Exploring the Congruence Level of Music and Product Category. A Content Analysis on Global Musical Ads

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Abstract. The race to capture consumers’ attention has rapidly increased in the past years. Besides the importance of the channels, the elements composing an ad are as crucial as ever in promoting compelling messages relevant to the target group. Music is one of the mechanisms through which the interest of consumers can be aroused while enhancing the advertising message and giving it more nuance. There have been several attempts to understand advertising music better, but most of the works focus on individual dimensions. There is a need to understand advertising music choices more coherently and complexity. The present study aims to provide a comprehensive instrument of several items that help understand musical congruency within an ad. The paper provides a content analysis of 95 global musical ads for 2019–2022. The primary product/service categories are reviewed, and the dimensions used in the analysis present the essential aspects of musical congruency, underlining the importance of original music composed for the ads, the capacity to adapt to various music sources, and giving additional importance to elements such as pitch, dynamics, and tempo.
The paper offers a bigger picture of the musical landscape in advertising and interweaves music knowledge and elements with advertising purposes.

**Keywords:** Music; Congruency; Advertising; Content analysis; Co-occurrence analysis.

**Introduction**

The advertising market is oversaturated, and the proliferation of communication channels led to a lack of interest and motivation on behalf of consumers. The need to stir their attention and find powerful messages motivates advertisers to search for alternative channels and give more consideration to how advertisements are conceived. In this attempt to find a more meaningful balance within the ad and make it more relevant, brands often turn to music.

Music is omnipresent in advertising, whether we discuss above-the-line channels such as television, radio, or digital platforms (Nielsen, 2015). The research in this field is interdisciplinary, with works spanning music studies (Habe et al., 2018; Herget et al., 2020), psychology (Craton et al., 2017; Frances & Dowling, 2014), and advertising (Allan, 2008; Anglada-Tort et al., 2020). Music is used in advertising as it offers a supplementary dimension to the spoken or written narrative, adding force to the promotion efforts and bringing consumers closer to the brand. Furthermore, to better grasp what makes music suitable for an ad, there is a need to understand what the main elements are involved and how they function together.

Previous studies (Frances & Dowling, 2014; Hagtvedt & Brasel, 2015; Knoeferle et al., 2017; Lowe & Haws, 2017; Sunaga, 2018) have been focusing on various independent dimensions of music in advertising, but there are scarce efforts put into unifying these dimensions and patterns into a more coherent or comprehensive instrument. Moreover, there is no clear information about why a particular type of music source fits more than others for a product category. The present study aims at gathering the most relevant studies on advertising music and proposes an instrument that looks at musical congruency within ads based on these findings.

As previous works focused mainly on individuals or only a couple of musical dimensions, the paper combines the most important items used in music analysis in advertising. It connects them based on the technical elements of a song, its most valuable attributes, and its connections to advertising purposes. The paper provides a content analysis of the past years (2019–2023) regarding musical choices in advertising and how music congruency can be found. The biggest brands are selected for analysis from platforms such as Interbrand and Forbes, and the campaigns are selected from the Ads of the World platform. The quantitative analysis focuses on how prevalent musical elements and congruency in each product category are. The co-occurrence analysis helps visualize the data and review the most important links.