

The Psychology of Decision-Making: Background Music Used in Advertising

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine the importance of background music used in advertising, and how knowledge of the strategies advertisers use may psychologically influence a consumer's decision to buy what the advertisement is selling. In this study, music was removed from both a preexisting movie trailer and television commercial and replaced with two new options to isolate the music factor of an advertisement and determine which song caused participants to prefer one advertisement over the other. The new advertisements were then each placed into two surveys, Survey A and Survey B. Survey A had an information slide with general facts about psychology and advertising that appeared before participants watched the advertisements, while Survey B had statistics about teenagers spending time watching television. The findings are relevant because they help advertisers see how effective their existing criteria is for the songs they decide to use in their advertisement. The study implies that advertisers need to do further research to ensure that their commercials' and trailers' success is due to the music they select, being that they spend a significant amount of money on it, since consumers are heavily persuaded by background music to go see a movie and/or buy a product.

Research Goal

This study serves a purpose for both consumers, and advertisers. From a consumer standpoint, if an advertisement appeals to someone, they are more likely to buy the product/see the movie being promoted. However, often times, consumers do not understand what factor of the advertisement made it appealing to them. Viewers may think that they want to see a movie because it seems interesting, when in reality, it may very well be that the steady beat playing in the track was keeping them stimulated and paying attention to the trailer in the first place. As for advertisers, a great deal of thought goes into song selection; there are specific jobs dedicated to doing just that. After reading articles on this subject as well as conducting interviews with professionals in the field, it is clear that there is specific criteria that goes into choosing background music. This study aims to discover how do advertisers know that their criteria is effective, and that the success of an advertisement is not due to another factor of the advertisement altogether.

Methods

Participants

Participants were diversely educated high school students.

Respondents

Survey A received 109 responses, while Survey B received 123 responses.

Process

Music from already existing advertisements were replaced with one song similar and one song dissimilar to the original music.

Movie Trailer

The movie trailer was for the film *A Cure For Wellness*, and the original song used was "I Wanna Be Sedated," cover by Mirel Wagner. The song chosen for the expected option was "Hotel California," by The Eagles. The song "Crazy Train," by Ozzy Osbourne, was selected as the unexpected song.

Television Commercial

As for the commercial, the same song as the original version of the commercial was used, but with two different versions of it. The commercial used for this study was one selling Kraft Macaroni and Cheese that used the song "What I Did For Love," cover by Engelbert Humperdinck. In this experiment, the expected example was the cover by Josh Groban and the unexpected example was the original song from the musical *A Chorus Line*.

Surveys

For the movie trailer, the expected option, which was "Hotel California," was presented as the first option, while "Crazy Train," the unexpected option, was the second one. In the television commercial section, the unexpected option, which was the original Broadway recording of "What I Did For Love," was the first option, while the expected option, the cover by Josh Groban, was the second option.

Information Slides

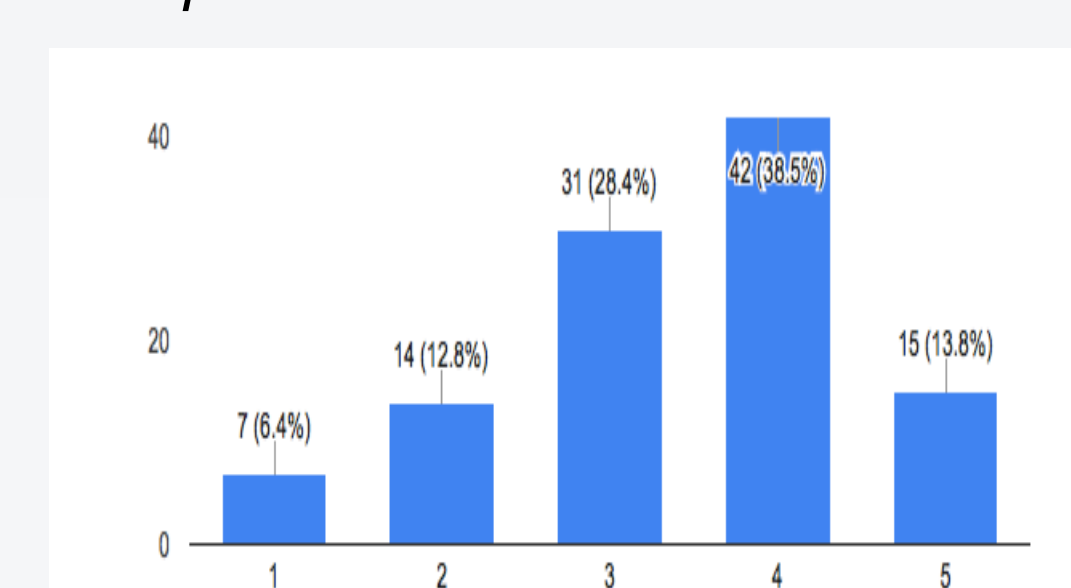
In each of the two surveys, participants watched the trailer and commercial, and read a slide of information. Survey A gave a background on the psychology of decision-making and how editors choose background music. Survey B had a statistics about teenagers spending time watching television.

Results

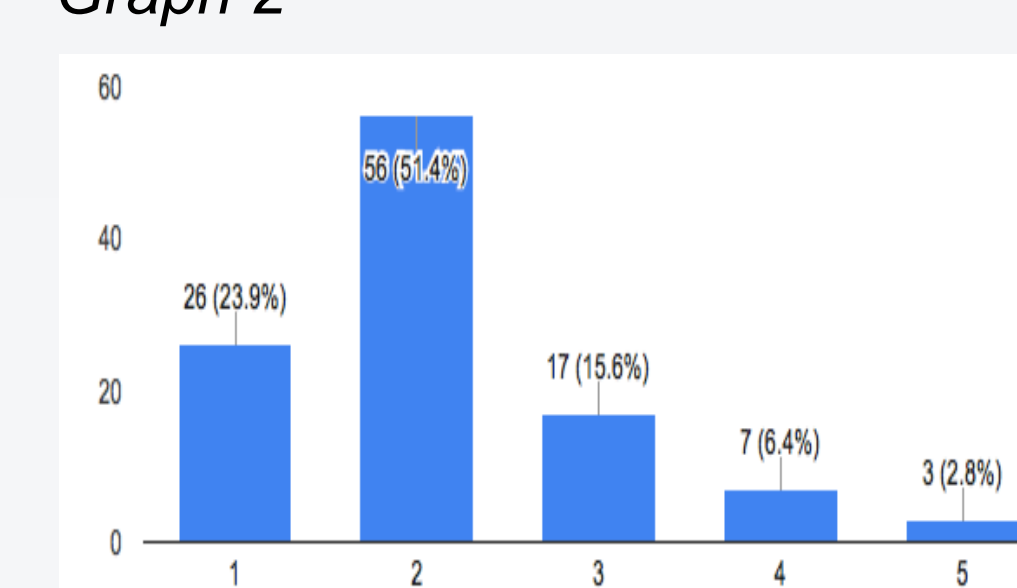
Movie Trailer Results

In Survey A, 78% of participants said they preferred the song "Hotel California" to "Crazy Train," compared to 89% in Survey B. Respondents were asked to rate on a scale of one to five of how likely they would be to go see the film *A Cure For Wellness* if they saw the trailer using the song they preferred, one being they would never see it, five being they definitely would, versus how likely they would be to see the trailer using the song they did not prefer. The majority of participants in both Survey A and B (39% and 35%) said that there was a four out of five chance that they would see the film if they saw the trailer using the song they selected (Graph 1 and 3). If the trailer did not use the song they selected, the majority of respondents in both surveys (51% in Survey A, 41% in Survey B) said that there was a two out of five chance that they would go see the film (Graphs 2 and 4). Survey A is in blue, Survey B is in green.

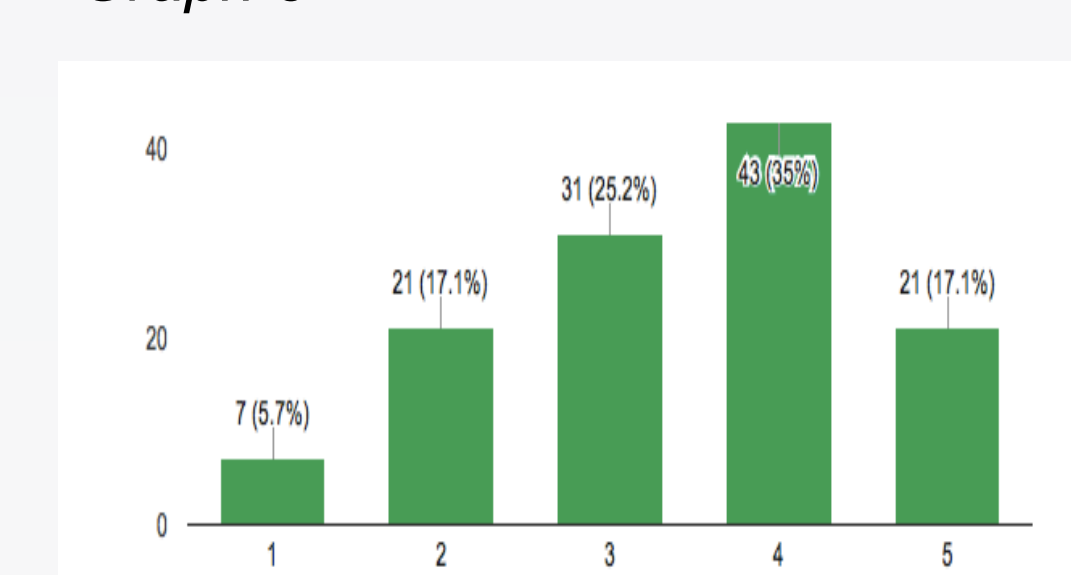
Graph 1



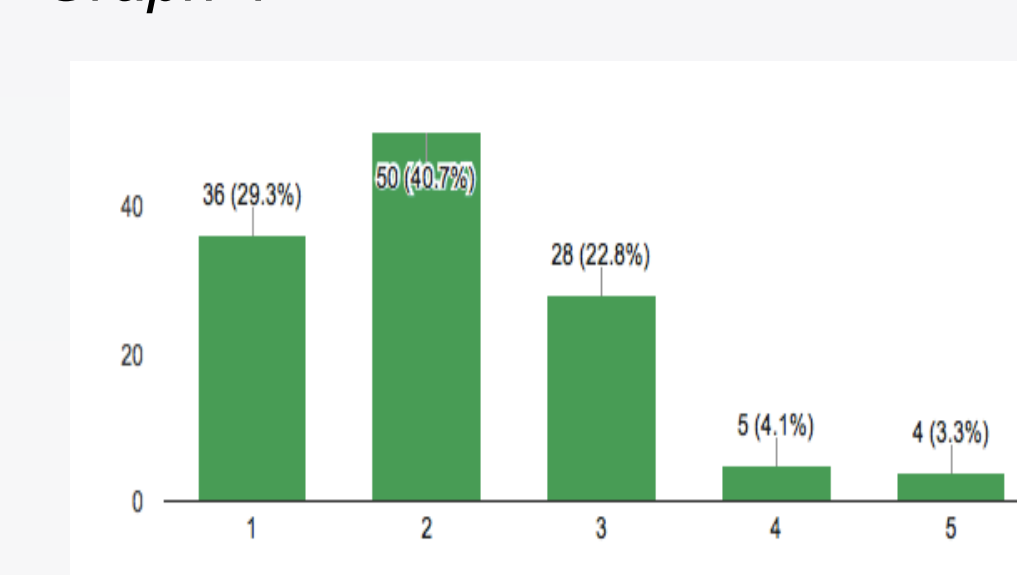
Graph 2



Graph 3



Graph 4

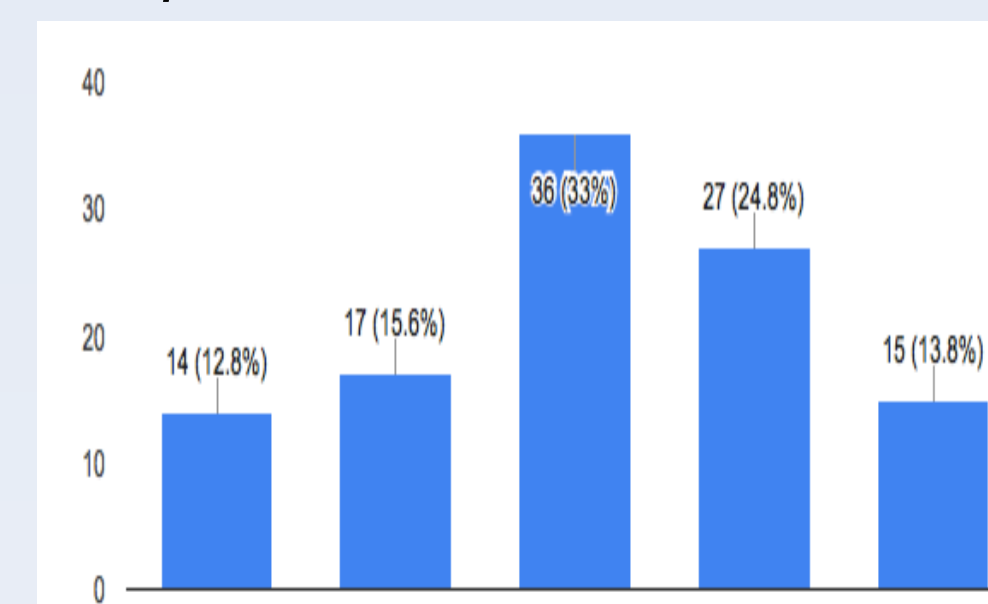


Television Commercial Results

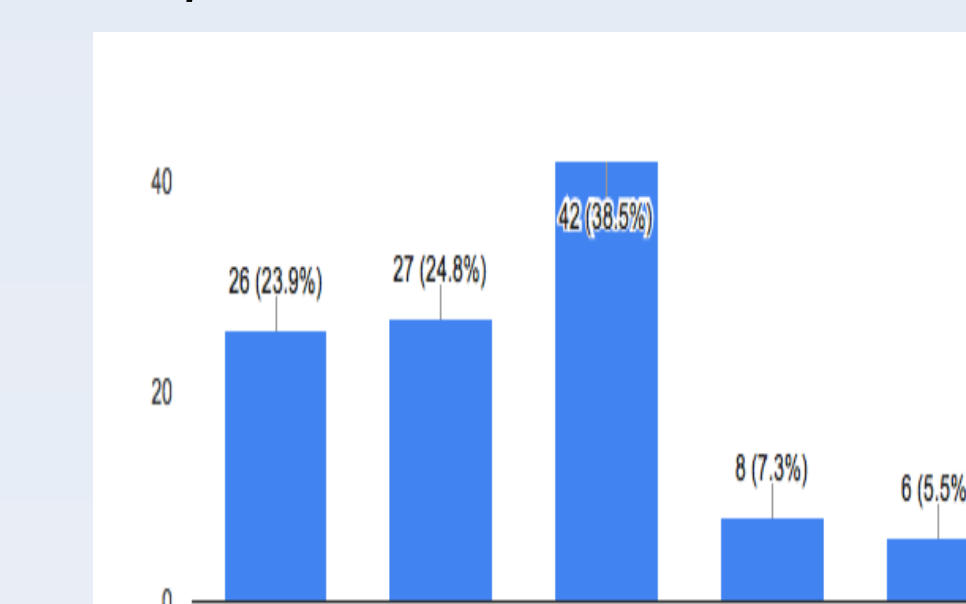
For the Kraft Macaroni and Cheese Commercial, participants preferred the unexpected option, the cover from the Broadway musical *A Chorus Line* (65% in Survey A, 64% in Survey B).

Just like with the movie trailers, participants were asked to rate on a scale of one to five how likely they would be to buy the product being advertised if they saw the commercial using the song they selected versus if they saw it using the song they did not. In both surveys, the majority of participants (33% Survey A, 32% Survey B) rated their likeliness to buy the product if they saw the commercial using the song that they preferred a three out of five, with the second highest majority (25% Survey A, 28% Survey B) being a four out of five (Graphs 1 and 3). If they saw the trailer using the song that they did not prefer, participants in Survey A still had a majority (39%), of three out of five, the second highest (25%) being two out of five (Graph 2). Survey B had a majority (35%), of two out of five with the second highest (30%) being a one out of five (Graph 4).

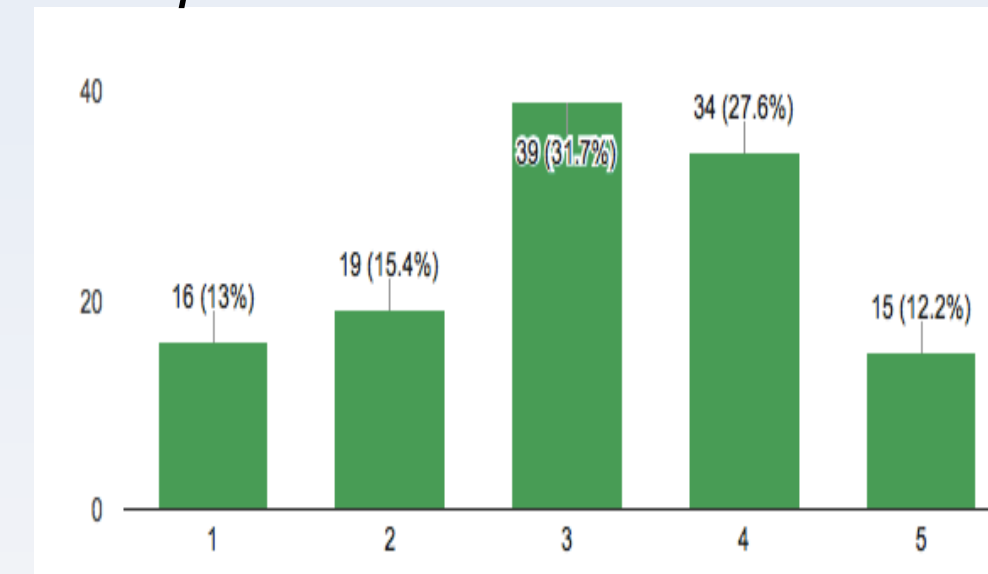
Graph 1



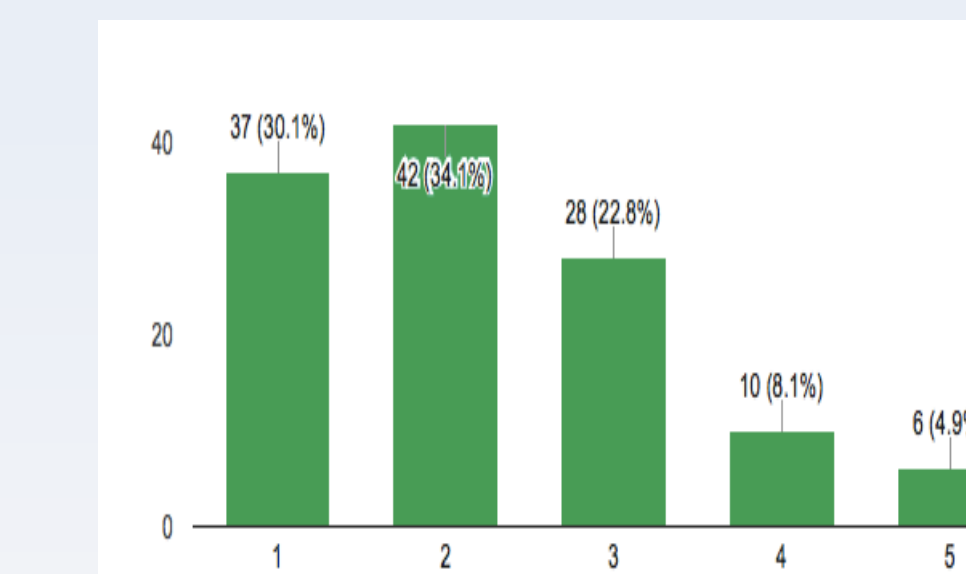
Graph 2



Graph 3



Graph 4



Discussion

Option One Was Preferred

In the case of the movie trailer, consumers chose what advertisers believed that they would, that being the song "Hotel California." As for the television commercial, consumers preferred the original Broadway recording of "What I Did For Love," as opposed to what advertisers expected they would choose, which was the cover by Josh Groban. This finding has multiple implications, the first being that the hindsight bias could have been a factor. Due to the fact that in both cases, the first option was the preferred option, there is a possibility that after the participants had seen the first advertisement, they had it in mind while watching the second one. If they had already formulated their own opinion after watching the first advertisement, they may have held a bias while watching the second one. This finding is surprising, because advertisers seem to have a great deal of confidence in their choices to be spending millions of dollars on the music they feel will be successful. Based on these results, perhaps the criteria that advertisers use to determine which songs are the best fit for an advertisement is not as dependable as it could be.

Effect of Providing Information About Advertising

A consistent trend throughout examining the data was that the results between Survey A and Survey B were quite similar. Therefore, from a consumer standpoint, whether they are more aware of the motives behind why advertisers select certain songs for their trailers and commercials does not influence their perceptions and opinions of what they watch. Even if viewers know that advertisers may be using strategies to get an advertisement to appeal to them, as long as it works, they are not bothered by this, and will still formulate their own ideas about what they are watching. For advertisers, this is a strength, because they can continue to manipulate elements of music used in their advertisements to appeal to their demographics, and see how consumers react to their methods. In terms of the psychology of decision-making, consumers' knowledge of advertisers' strategies did not impact their likeliness to see a movie or buy a product.

Background Music Influences Decisions

The overarching finding came to be that consumers are influenced to go see a movie or buy a product based on whether or not the advertisement uses a song that they prefer. The chance of people seeing a movie or buying a product significantly drops if a song is used in an advertisements that does not appeal to them. For consumers, this means that they may make their decisions based on specific elements, like music, that appeal to them, more than they realize. For advertisers, this finding means that choosing the right song could be someone's deciding factor in whether or not they do what the advertisers hope they will. It especially means that more consideration can be given to the criteria that advertisers use to deem a song as a successful fit for an advertisement, as shown when noticing that participants in this study ended up preferring a song for a commercial that they were not expected to by 65%.

Conclusion

Advertisers are right to put the effort that they do into the songs they choose for their commercials and movie trailers. Consumers report that liking songs in advertisements does matter to, and it significantly impacts their likeliness to see a movie or buy a product. Knowing the strategies that advertisers use and background information on the psychology of decision-making did not influence participants' choices in which advertisements they preferred. In the case of the television commercial, participants chose the option that advertisers would not expect them to, which shows that there is room for improvement when determining the criteria advertisers use to deem a song successful for a specific advertisement.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Natalie Chetkovich, editor at a leading content and entertainment marketing agency called Trailer Park, my mentor, Justin Kantner, professor of psychology at California State University Northridge, and my AP Research Teacher, Dr. Swanson, for all of their help, advice, and support.