

Exploring the Impact of Nostalgic Music on the Effectiveness of Video Ad Campaigns

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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the psychological influence of music in advertisements and the effects of nostalgia on the success of video ads. By examining the research surrounding ad effectiveness, the effect of music on the brain, and brand perception, we determine the underlying cognitive functions behind the music used in nostalgia-centered video advertisements. This paper selects and analyzes specific examples of successful and unsuccessful ad campaigns that incorporate music in order to connect with their audiences by evoking nostalgia. It explores the effects of music on the brain and how it can influence people to connect with a brand. It identifies common qualities of successful campaigns and determines how they influence the brain. Those developing creative strategies for video ads may find this research useful to better understand consumer behavior.

Introduction

The use of psychological principles in creating advertisements in marketing, when done skillfully, can produce powerful marketing outcomes by drawing on consumer's emotions, motivations, and purchasing processes. Ultimately, the successful combination of psychology and marketing can lead to increased engagement, sales, and brand loyalty (Dwivedi, 2015).

Music and nostalgia have both proven to be compelling tools in advertisements, as both can evoke powerful emotions from consumers and form lasting associations between a stimulus and a product. Different segments of the population respond to different types of nostalgic music, depending on a multitude of personal and demographic factors (Holbrook & Schindler, 1996). Marketers can tailor their music choices to align with specific memories and emotional triggers to create the maximum impact on their intended audience.

By utilizing nostalgia and music in video advertising, marketers can create memorable, impactful campaigns, fostering emotional connections, and ultimately driving consumer loyalty and sales. This paper examines how different segments of the population respond to various forms of nostalgic music content, offering valuable information for marketers to create more emotionally resonant advertisements.

Nostalgia in Marketing

Nostalgia, a bittersweet longing for the past, holds a unique power over human emotions (Andersson, 2011). The term itself originates from the Greek tale of Odysseus, the king of Ithaca and hero of Homer's "The Odyssey." Odysseus was away from home for 20 years, during which he was fighting in the Trojan War and struggling to return to Ithaca (Homer, 2015). Swiss physician Johannes Hofer invented the term "nostalgia" in 1688 by combining the two Greek words "nostos" and "algos" (Hofer, 1934). While he was away from his homeland, Odysseus yearned for nostos (the return home), and experienced algos (pain) due to it (Sedikides et al., 2004).

Nostalgia transports individuals back to cherished memories and evokes feelings of warmth, comfort, and familiarity. Nostalgia has a multitude of positive personal and social effects. For example, nostalgia can inspire the

pursuit of one's authentic self and make one look back fondly on positive memories (Juhl & Biskas, 2023). Additionally, nostalgia is linked to motivation and reward-seeking (Yang et al., 2022).

Nostalgia has many triggers that elicit feelings and memories, the most notable being music, tastes, and scents (Juhl & Biskas, 2023). Many people experience a rush of nostalgia when hearing a song from their childhood, eating a dish reminiscent of their grandmother's recipe, or smelling an old perfume. These triggers are considered nonsocial, while other stimuli like family members, reunions, or birthday parties are considered social (Holak & Havlena, 1998). Nonsocial music triggers encompass more impersonal songs that can be broadly shared across specific demographics, such as certain age groups or cultures. An example of a nonsocial nostalgic song would be "Party in the U.S.A." by Miley Cyrus, a popular early 2000s hit. The broad demographic of American teenagers during the time of the song's release is likely to have a nostalgic attachment to it. On the other hand, a social nostalgic trigger would represent an individual's unique experiences, such as an old lullaby one's mother used to sing for them as a child. Both nonsocial and social musical nostalgic triggers can significantly impact a person's emotions.

How do marketers use these types of nostalgia to advertise their products to consumers? In the realm of marketing, nostalgia serves as an important tool for brands to create emotional connections with consumers (Cui, 2015). Although it is largely a positive emotion, nostalgia also has some melancholy components, as it can make people wish to relive parts of their pasts (Juhl, & Biskas, 2023). Zachary Boren (2013) describes a type of nostalgia in which "there is a pathological manifestation of the emotion, a compulsion to recapture that feeling long lost". With advertisements, marketers can convince consumers that the product they are pushing will bring back a part of their past by appealing to the melancholic/sorrowful part of their nostalgia.

Understanding the function of nostalgia and its psychological implications is essential for marketers to harness the power of the sentimental marketing method. By associating their product or service with shared cultural references, iconic imagery, and vintage aesthetics, marketers can elicit nostalgic sentiments that resonate deeply with their target audience. Using this to their advantage, they can strive for maximum product sales and a strong brand-customer affinity.

Market Segmentation and Relevance to Nostalgia Triggers

Effective marketing practices consist of interpreting the diverse needs, preferences, and behaviors of consumers and promoting goods or services accordingly. Wendell Smith (1956) first coined the term "market segmentation," which refers to the division of consumers in a market into subgroups based on these needs, preferences, and behaviors. In grouping consumers, marketers can specifically target certain audiences with advertisements to ensure that their products have a higher chance of being purchased. To do this, marketers will look for shared characteristics and implement four types of segmentation: demographic segmentation, geographic segmentation, psychographic segmentation, and behavioral segmentation (Camilleri, 2018). Demographic variables include age, ethnicity, income, gender, occupation, educational qualification, socioeconomic status, and religion, among other factors (Shinde, 2016). Geographic segmentation is the selection of markets according to location and its variables include terrain, climate, population density, and natural resources. Psychographic segmentation is based on shared psychological characteristics such as personality traits, values, motives, interests, and lifestyles. Behavioral segmentation includes individual purchase behaviors such as shopping frequency, volume of purchases, and customer loyalty (Camilleri, 2018).

When advertising products through nostalgic content, marketers segment customers by using demographics, geographic locations, psychographics, and behaviors. They also consider other factors, specifically cultural backgrounds, technology and social media use, and historical and event-based advertising. Different markets are accessible through different communication mediums. Marketers must be mindful of producing ads with the proper nostalgic content for specific markets. Holbrook and Schindler's (1989) study found that musical nostalgia peaks around age 24, with the most nostalgic ages ranging from the late teens to early twenties. To effectively tap into their target market's nostalgia, brands should select music from the customers' adolescent to early adulthood years, as each age group will respond to different musical periods.

Music's Role in Perception

Music, a universal language, is defined by sound organized in assorted rhythmic, melodic, and dynamic patterns (Hassan et al., 2012). Developmental psychologist Howard Gardner, in his theory of multiple intelligences (1983), asserted that musical intelligence is as important as the other seven intelligence types: mathematical intelligence, linguistic intelligence, spatial intelligence, bodily-kinesthetic intelligence, interpersonal intelligence, and intrapersonal intelligence.

Music has been proven to have a myriad of benefits for the mind and body. It can have therapeutic effects on pain and sleep disorders and can help improve the mental well-being of people with depression, anxiety, schizophrenia, and autism (Hosseini & Hosseini, 2018). In a study at McGill University, positron emission tomography was used to study participants' pleasant emotional responses to music known as "chills". The chills were measured by rCBF (regional cerebral blood flow) changes while subjects listened to the music they selected. The results of the experiment demonstrated that the music activated the subjects' neural centers of reward and emotion. The response to the stimulus exhibited the ability of music to have a significant positive impact on a person's mental and physical health. (Blood & Zatorre, 2001).

In the context of music in video advertisements, classical conditioning can be applied to build positive associations between a product and certain musical stimuli. Classical conditioning, a concept developed by Ivan Pavlov, involves learning through association.

Unconditioned Stimulus (US):

- something that triggers a natural and unlearned reaction
 - the music used in the advertisement

Unconditioned Response (UR):

- the unlearned reaction to the US
 - the positive emotions felt by the consumer as a result of hearing the music

Conditioned Stimulus (CS):

- a previously neutral stimulus that triggers a conditioned reaction after being associated with the UR
 - the music in the advertisement

Conditioned Response (CR):

- the learned response to the CS
 - the resulting positive feelings toward the product alone

The use of music in video advertisements can be very effective in developing a consumer's positive perception of a product. If an advertisement pairs pleasing music with a product, the consumer can associate the emotions they experience from the music with the product (Gorn, 1982). The appeal of music is often associated with particular character values, so the same music may elicit different reactions in different people (Čuić Tanković & Alerić, 2011).

Our memories, personal experiences, and overall backgrounds play a large part in what music we connect to. The perception of music will vary from person to person because of different experiences and attachments.

Methods & Case Studies

To illustrate real-world examples of music-based nostalgia marketing in video advertisements, 2 case studies have been chosen to review. Using Figure 1, we can understand the correlation between the dynamic markings of a song and the most compelling parts of an advertisement. By examining patterns across case studies and breaking down their scenes by their corresponding dynamic markings, we can identify how marketers use different parts of songs to amplify key nostalgic moments of advertisements.

Dynamic Markings



Common Dynamic Markings

LETTER(S)	WORD	MEANING
pp	pianissimo	Very Quiet
p	piano	Quiet
mp	mezzopiano	Quite Quiet
mf	mezzoforte	Quite Loud
f	forte	Loud
ff	fortissimo	Very Loud

Figure 1. (Dynamics - Music Theory Academy - Forte, Piano, Crescendo All Explained, n.d.)

First, a car commercial for the new VW ID Buzz (Volkswagen USA, 2024) encapsulates musical nostalgia. The ad displays “Americana” nostalgia. The definition of Americana is: materials concerning or characteristic of America, its civilization, or its culture (*Americana Definition & Meaning - Merriam-Webster*, n.d.). The advertisement takes the viewer through decades of various events and milestones as Volkswagen develops in America, while an empowering song plays in the background. Table 1 portrays an analysis of the intensity of the song’s music progression. The song crescendos and rises to a peak as the advertisement becomes more fast-paced and current (Neil Diamond, 2023). The American nostalgia allure increases as a result of the song escalating and the visuals of classic American culture appearing quicker and in shorter bursts on screen. The video concludes with a call to action that informs the viewer about the product being promoted: in this case, a Volkswagen ID. Buzz. As shown in Table 1, this occurs when the song has reduced in intensity and volume.

Table 1. Music Progression Chart of Volkswagen USA 2024 Advertisement

Ad Scenes	Big Game Commercial 2024 Volkswagen Song: I am... I Said (1971) - Neil Diamond	Music progression
0:00 – 0:10	1949 VW Beetle arrives in NYC on a ship.	p
0:10–0:18	The Beetle is stared at by pedestrians as it drives through the city.	
0:18–0:26	A young couple enters the VW dealership and approaches the Beetle, then it cuts to the car driving on the road.	mp

0:26–0:30	The ad changes from black and white to color and a youngmp kid and his dad are shown playing with the car, then a group of young people trying to cram into it.	
0:30–0:31	A racing Beetle from Herbie Rides Again (1974) is shownmf using another Beetle as a ramp to jump across the rooftop of a building onto another one.	
0:32–0:33	A VW bus sits on the beach and hippies are around it. Thenmf the Beetle is being sat on and is surrounded by hippies at Woodstock.	
0:33–0:34	A bus and convertible Beetle are in the back of a “Champagnef Edition” commercial from 1978.	
0:34–0:35	Young people skateboard down a palm tree - surrounded roadf next to a VW rabbit convertible and the bottom of the screen reads, “If you’re not living in the 70s, 80s, or 90s, do not at- tempt”.	
0:35–0:341	More modern VWs are shown and people f surrounding them dance and sing as they drive.	
0:41–0:43	A clip from the Simpsons is shown. The Simpson family isff playing punch buggy.	
0:43–0:52	Some more modern scenes with the VW are shown, includingff people doing sign language, a lesbian wedding ceremony, kids dressed as Darth Vader going into a convention, and a VW employee looking at the car.	
0:52–1:00	A new model is shown on the screen with the location of Newmp York and the date 2024 on the screen. At the bottom it says: “ID Buzz coming later this year.”	

Second, a persuasive advertisement about quitting smoking by HSE Ireland's Quit Media campaign praises quitters of the addictive drug (*HSE Quit I Will Survive - YouTube*, n.d.). The video also uses an uplifting song that would evoke nostalgic feelings from the target market of the ad (Gloria Gaynor, 2014). The target market includes people in their late teens and early twenties around the time "I Will Survive" was released. They are also part of a generation that grew up smoking nicotine and remain addicted as a result. This advertisement has nostalgic musical content and a relevant connection to the target market. Table 2 presents a detailed overview of the musical progression in the HSE Ireland ad, highlighting key moments of the ad that align with it. Similar to the first example, the crescendo of the song happens in the middle of the video when the imagery and music are at their peak. Then, at the end of the video ad, the music quiets, and the call to action appears, encouraging citizens to quit smoking.

Table 2. Music Progression Chart of HSE Quit I Will Survive 2017 Advertisement

Ad Scenes	HSE Quit I Will Survive Song: I Will Survive (1978) - Gloria Gaynor	Music progression
0:00 – 0:06	The camera zooms in on a red brick house and a young manp opens it. He lip-syncs the first line, “At first I was afraid, I was petrified”.	

0:06 – 0:10	A woman stands in front of a restaurant smoking a cigarette in the dark as she lip-syncs “Kept thinking I could never live without you by my side”.	
0:10 – 0:14	An old woman sits at a table inside her home and puts out a cigarette in an ashtray. She sings, “But then I spent so many nights/ Thinking how you did me wrong”.	
0:14 – 0:18	A young woman holds a broom at a hair salon and lip-syncs, “And I grew strong/ And I learned how to get along”.	
0:18 – 0:22	An old man on a mobility scooter is followed by 3 young men on small bikes. He points his cane and lip-syncs, “Go on now go/ Walk out the door”.	
0:22 – 0:28	The woman from outside the restaurant is shown again as she puts out her cigarette and lip-syncs more emotionally this time: “Just turn around now/ ’Cause you’re not welcome anymore”.	
0:28 – 0:31	A man working at a gas station behind a counter lip-syncs, “Weren’t you the one who tried to hurt me with goodbye”.	
0:31 – 0:33	A man sits on his couch with 2 dogs, lip-syncing the lyric: “Did you think I’d crumble”.	
0:33 – 0:37	The music abruptly stops and a man with a long scar down his chest stands in a bathroom across from the mirror. He stares at himself for a couple seconds before he says, “Did you think I’d lay down and die?”.	
0:37 – 0:39	The music restarts and the young woman in the hair salon lip-syncs, “Oh no not I”.	
0:39 – 0:41	A boy rides down the street on his bicycle on only the back wheel as he lip-syncs, “I will survive”.	
0:41 – 0:45	A young mother sings to her baby in a nursery while her other young child sits behind her. She lip-syncs, “Oh, as long as I know how to love/ I know I’ll stay alive”.	
0:45 – 0:49	3 young schoolgirls sit on the couch and sing karaoke to the lyric: “I’ve got all my life to live/ I’ve got all my love to give”	
0:49 – 0:53	The man from the beginning of the advertisement walks outside in a park and lip-syncs, “And I’ll survive/ I will survive/ Hey, hey”	
0:53 – 0:06	The call to action appears on the screen: “Ireland now has more quitters than smokers. You can join them. We can help.”	

Conclusion

Nostalgia and music are powerful tools that marketers can use in their video advertisements to entice consumers. When creating their advertisements, marketers have several factors to consider: identifying their target market, selecting music that will have the desired impact on their intended audience, and determining how to give their ad nostalgic significance.

Musical preferences among different ages, genders, cultural backgrounds, status, and personal characteristics vary greatly. The key qualities that contribute to the success of an advertisement's nostalgic music selection include the listener, the music, and the connection. Understanding and targeting the appropriate demographic with a music-driven nostalgia ad is the most crucial task for marketers to ensure their ad effectively persuades consumers to make a purchase or take action.

While this paper highlights the key factors contributing to successful music-driven nostalgia marketing, there are several limitations to the study. Some limitations of this study include a lack of research available on the topic of musical nostalgia's cognitive effects. Additionally, the nature of the scope of this paper was limited regarding finances and time. Future research could benefit from examining a more diverse collection of ad strategies for nostalgic music content in different cultures. Further investigation into how different types of nostalgic music influence brain activity and consumer behavior would provide a more complete understanding of this marketing strategy.

The significance of advertising in today's purchasing environment is undeniable. All over the world, advertisers vie for consumer's attention to convince them that their product is one worth purchasing. The use of nostalgic music in advertising is extremely promising, but marketers must remember to consider their target audience, the emotional tone of their campaign, and the broader cultural context to create successfully moving advertisements. Through the continuation of research on different psychological factors of marketing, advancements can be made by marketers to forge stronger connections with their audiences through the emotional power of music and nostalgia.

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