The Effect of Background Music in Sports Advertisements on Emotional Arousal, Attention, and Purchase Intention

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Because of its emotional appeal, background music can be highly influential in sports advertisements (vs. general advertisements) as blending dynamic sports images and rhythmical music can create synergetic effects in forming positive brand images (McLeod, 2016). However, there is a lack of theoretical explanation regarding the psychological and physiological reactions to experiencing music in sports advertisements and the consequences of such experience.

In media and communication studies, the relationship between background music and viewers’ responses and related theories has gained much scholarly attention. For instance, arousal theory is used to explain the positive relationship between media background music and viewers’ arousal and attention (Fox & Embrey, 1972). A large body of research is established, as researchers scrutinized the roles of arousal and attention in consumer information processing and as a predictor of advertising effects (e.g., Morris & Boone, 1998; Sanbonmatsu & Kardes, 1988).

Based on arousal theory, we examined the differences in consumer’s arousal, attention, and purchase intention according to the presence or absence of background music in sports advertisements. Specifically, the purpose of this study was to analyze the relations between arousal, attention, and purchase intention through an information processing model (IPM) explaining how consumers develop new beliefs, attitudes, and future behavioral decisions. We assert that academics and practitioners can gain deeper understandings and insights for better consumer experience by dissecting the causal effects using IPM.

Towards these ends, a total of 54 respondents participated in the study. Two running shoe advertisements were selected for this study. The first advertisement only featured narrations, while both narrations and background music were included in the second advertisement. A quantitative electroencephalogram (qEEG) was employed to measure the level of arousal, and questionnaires were used to measure attention and purchase intention. A multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) and a partial least squares structural equation modeling was performed for data analyses.

Mean differences between groups indicated that experimental group exposed to background music (vs. non-exposure group) had a significant difference in arousal ($F = 25.868, p < .001$), attention ($F = 5.792, p = .020$), and purchase intention ($F = 4.159, p = .047$). The results of path analysis indicated that arousal induced by watching sports advertisements has a positive impact on attention ($\beta = .420; p < .001$), and attention in watching sports has a positive impact on purchase intention ($\beta = .523; p < .001$).

In this study, we integrated a vast and disparate literature to investigate the overlooked effects of arousal and attention in sport advertisement studies. The results of this study contributes to sport marketing literature as we implemented scientific methods to apply and examine arousal theory and IPM in the context of sport advertising. Association among EEG and psychometric scales indicated significant effects. These results also suggest practical implications for effective sports advertising strategies. Practitioners should consider background music as a critical determinant for successful sports advertising based on its moderate effect sizes on gaining attention and purchase intentions.