA dataBANK does now contain some information on the use of music in advertising and a preliminary analysis of that data suggests that music does indeed boost effectiveness (Figure 4). Using the same measures as Binet and Field, we find that TV ads featuring music prominently are significantly more effective than ads that don't. Depending on which measure is used, it looks as if music can enhance effectiveness by around 20%–30%.

One reason why emotional advertising works so well is that its effects last much longer (Binet and Field, *The Long and the Short of it*, 2013). This, in turn, relates to the long-term nature of emotional memories. It may be that music enhances long-term effectiveness in a similar way. Certainly,

most people can easily remember (and sing) advertising jingles from their childhood, even if they can't recall the visuals that went with them. (Finger of Fudge, anyone?) The dataBANK does not yet contain sufficient data to distinguish between the short-term and long-term effects of music, but this may be fertile ground for future research.

In the meantime, it is clear that music really does matter. Our various research findings suggest that music can make TV advertising work 10–30% harder, so it's clearly worth spending significant time and money on getting the right track.

And it's also clear that conventional advertising research probably underestimates the effects of music, because some operate below the radar of consciousness and some only emerge at the social level.

And this points to a more general conclusion. Music offers a particularly pure example of the way that the non-verbal, stylistic elements of an ad can influence consumer attitudes and behaviour. This research demonstrates that these effects are important, perhaps in some cases more important than the explicit message of the ad. And it demonstrates that conventional research does not always measure them properly.

So maybe if we can understand the power of music a little better, we will gain a deeper understanding of how advertising works in general.

 more on music in advertising at www.warc.com