

How background music in ads affects consumers

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Including music in the background of a television commercial may make for a more effective sports product advertisement, according to the results of a Texas A&M University study.

The evidence is in consumers' brain waves: Study participants who were shown the version of a commercial that included music in the background had higher emotional arousal and attention level than those who were shown a version that only included narration. Background music also could lead to increased brand attitude and purchase intention, according to the study published in the *International Journal of Sports Marketing and Sponsorship*.

Hyun-Woo Lee, a sport management researcher and assistant professor in the Department of Health and Kinesiology within the College of Education & Human Development, said the research team used quantitative electroencephalography (EEG) to measure the brain waves of women who participated in the study. While social science researchers more commonly use psychometric measures like surveys, Lee said it can be difficult to capture people's perceptions or emotions in real time using this technique because it relies on memory.

By measuring survey participants' brain waves, Lee said he's confident the results show strong evidence that [background music](#) has a convincing effect in sports advertising.

"Specifically, we found that EEG activity in the [frontal lobe](#) (the front part of the brain), which is heavily associated with our emotions, was increased by background music," Lee said.

The study used two television ads produced by Korean sports goods company Prospects that aired in 2012. The 15-second commercials advertised the same women's running shoe and featured South Korean figure skater YuNa Kim.

A [control group](#) was played the commercial using only narration, and the experimental group watched the commercial featuring both narration and the song "Afternoon March" by Peppertones in the background.

The frontal lobe region was activated more in the group that watched the advertisement with background music, which supports the idea that music induces emotional arousal. Attitude toward the brand and purchase intentions are a separate matter from brainwaves, though. Since these variables couldn't be gauged through EEG, they were measured via a questionnaire and tested based on the hierarchy-of-effects model.

Purchase intention was stronger in the group that watched the ad with background music. In the seven-point scale questionnaire, the average [purchase intention](#) of the group who heard background music was a 4.36, while the group without music averaged 3.64.

Although the results provide evidence that music in ads work, the researchers noted they cannot promise that all background music will be effective.

"I would suggest that it is necessary to consider and test various elements in music, such as a certain genre, a certain tempo, or the relationship with a product endorser, doing so based on the type of sports product or brand," Lee said.

Lee's co-author, kinesiology student Jun-Phil Uhm '23, said music that harmonizes with the ad's visuals and message can make for a powerful advertising strategy.

"The significance of background music is particularly true in sports advertisement, where even stronger effects can be created by blending dynamic sports images with rhythmical music," Uhm said. "Advertisers can match vivid and affirmative images of sport with suitable background music to enhance the customer's perception of the message."

Lee and Uhm hope this study will be a jumping off point for more research into how [music](#) in advertising affects consumers.

More information: Jun-Phil Uhm et al, Effect of background music and hierarchy-of-effects in watching women's running shoes advertisements, *International Journal of Sports Marketing and Sponsorship* (2021). [DOI: 10.1108/IJSMS-09-2020-0159](https://doi.org/10.1108/IJSMS-09-2020-0159)

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