

Music Tempo Key to Tourism Commercial Effectiveness

Tourism organisations produce commercials with fast-tempo music to gain the audience's attention and increase message recall, according to the SHTM's Dr Steve Pan and a co-author. In a recently published study, the researchers find that as fast-tempo music demands more processing resources, advertisers compensate by including fewer scenes. They suggest that marketing organisations are "walking on the edge by striking a delicate balance between aural and visual information load".

Music as Mood Setter and Memory Trigger

TV commercials (TVCs) commonly use music to gain the audience's attention and to convey key messages. The researchers note that music not only helps to "set the mood of an encounter", but also has the potential to alter the mood of the listener; it can "both soothe and agitate the emotions". Hearing music can bring back certain memories that are associated with the mood created by that music. The use of music in TVCs can exploit this ability to create and change the listener's mood, so watching a tourism commercial has the potential to create or change the perception of a destination. Through repetition, music in a TVC can act as a memory trigger that "helps build a unique and consistent style" for a brand.

The most important element for creating the mood of a piece of music is the speed, or tempo – the faster the tempo, the more notes that must be played per minute. Although fast-tempo music tends to be perceived as happier and more attention gaining, it contains more information than slow tempo music and requires more resources for processing. The researchers observe that fast-tempo music in TVCs is normally "combined with less scenes (or shots)" to "reduce the visual information load".

Although music is an important element of TVCs, and various characteristics of the music can influence its effectiveness, little is known about the use of music in tourism commercials specifically. The researchers thus set out to "explore how music, as one of advertising's executional cues, is used in tourism TVCs". Their intention was to identify the characteristics of tourism

TVCs to provide post-production guidelines to national tourism organisations (NTOs).

Analysis of Tourism Commercials Worldwide

The researchers analysed the content of 95 TVCs produced by NTOs to identify their aural and visual characteristics and provide guidelines on how music can be used most effectively by destination marketing organisations. The commercials came from Europe (36.8%), the Americas (27.4%), Asia and the Pacific (20%), Africa (8.4%) and the Middle East (7.4%). They were downloaded from YouTube but had been broadcast on international television channels.

To conduct the analysis, the researchers quantified various aspects of the musical content, including the tempo, the type of music – jingle, parody of a chart hit or a chart hit – whether the music was instrumental or vocal, and whether slogans were incorporated into the lyrics. They also considered whether silence was used before key messages, whether voiceovers were included and the content of any voiceover narration.

In analysing the visual content of tourism TVCs, the researchers examined their duration, number of scenes and type of editing. They further analysed six commercials produced by NTOs "considered to be good at destination branding" to provide more in-depth understanding of the role that music plays in tourism TVCs.

Fast Tempo Music to Attract Attention

The tourism TVCs were comparatively long, with an average duration of 43.32 seconds, presumably because consumers "require more and detailed information" on a destination before buying a holiday. In terms of the number of scenes, the researchers found that the average was 14.65 shots per 30 seconds, which is "at the lower end of the range" of 15-20 shots found in general TVCs. The tourism TVCs tended to use "montage editing", with each shot lasting an average of 2.32 seconds, slightly longer than the 2 seconds in general TVCs that use this type of editing.

Analysis of the TVCs' musical content found that the average number of beats per minute was 117.75, and almost half had an unusually high 120 beats or more. Fast tempo music can create information overload, particularly if the "information load of the advertising message" is also high. Thus, fast music is usually associated with fewer scenes per minute to compensate for the high processing load. However, the number of scenes in the tourism commercials was only slightly reduced. The researchers suggest that these TVCs "favoured higher tempo music even though the information load for the advertising message is high" because they wanted to gain attention and increase message recall.

Other findings reveal that tourism TVCs tend not to use chart hits, preferring to "create music (or jingles) that can match their own messages and images". The researchers suggest this may be the case because uniqueness is a "very desirable quality" in advertising and using familiar popular music "might not do the trick". The commercials also tended to use instrumental rather than vocal music, perhaps to reduce the information load from the fast tempo music. Few commercials incorporated jingles, which the researchers attributed to budget limitations because "specially written jingles are usually more expensive".

Good-Branding Destination Commercials Differ Slightly

A more in-depth analysis of the TVCs produced by six "good-branding" destinations – New Zealand, India, Spain, Australia, Dubai, Ireland and Malaysia – revealed few differences between these and other TVCs. The tempo of the music in the good-branding commercials was slightly lower, with an average of 108.48 beats per minute rather than 117.75, and had slightly fewer scenes per minute (27.79 compared with 29.35 for others). The researchers conclude that although these destinations reduced the amount of aural information, they did not seek to take advantage of this by increasing the visual information load.

Balancing Attention and Overload

The study's findings provide helpful guidelines on aural and visual information loads for the producers of tourism TVCs. For instance, the researchers suggest that if an NTO aims to produce a 30-second commercial and "wants to squeeze in 25 shots/scenes, this is uncommon and may not be feasible". They note that music with around 120 beats per minute and roughly 15 scenes is

about right for a 30-second commercial. The fast tempo combined with a slight reduction in visual information will ensure the audience's attention without creating a processing overload. Future effort is now needed, the researchers comment, to determine exactly how audiences balance that audio and visual information they receive from tourism TVCs.

Points to Note

- Music sets the mood of TV commercials and improves recall.
- Tourism commercials tend to use fast-tempo music that grabs attention.
- Fast music is balanced by reduced visual content to avoid information overload.
- The ideal balance is 120 beats per minute and 15 scenes for a 30-second commercial.

Pan, Steve and Hanusch, Folker. (2011). "Tourism TV Commercials: A Delicate Balance Between Aural and Visual Information Load". *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, Vol. 28, pp. 465-480.