Music-Visual Congruency and Its Impact on Two-Sided Message Recall

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Music-Visual Congruency and Its Impact on Two-Sided Message Recall To date there has been minimal work which has evaluated processing biases related to two-side advertising. In this work we look at the impact of music-visual congruency on two-sided message recall. To ascertain the effects of music-visual congruency on two-sided message recall, subjects were exposed to a fictitious advertisement containing a list of ten negatively correlated words. Recall results support mood congruence processing theories which link affective mood states to underlying cognitions. Implications for increasing advertising credibility through two-sided advertising while harnessing processing biases are discussed.

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Two of the greatest challenges facing advertisers today are credibility and clutter (Marney 1996; Zanot, 1984)—both of which can negatively impact advertising recall. Thus, creative tactics that help to combat these problems are prevalent in today’s advertising. For example, a two-sided message can help to increase credibility (Pechmann 1992; Swinyard 1981), whereas music can serve as an attention getting agent (Kroeker-Riel 1979). In this work we look at the impact of music-visual congruency on two-sided message recall.

Theoretical Foundation

Two-sided Advertising Messages

Two-sided advertising messages present both positive and negative information about a given product, service, or even situation (Hovland, Lumsdaine and Sheffield 1949). Extant research shows that two-sided advertising is viewed as more credible (Kamins and Assael 1987; Smith and Hunt 1978; Swinyard 1981). However, to date there has been minimal work which has evaluated processing biases related to two-side advertising. In this study we are interested not in the credibility of the claim, but in the viewer’s ability to recall certain portions of the message. Thus, we present viewers with a list of five negatively correlated words (e.g., love/hate) imposed on an advertising image and then measure recall of these words across conditions of music-visual congruency and incongruency.

Music and Advertising

Music functions on many levels to positively influence advertised brands and their messages. From an elaboration likelihood perspective, music is viewed as a peripheral cue, which helps to gain attention for the brand and create positive affect. In fact much of the music and advertising literature focuses on music’s ability to create a positive mood state (see Bruner 1990 for a review). There is substantial evidence that a positive mood state improves recall as encoding is more efficient (Isen 1993 and 1999). In this work we expect that the calm music will induce a more positive mood state than chaotic music or even the control condition where no music is present. Thus,

H1a: Calm music will lead to greater total word recall than chaotic music.
H1b: Chaotic music will diminish total word recall.

Further, mood congruency processing states that processing is selective and biased toward cognitions that are congruent with our mood state (Bower, Gilligan and Monteiro 1981; Parrott 1991). If we are in a positive mood (calm in this study), we are more likely to process information which is positive. Conversely, if we are in a negative mood state (chaotic in this study), we are more likely to process information which is negative. Thus,

H2a: Calm music will lead to greater word recall of positively valenced words than chaotic music.
H2b: Chaotic music will lead to greater word recall of negatively valenced words than calm music.

Further, we believe the mood state is intensified when the visual and musical cues are congruent. Thus,

H3a: Calm music-visual congruency will lead to greater recall of positively valenced words than calm music-visual incongruency.
H3b: Chaotic music-visual congruency will lead to great recall of negatively valenced words than chaotic music-visual incongruency.

Divided attention and Incongruity

There is significant evidence that when attention is divided between two or more tasks (e.g., resolving the incongruity and processing words), recall is diminished (see Naveh-Benjamin, Guez and Marom 2003). Thus, total recall should be enhanced when music-visual congruency exists because cognitive resources are not expended trying to resolve the incongruity between the music and the visual image.

H4a: Music-visual congruency will increase total word recall.

Results

Manipulation checks reveal that perceived congruency varies as expected (M_incongruent=2.39 and M_congruent=6.16, F(1,239)=1876.00, p=.0001) and does not vary by example (F(1,239)=2.87, p>.26). Further the images that are suppose to be chaotic or calm were perceived as such (M_calm=5.06, M_chaotic=5.46, F(1,239)<1.) as are the music selections (M_calm=4.75, M_chaotic=5.02, F(1,239)<1.)

Music Effects. In support of H1a, total recall is greater for the calm music than the chaotic music (Ms_calm=6.312, Ms_chaotic=4.49; F(1, 159) =51.697, p=.000). Similarly, H1b is supported (Ms_chaotic=4.49, Ms_control=6.25; F(1,159)=47.082, p=.000), indicating that the chaotic music diminish total word recall.

Mood congruency. As predicted by H2a, total positive word recall is greater when calm music is present than when chaotic music is present (Ms_calm=3.61, Ms_chaotic=2.12; F(1,159)=77.80, p=.000). Contrary to our predictions, total negative word recall is not greater when chaotic music is present.

When we add the visual image to our analysis, we find strong support for H3a and marginal support H3b. Calm music-visual congruency leads to greater recall of positively valenced words than calm music-visual incongruency (F(1,79)=14.274, p=.000). Chaotic music-visual congruency leads to marginally greater recall of negatively valenced words than chaotic music-visual incongruency (F(1,79)=5.149, p=.026).
Incongruency and Divided Attention. We do not find support for H4, which predicts that music-visual congruity will lead to increased recall ($M_{congruent} = 5.55$, $M_{incongruent} = 5.25$; $F_{(1,159)}=1.06, p=.305$). What we do find is that total positive recall is increased in cases of music-visual congruency ($F_{(1,159)}=11.908, p=.001$).

Conclusions
These results suggest that temporary mood states can influence processing and are likely tied to underlying cognitions. These findings are important in that we are able to demonstrate how advertisers can potentially capitalize on processing biases of two sided messages and mood-congruency. The pattern of recall results in this study, suggests that advertisers can present two-sided messages and bias processing beyond simple credibility effects.