Narrative Music in Congruent and Incongruent TV Advertising

Kineta Hung

Recent research suggests that music comprises a sign system that could add meanings to advertising. However, research in this area is scant and there is practically no research that has examined the process by which consumers use music to create meanings. This study extends previous research on print advertising to delineate effects of music in congruent/incongruent TV advertising. A mixed design integrating features of qualitative and quantitative methods was used. Results indicated that the viewers’ knowledge of cultural texts form a reference point for reading the commercials. Specifically, music in congruent ads reduces "noise" by reinforcing the connecting cultural context to communicate meanings. However, music in incongruent ads helps enact an alternative context that is meaningful to the viewer to communicate the ad message.

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Music is presumed to be an affective component in the majority of the advertising literature (Alpert and Alpert 1990; Bruner 1990; Strodt and Leckebush 1988). In part, this prevalent view is spurred by research drawing on the Elaboration Likelihood Model that tends to dichotomize ad components and processing approaches. According to this orientation, viewers are presumed to follow the central route and process the semantic aspects of message-based components (e.g., supportive argument, counter argument), or they follow the peripheral route and allow the sensual and/or formal aspects of non-message-based components (e.g., music, presenter, humor) to affect the way they process the commercial (MacInnis, Moorman and Jaworski 1991; MacInnis and Park 1991). Because music is an effective inducer of emotions, past research has emphasized its sensual properties and effects while ignoring its semantic properties and effects. However, as pointed out by a number of researchers, the practice of dichotomizing ad components into two distinct categories of being either message-relevant or non-message-relevant could be simplistic (MacInnis and Park 1991) and potentially misleading (McCracken 1988; Scott 1990).

In contrast to this prevalent view, scholars in cultural studies counter that music comprises a sign system that could effect the movement of meanings from a culturally constituted world to the world of products (Englis, Solomon and Oldsman 1992; McCracken 1986). Specifically, Scott (1990) conducted a textual analysis of eight television commercials that indicated that music could help represent cultural temporality, identify locations and forge social identifications in advertising. However, despite the potential importance of this approach, research in this area is scant and there is practically no research that has examined how music creates meanings in advertising.

While music is a symbolic element capable of communicating meanings on its own, it never appears alone in a commercial. Instead, music is always accompanied by at least one other ad component, such as voice-over-dialogue, copy, or a visual. Thus, the function of music in advertising is determined not only by the meanings it evokes, but also by its relationship to other ad elements. These juxtapositions of music, speech, copy, or a visual provide a framework for examining how music adds meanings to advertising.

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Music As a Cultural Symbol in Advertising

Rhetorical Figures and Incongruity

The process of coating meanings onto a product was formerly expressed as a form of transference (McCracken 1986) but has been later extended to include different rhetorical processes that specify the relationship among ad components (McQuarrie and Mick 1992; 1996). In a study examining the juxtaposition of picture and text in print advertising, McQuarrie and Mick (1996) outlined the rhetorical figures found in magazine advertising that encompass different levels of incongruity. In particular, they suggested that because the level of deviation would be greater in the case of irregular figures, incongruent advertising could elicit semantic processing at a deeper level. This point is supported by other research, which has shown that incongruent advertising elicits better recall than congruent advertising (Holland and Jacoby 1973; Houston, Childers and Heckler 1987).

An important feature relative to the semantic properties of incongruent advertising is that the incongruity could help form a "twist" in the rhetorical structure of the commercial and entice viewers to reconect seemingly incompatible components in a new light. Sperber and Wilson (1986) suggested that when a speaker violates a convention, the listener would search for an alternative context that renders the violation intelligible. Similar support has been provided by Gorbman (1987), who suggested that any music applied to a film segment will have an effect on the spectator because the spectator automatically imposes meaning on such combinations. This process of meaning enactment or resonance (McQuarrie and Mick 1992) is made possible because the two components in a symbol are arbitrarily coupled (Culler 1977; Flrat and Venkatesh 1995). Thus, the signifier (or the vehicle such as a word that transmits meanings) could be associated with different signified (or the meanings represented) to create different meaning structures. Indeed, there are many examples in the history of languages where the meanings represented by a word shift over time. Thus, a silly person once was someone "happy, blessed, and pious" but now is "simple, foolish, and stupid" (Culler 1976). In the postmodern world where styles proliferate and meanings change at an ever faster pace, advertisers and consumers alike become active agents who substitute different meanings onto a consumption symbol (Hedgidge 1979; Hirschman, Scott and Wells 1996).

For example, rap music that was once a powerful expression of the culture of African-Americans has become a staple of the mainstream popular culture, selling sneakers and soft drinks to young consumers around the world (Blair and Hatala 1992). Similarly, viewers watching a commercial are able to reconfigure meanings associated with an ad symbol to ensure its appropriateness in a given copy (Ottes and Scott 1996; Scott 1994).

McQuarrie and Mick (1996) have previously illustrated the process of adjusting meanings in a commercial using a Band-Aid ad. The Band-Aid ad was made up of two incongruous elements: a headline, "Say hello to your child's new bodyguard" and an illustration of the product emblazoned with cartoon characters. When confronted with the incongruous images, viewers could resolve the conflict by endowing the Band-Aid with the qualities of a bodyguard (i.e., big, strong, protecting VIPs from harm) and thereby inferring from the commercial that Band-Aid could provide extra protection to an invaluable child (pp. 425-6). Because the new reading requires input of social knowledge (e.g., the meanings of a bodyguard, a viewer's prior exposure to other commercials, films and television programs could be called upon to offer alternative linkages that render an incongruent advertising meaningful (Ottes and Scott 1996; Scott 1992).

Implications for Music in Advertising

Although these previous studies tend to examine advertising rhetoric inherent in verbal and visual elements, they provide a theoretical framework that can be extended to examine how music and other ad elements (e.g., visual) interact and communicate meanings. Specifically, when music and visual elements are congruous (i.e., if they evoke similar meanings), the meanings evoked could be readily communicated via the connecting context. Alternatively, when music and visual elements are incongruous, their meanings would have to be reconfigured to connect in an alternative context. The current study will draw on commercials that are more or less congruent to examine these issues. Research results will show the role music plays in helping viewers interpret these commercials.

Methods

Research Approach and Design

Previous research examining ad meanings have typically used textual approaches to reveal more contexts
ally the cultural milieu in which viewers and commercials were situated. Specifically, Scott (1990) used the textual approach to show how music can help communicate meanings in advertising. While her study indicated that an experienced interpreter could read the music-evoked meanings of a commercial, it is less clear whether such meanings are communicated to the average audience. Thus, empirical support showing that viewers do acquire meanings from music is needed to advance this area of research.

The current study complements previous research by collecting viewers’ verbatim responses to advertising involving music. Further, it goes beyond a straightforward textual approach but integrates aspects of experimental methods to examine how viewers enact meanings in these commercials. Whereas a textual approach can enrich an experiment by yielding data that reveal more broadly the respondents’ emic view, an experimental design can enhance interpretive research by providing guidelines for creating groups (Glaser and Strauss 1968) and delineating the effects of music using a comparative approach. Together, the methods provide a richer and more informed approach to examine the phenomenon.

The current study consisted of eight conditions that examined respondents’ perceptions of two musical scores, two videos, and four commercials that arranged the music and videos in split (mismatched) and intact (matched) format. The stimuli came from two existing commercials and supported Scott’s (1990) plea to study music in “real” commercials. The manipulated stimuli also approximated conditions of more or less congruent advertising that warrant a comparative study. Hollander and Jacoby (1973) have used a similar design in their work on advertising incongruity.

Advertising Stimuli

The stimuli used in this research were made up of the music and videos of two existing television commercials. The two commercials were selected from a sample of 120 international coffee commercials provided by an industry source. Coffee commercials were used because coffee is a product with which the respondents were familiar. Meanwhile, international advertising was used because few respondents would have prior exposure to these commercials.

The selected commercials, entitled Brazil and Been to Café (Café, for short) were aired in Australia in 1991. These commercials were selected because the music was instrumental (no lyrics) and there was no written or spoken words in the commercials—the brief copy that appeared in Brazil could be deleted easily.

Thus, the selected commercials could be adapted to conform to the design of this research.

The music in Brazil had a simple repetitive tune and a reedy, “primitive” sound arising over an orchestral background. It resembled film music featuring faraway places (e.g., Silk Road, Mission). Café music, on the other hand, consisted of raspy avant-garde band music that carried a drumbeat throughout the commercial. Also, it had an edgy voice (no lyrics) that cut in the soundtrack from time to time. The tempo of the music ranged from slow (Brazil) to moderate (Café).

The scenes in the selected commercials were sung together without an explicit storyline to evoke an image. The images in Brazil included rainforest scenes and what appeared to be Latin Americans working and drinking coffee in a wilderness setting. Café was filmed in black-and-white with a slight zipt, and the images were of young men and women who appeared artistic and who socialized and drank coffee together in a sparsely decorated space. Because there was no spoken voice, the images seemed rather detached from real life. To reduce potential bias resulting from the respondents’ prior knowledge of the advertised brand, the name of a brand not available in the local area, Moccona Coffee, was superimposed onto the commercials to replace the original brand name, Nescafé.

The selected commercials were edited by a professional film technician into eight stimuli: two soundtracks (Brazil music or Brazil Café music or Om), two videos (Brazil video or Brazil Café video or Om), and four combinations of the music and videos (BmVb, BmCm, CmVb, and OmOm). Because the music and video in intact commercials appeared to evoke similar types of meanings but the music and video in split commercials appeared to evoke different types of meanings, intact (BmVb, BmCm) and split (BmCm, CmVb) commercials were used to approximate conditions of congruent and incongruent advertising. The brand name Moccona Coffee that comprised the only verbal material in the stimuli was superimposed onto the end of the commercials.

Respondents and Procedures

The study was conducted in eight MBA classes in marketing at a medium-size university in Ontario, Canada in 1993. The advertising stimuli were randomly assigned to the participating classes so that each class of students had an equal chance of being exposed to a specific stimulus. To reduce demand artifacts, a between-subject design was used. During the study, participants listened to/watched the stimulus one time. Although participation was on a volun-
tary basis, all the students who came to class on the
day of the study participated in the research.
The participants were informed that the researcher
was interested in their perceptions of certain music,
videos or commercials. They were reminded that the
study was not a test, there were no right or wrong
answers, and they could work at their own pace.
Be-
cause there were three types of stimuli, three ver-
sions of the questionnaire were used. In music condi-
tions, the main question was stated as follows:

"You have just heard a short piece of music. Please
describe the thoughts and feelings that came to
your mind when you were listening to the music.
Try to choose words such that someone reading
them would feel the same things you did. Please
include specific details."

In video and commercial conditions, references to
these stimuli were substituted for references to mu-
sic in the above statement. Participants were given
the rest of the page to write down their responses.
Additional paper was available upon request. Demo-
graphic information was collected towards the end of
the questionnaire.

A review of the demographic profile indicated that
some classes have a higher proportion of students
under 25 than the other classes. To provide consis-
tency in the sample, responses collected from stu-
dents under 25 were excluded. The remaining sample
had 134 respondents; 86% were between 25 and 34;
14% were between 35 and 44; 60% were male. Chi-
square tests indicated no significant differences across
the classes in gender (2 = 4.29, p > .05), age (2 = 8.83,
p < .05), marital status (2 = 9.77, p < .05) or family in-
come (2 = 11.44, p < .05).

Although no coffee usage information was collected from
respondents in this study, a survey of a conve-
nience sample of MBA students at the same univer-
sity conducted a year later provided useful informa-
tion. Results of the survey for students 25 or over
(n = 99) indicated that 50% of the respondents drink
one to two cups of coffee per day, 41% drink three
to four cups of coffee per day, 5% drink five cups or
more. Thus, it is reasonable to infer from this survey
that many respondents in the current study drink
coffee regularly.

Categories of Meanings
Procedures

The analysis of data was conducted at two levels.
First, a content analysis was conducted to delineate
the major categories of meanings viewers perceived in
each stimulus. Afterwards, a textual analysis was con-
ducted to identify patterns that show how viewers con-
ceive meanings in the commercials. This approach has
been used in previous research (Mick and DeMoss 1990;
Roth, Öttesø and Brunel 1999) and provided an oppor-
tunity to triangulate research findings across two meth-
ods that emphasize depth and breadth, respectively.

Because the categories of meanings evoked are unique
to the stimuli, the author (with the help of a gradu-
ate student) developed a coding scheme grounded in the
protocols to assess the types of thoughts/feelings (meanings) viewers associate with
the stimuli. We analyzed the verbatis responses in-
dependently by a) writing down the underlying mean-
ings that could provide a consistent reading across
multiple questionnaires in a given condition, and b) supporting our analyses by citing protocols that al-
lowed us to arrive at the identified meanings. The
underlying meanings were modified and refined by
each reader independently through multiple interac-
tive readings between the emergent codes and the
verbatis responses (Arnold and Fischer 1994). Fi-
nally, the author examined the extent of association
between the refined meaning codes and the protocols,
compared the two readers’ interpretations, and iso-
lated the more trustworthy categories of meanings.

Major categories of meanings are shown in Tables 1 and
2. The protocols were then content analyzed inde-
dependently by two graduate students new to this
study. The content analysis followed the procedure
used by other researchers to code verbatis responses
to advertising (e.g., Batra and Ray 1986). First, the
author delineated and numbered each thought/feel-
ing (meaning) on the questionnaires. Afterwards, the
coders identified to which category the coding
scheme did each thought/feeling belong. To ensure
that the coders would be familiar with the codes and
the analytical procedures, they performed practice
runs by coding questionnaires completed by respon-
dents under 25 years of age—that is, questionnaires
that would not be included in this study.

During the study proper, one coder began by work-
ing on the ad component conditions while the other
began by working on the commercial conditions. Both
coders were informed of the nature of the research
design and they watched/listened to the four stimuli
once. After completing the coding of the first four
stimuli, the coders watched/listened to the remaining
stimuli before coding those protocols. Despite the use
of different ordering to increase reliability, the over-
all intercoder agreement rate was 87%. The rate for
individual conditions ranged from 77% (Brazil music)
to 85% (Café music/Café video). The rate for the re-
### Table 1
Meanings Associated with Ad Components

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stimulus</th>
<th>Major Meanings</th>
<th>Quotes</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brazil music (Bm)</td>
<td>Nature/mysterious/going away (66%)</td>
<td><em>Lush green tropical rainforest, cool running water.</em> <em>As though you were on horseback going across a desert or an undulating plain or an African safari.</em> <em>Feelings of calm and peace.</em></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Serenity (26%)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Other (6%)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Café music (Cm)</td>
<td>Party music (38%)</td>
<td><em>The metallic music gives strong beat. I have a feeling of following the music and shouting.</em></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Trendy, young (23%)</td>
<td><em>May be loved by people pursuing style in living and fashion leaders.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pleasant (12%)</td>
<td><em>Funky, pleasant music.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other (27%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brazil video (Bv)</td>
<td>Nature/majesty/serenity (68%)</td>
<td><em>I felt the vastness and power of nature.</em></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Hand work, sad (21%)</td>
<td><em>Poor country appeared depressed and showed a hard life of work.</em></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Other (11%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Café video (Dv)</td>
<td>Young/trendy/friendly (49%)</td>
<td><em>Creative people, in a funky atmosphere, doing their thing.</em></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Cold, secretive (65%)</td>
<td><em>Feeling of ‘hardness,’ cold, made me feel a little uncomfortable.</em></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Relaxing (16%)</td>
<td><em>People drinking coffee in a leisurely way.</em></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Other (9%)</td>
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</table>

### Table 2
Meanings Associated with Commercials

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stimulus</th>
<th>Major Meanings</th>
<th>Quotes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brazil music (Bm)</td>
<td>Exotic, travel, hot (42%)</td>
<td><em>Exotic adventure, explores Africa, old-style vacation.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Peaceful, relaxing (25%)</td>
<td><em>Music was very soothing. Made you feel relaxed along with the pictures.</em></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Natural coffee (14%)</td>
<td><em>This coffee is 'AUTHENTIC.' Coffee not pre-processed or industrial.</em></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other (19%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Café music/ Café video (Cm/Bv)</td>
<td>Sophisticated/prestigious/expensive (47%)</td>
<td><em>Parisian atmosphere.</em> <em>‘Style over substance,’ ‘It looks expensive, but not necessarily good coffee.’</em></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Relaxed, social affections (40%)</td>
<td><em>I feel relaxed and seduced by the commercial.</em></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other (13%)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Café music/ Café video (Cm/Cv)</td>
<td>Foreign (esp. South American)</td>
<td><em>Hot, steamy.</em> <em>‘The product is foreign-oriented, likely from South America.’</em></td>
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<td>setting and/or coffee (64%)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Labor/action (14%)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Authentic, strong coffee (16%)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other (12%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brazil music/ Café video (Cm/Bv)</td>
<td>Mysterious setting/Non-conformists, incl. artists (26%)</td>
<td><em>It was a dark, gloomy setting.</em></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Foreign professionals (21%)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other (27%)</td>
<td><em>‘It looked like a scene from some sci-fi movie (RoboCop). Strange looking people, I would stay away from a crowd like that.’</em> <em>‘Everyone wore black – creative, artsy.’</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Provisional, Subject to Further Analysis.*
The Journal of Advertising

maining conditions were 80% for Cafe music, 93% for Brazil video, 87% for Cafe video, 90% for Brazilian music/Brazil video, 82% for Cafe music/Brazil video, and 93% for Brazil video/Cafe video. When the coders disagreed, the author served as the third coder to resolve the conflict.

Results

The respondents reported a total of 285 meanings in the eight conditions (k = 2.15). Among all components, Cafe music (x = 1.86) evoked fewer meanings than the other components (Brazil music, 2.58; Brazil video, 2.41; Cafe music, 2.44; Cafe video, 2.54). Among commercials, those incorporating Cafe video (Cafe music/Cafe video, x = 1.73; Brazil music/Cafe video, x = 1.59) evoked fewer meanings than those incorporating Brazil video (Brazil music/Brazil video, x = 2.44; Cafe music/Brazil video, x = 2.45). A reason commercials incorporating Cafe video evoked fewer meanings might be that these commercials (Cafe music/Cafe video, 21%; Brazil music/Cafe video, 21%) were perceived to be more confusing (“confusing”/“lacking information”/“the message was unclear” or “the execution was poor”) than those incorporating Brazil video (Brazil music/Brazil video, 12%; Cafe music/Brazil video, 14%).

Table 1 reports the major categories of meanings evoked by ad components. The corresponding percentages (excluding confusion-related thoughts) and samples of protocol responses are also shown in the table. Specifically, Brazil music evoked nature-related thoughts (66%) and a sense of serenity (20%) while Brazil video evoked nature-related thoughts (56%) and thoughts and feelings relative to doing hard work (21%). Meanwhile, Cafe music evoked party-related thoughts (30%) and images of trendy people (23%), while Cafe video evoked images of a trendy lifestyle (40%) and a cold, secretive atmosphere (26%). As Brazil music and Brazil video evoked nature-related thoughts and Cafe music and Cafe video evoked thoughts related to a trendy lifestyle, intact commercials were more congruent than split commercials. However, it should be noted that the intact commercials used in this research were not as congruent as manipulated stimuli found in most experimental research (e.g., MacInnis and Park 1991).

The multiple meanings evoked by each ad component showed a different level of relatedness. Meanings evoked by musical scores, such as nature and serenity in Brazil music or partying and young trendy people in Cafe music, seemed to be closely related. Meanwhile, meanings evoked by videos, such as nature and hard work in Brazil video and a trendy lifestyle and hostile atmosphere in Cafe video seemed to be less related. These features of the ad components could explain why the videos were more confusing to viewers (Brazil video, 3%; Cafe video, 9%) than the music (9%).

Table 2 reports the major categories of meanings evoked by the commercials. The corresponding percentages (excluding confusion-related thoughts) and samples of responses were also reported. Specifically, Brazil music/Brazil video evoked travel-related thoughts (42%) and a feeling of relaxation (25%). Perhaps inferring from the less industrial setting, some viewers suggested that the advertised coffee was natural (14%). Meanwhile, Cafe music/Cafe video evoked a relaxed, social atmosphere (40%), and viewers suggested that the advertised coffee was sophisticated, expensive, though somewhat pretentious (47%). Although Cafe music/Brazil video and Brazil music/Cafe video were less congruent, viewers were able to infer meanings onto the commercials. Viewers exposed to Cafe music/Brazil video traced the setting of the commercial and/or the origin of the advertised coffee to South America (54%). Other viewers generated action-related thoughts (14%) that related to either the hard work performed by the characters in the commercial or in action/adventure movies. Finally, some viewers put the South American theme and the action theme together and suggested that the advertised coffee was authentic and strong (10%). Meanwhile, Brazil music/Cafe video evoked thoughts that were less positive. Viewers thought that the commercial portrayed a mysterious setting (26%) and the users of the coffee were non-conformists (26%). However, some viewers thought that users of the coffee were young professionals and appeared to perceive the commercial in a positive manner (21%).

The content analysis showed that, despite individual idiocyncrasies, viewers in an “interpretive community” (Scott 1994), in this case, MBA students enrolled at the same university, do read advertising in a similar manner. According to their reading, music (in advertising) that evoked different meanings (Brazil music, Cafe music) could affect viewers’ perceptions of the commercial and the advertised brand. Whereas Brazil music/Brazil video evoked images of a relaxing travel destination and a natural coffee, Cafe music/Brazil video evoked images of South America, adventure and a strong coffee. Similarly, whereas Cafe music/Cafe video evoked images of sophistication and an expensive product, Brazil music/Cafe video evoked images of a mysterious setting and potentially non-conformist users. Thus, these findings provided support for the proposition that music could help create meanings in advertising.
The content analysis also showed little evidence for a simple transference of either music-evoked or video-evoked meanings onto a brand. Among congruent advertising (Brazilian music / Brazilian video, Café music / Café video), the meanings evoked were somewhat different from the meanings embedded in individual ad components. Among incongruent advertising (Brazilian music / Café video, Café music / Brazilian video), the meanings evoked were vastly different from the meanings embedded in individual ad components. The following analysis will examine in more detail the meaning enactment process viewers use to interpret these integrated audio-visual signs.

Textual Elaboration

Intact Commercials

Brazilian music / Brazilian video. The commercial BmBo was made up of music and video that evoked nature-related thoughts. Perhaps because travel ads often show scenes of nature and are accompanied by peaceful, nature-like music, many viewers (42%) thought that BmBo was a travel ad for an exotic destination: "Exotic adventure, explores Africa, old-style vacation." Some viewers thought that the venue was too "wild" or "dirty" to be a travel destination; yet, even these thoughts were travel-related. However, because the brief copy in the source commercial indicating that the advertiser had gone to faraway places to bring back the coffee was deleted to conform to the research design, some viewers had difficulties bridging images of the commercial to a coffee product. They suggested that when the brand name Moccona Coffee appeared at the end of the commercial, "The commercial doesn't make sense. Initial impression was that perhaps vacations or something related was advertised. Don't see the connection to coffee." Thus, in the absence of a "bridge" tying the natural scenes/music to coffee, viewers attributed the nature-related thoughts elicited by the commercial to be the message of the commercial (i.e., a travel ad).

Despite these difficulties, 14% of the elicited thoughts indicated that some viewers were able to link the commercial to coffee. Specifically, they suggested that the coffee was "AUTHENTIC. Coffee not pre-processed or industrial." Thus, these viewers extended nature-related thoughts elicited by the commercial to the coffee.

Perhaps the most obvious change in meanings between BmBo and its video component Bo was the few occasions in the commercial condition where the viewers discussed the hard work characters in the video were performing. Instead, viewers thought that the commercial was relaxing (25%). A reason viewers of BmBo were less sensitive to the hard work theme might be because the commercial evoked a travel ad context that made thoughts related to doing hard work (vs. relaxing or vacationing) irrelevant and difficult to elicit. Thus, the music that helped create a travel ad context also helped smooth out negative thoughts evoked by Bo, such as "a rugged, primitive way of life" or "getting back to the basics" that viewers had used to describe the video.

Café music / Café video. The commercial CmCm was made up of music and video that projected images of a trendy lifestyle. While viewers were more likely to attribute these qualities to the advertised coffee and its users (47%) than viewers of BmBo (14%), their overall impressions were quite diverse. Some viewers perceived the CmCm coffee positively and thought that it was a coffee for "fashion leaders"; "Parisian atmosphere"; "An alternative type of coffee for the younger generation who drink coffee for social reasons." Other viewers perceived the coffee less positively. They thought that CmCm was a beer commercial (especially Black Label) dressed up to sell coffee, which in turn, made the coffee pretentious: "Style over substance"; "It looks expensive, not necessarily good coffee."

Still other viewers were confused by the beer context created by the commercial and had difficulties extending it to coffee: "I had no idea of what the people were drinking until the word 'coffe'e appeared at the end."

Similar to BmBo that played down the hard-work theme in the video component, CmCm also played down the secondary theme in Bo that projected a cold, secretive atmosphere. Indeed, only one viewer watching CmCm mentioned the cold atmosphere in the commercial (vs. 26% in Bo). Meanwhile, 40% of the thoughts elicited by CmCm described the commercial as being relaxing. Thus, the music in either intact commercial helped create the context that highlighted the principal (and congruent) themes of the videos but relegated the incongruent and undesirable perceptions, such as "hard workload" in Bo and "cold, secretive atmosphere"; "obscenity" in Bo.

Conclusion. In either BmBo or CmCm, the meanings evoked by ad components that were congruent created a context that helped viewers "read" the commercial and transfer the congruent meanings onto the brand (McCracken 1989). Thus, some viewers perceived the coffee in BmBo to be natural and the coffee in CmCm trendy. However, the created contexts did more than transfer meanings. They helped emphasize some meanings (e.g., relaxation) that were not
apparent in the ad components but de-emphasized other meanings (e.g., hard work in BmCo, cold atmosphere in CmBu) that were apparent in the components. Thus, the findings of this study demonstrate that the meaning enactment process goes beyond a simple transference. Instead, the viewer as well as higher knowledge of cultural texts, such as other commercials and films, plays an important role in affecting what a commercial means to him/her. This point is most obvious in CmCu, where viewers questioned the trendy image "transferred."

Split Commercial

Café music/Brazil video. The split commercial CmBu juxtaposed party music and a video that evoked images of nature. Perhaps more so than Brazil music/Brazil video (42%) that projected a sense of foreignness via its close-to-nature, feel-good travel ad context, CmBu (64%) elicited a strong sense of foreignness. It identified with South America both as a setting: "The images made me feel I was in a hot tropical climate somewhere in Colombia or the Amazon," and as the origin of the advertised coffee: "The product is foreign-oriented, likely from South America." Further, the commercial projected a sense of ruggedness and adventure so that nature was not only a destination for a vacation, but was "exhilarating, exciting, dangerous, unprotected, uncontrolled."

Together with the hard work theme that was evident to viewers of this commercial, the ruggedness was passed onto the target user: "lower-class" male, "Indian Jones-type," and the advertised product: "images of a really crude, strong brew, the type that cowboys would drink around a campfire." Relatedly, the ruggedness of the product also gives the product a masculine image. Potential users were consistently referred to as men rather than women: "lower-class" male, Indiana Jones, cowboys.

As evident in these protocols, viewers could readily comprehend the message in CmBu; though it was made up of the music and video from different commercials. The reason CmBu is intelligible might be because viewers were able to identify a context that united the music and video in a meaningful manner. The reader may recall that Cm (party music) activates rather than relaxes (as in Bm). Thus, when Cm replaces Bm in the commercial, viewers could connect the activities in the new soundtrack to the nature setting in Bm. This combination of action music and nature setting provided a familiar context that viewers were familiar with: "The commercial seemed like a trailer for an action adventure film."

Brazil music/Café video. This commercial juxtaposed music that evoked images of nature and a video showing young people socializing in a café. The commercial created so much confusion and annoyance that viewers could not make sense of the images: "I thought it was a strange/unusual commercial and I wasn’t comfortable with the commercial at all." Further, the images conjured by viewers who could comprehend the commercial was rather negative. They related the commercial to a mysterious setting (28%): "It was a dark, gloomy setting"; "Atmosphere was cold, icy," "Felt there was a war going on," and non-conformist (28%): "Bohemian-non-conformist," "It looked like a scene from some sci-fi movie (RoboCop)." Strange looking people, I would stay away from a crowd like that." Not surprisingly, the image of the product perceived by these viewers was also negative: "Looked like green, coffee—yuck!" I would stay away ... from the product, too. Yuck!"

The reason viewers perceived this commercial negatively could be because they have difficulties placing the commercial in an appropriate context. Thus, while some viewers related BmCo to beer commercials, they also recognized features of the commercial that worked against the context: "Seemed like a slow motion beer commercial;" "Sort of a Black Label of coffee—may be it goes well with drugs." Meanwhile, other viewers associated the commercial with a plethora of alternative contexts that included British Airways commercials, fashion commercials, Labatt's ice-filtered beer commercials, MTV, and science-fiction movies such as RoboCop.

The difficulties viewers have in placing Brazil music/Café video in an appropriate context were also reflected in the percentages of thoughts evoked. Unlike the other three commercials that generated a major category of meaning that accounted for 45% to 64% of meanings evoked, BmCo generated three categories, each accounting for more than 20% of the meanings evoked. Also, the percentage of "other" thoughts generated by BmCo (37%) was considerably higher than those generated by the other commercials (12% to 19%).

Despite the negative opinions held by some viewers, other viewers perceived BmCo in a positive light. For example, some viewers associated the commercial with young professionals (21%): "People in this commercial were intelligent and highly educated. They seemed to be very successful." However, as indicated in this protocol, the comment is more descriptive than emphatic.

Conclusion. Although Café music/Brazil video was incongruent, viewers were able to make sense of the commercial by unifying the apparently incongruous
components in an action/adventure film context. Thus, viewers could infer from the context that the coffee in Café music / Brazilian video was strong and the users were Indiana Jones-types. Meanwhile, even though viewers could read meanings onto Brazilian music / Café video, the meanings evoked were rather negative, as viewers had difficulties connecting the components to a common context.

Belyne (1971) suggested that incongruity and attitude correlate in an inverted-U manner, so that moderate incongruity is preferred over excessive incongruity. As the meanings enacted in Brazilian music / Café video were more negative, results of this research seemed to suggest that Café music / Brazilian video is moderately incongruous while Brazilian music / Café video is excessively incongruous. However, the author would caution against this conclusion and offer that the relationship between incongruity and meaning enactment may be more complex. As noted, the readiness of a viewer to enact meanings depends on the availability of a common context drawn from his/her cultural knowledge. Thus, the level of incongruity between ad components provides only one of the relationships in the meaning enactment process. Meanwhile, the ability for one or more of the ad components to cue the common context could be just as important in affecting how a viewer reads a commercial. Because Indiana Jones movies were very popular in the eighties and the current study was conducted in the early nineties, the action/adventure film context may be more apparent to viewers watching Café music / Brazilian video than if the same research were conducted today. In other words, Café music / Brazilian video and Brazilian music / Café video could be incongruous at about the same level but their stronger or weaker relationships with a common context could have affected viewers’ ability to decode the commercials. Thus, future research could delineate these relationships to develop a more comprehensive understanding of ad incongruity and the meaning enactment process.

Discussion

The current research contributes to the literature by showing empirically that viewers could read music-evoked meanings from commercials. Further, this research developed an emergent model that examines how music creates meanings in advertising. Specifically, research findings indicate that, as an integral element in television advertising, music works with other ad elements—such as visual—to help “cue” a cultural context that frames the meanings communicated to a viewer. Thus, depending on the context, some meanings embedded in ad components would be acquired by the viewer (e.g., natural coffee in Brazilian music / Café video, trendy coffee in Café music / Café video) while other meanings would become less apparent (e.g., hard work in Brazilian music / Brazilian video, cold atmosphere in Café music / Café video). Meanwhile, some meanings embedded in ad components might be changed, when the viewer experiences the commercial in an alternative context cued by incongruous components (e.g., ruggedness in Café music / Brazilian video, strange people/product in Brazilian music / Café video). This approach to examining the effectiveness of music in advertising differs from the majority of research in this area that presumes that the function of music is context-free (e.g., Alpert and Alpert 1995; Bruner 1990; Stout and Leckenby 1988). Thus, instead of categorizing music along such dimensions as happy or sad, and assume that music would perform in a consistent manner independent of the ad context, future research might examine how music performs in different contexts to influence consumer perceptions.

As exploratory research, this study differs from a number of limitations. Because the source commercials were aired in Australia but tested in Canada, cultural differences could have rendered the stimuli confusing to viewers. This is noted in some of the viewers’ responses. Also, this research examined only two source commercials, both of a single product category (i.e., coffee), and responses of a single cultural socioeconomic grouping (i.e., MBA students). In view of the importance of contextual influences, future research could incorporate a broader range of ads, product categories, and consumer segments to examine how changes in contextual factors could affect research findings. This research manipulated stimuli to form a set of four commercials to develop the emergent model. To develop a substantive theory, future research could examine commercials that encompass a broader range of incongruity. First, the commercials used in this research, including intact commercials, were somewhat incongruent. Thus, future research could examine commercials that are “excessively” congruent that comprise a rhetorical scheme (McQuarrie and Mick 1996). Moreover, McQuarrie and Mick (1996) suggest that there are different forms of incongruity, and incongruity among formal aspects of ad elements could also create meaningful rhetorical effects. Because this research examined only the semantic incongruity among ad components and music has formal sound-producing properties (e.g., rhythm), future research
could examine how incongruity involving formal aspects of music could affect viewers' perceptions. The current research also contributes to the literature on the topic by showing that qualitative and quantitative methods are not antithetical but can be wedded beyond the all-too-common exploratory- confirmatory divide. Thus, future research could explore more creative uses of mixed design to provide an informed approach to examining a research issue.

References
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