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## THE AUDIOVISUAL CONNECTIONS IN THE TELEVISION COMMERCIALS

**Daniel Robert Szabo**

*Kautz Gyula Economics Faculty, Department of Economic Analyses, Széchenyi István University, Győr, Hungary*

[szabodr@sze.hu](mailto:szabodr@sze.hu)

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### Abstract

*Most of the television advertisements contain some sort of music, which can contribute to the stories and concepts found in them, and more importantly, to their overall messages and potential impacts, too. In this paper, the strength of the congruency or coordination between the visual elements of the ads and their music, as well as the types of these solutions, and also, the inconsistencies in this field were studied. For the sample of the present study, 100 ads from the most valuable brands served as a basis. Characteristics, like the genre and origin of the music, the inclusion of multiple or different pieces of music in each advertisement, the degree, and type of the coordination, between the music and the story of the film, as well as the types of verbal information heard in the ads were examined. The aim was to find audiovisual solutions, best practices that can be used in the marketing communication of brands.*

### Keywords

Marketing, Audiovisual Coordination, Communication, Commercials, Music, Advertising, Ads, Brands, Jingles

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### 1. Introduction

Since music can contribute to the successful delivery of the message of advertisements (Hecker, 1984; Morris & Boone, 1998), it should be considered as an important component of

marketing communication (Gorn, 1982). However, they have to prevail in crowded, saturated media. Additionally, compared to different television programs, advertising breaks tend to be less interesting for the viewers. From another point of view, commercials may not be able to produce such a powerful effect, since they are relatively short (Alpert & Alpert, 1989). In order to succeed under such circumstances, to increase the effect on the viewers and listeners, the strengthening of the linkage between the ad and its music can be applied in many ways, as well as the use of verbal information, or multiple types of music in ads can be seen as useful means for television advertising.

Analyzing more than three thousand commercials of the most popular television channels in the United States, Allan (2008) found that 14 percent of commercials contain well-known music, 5 percent have a short jingle, while in other commercials there is a general, less typical, previously unknown background music. According to Cannon (2008), well known, popular music has been frequently used in commercials in the past decades. It is important to point out that the royalties associated with the use of these songs can amount to millions of dollars annually (Bullerjahn, 2006). When it comes to jingles, although their popularity has declined somewhat over the past decade, they may still be useful components for advertising and brand building, even if it would take it a long time for them to be anchored in the memory of viewers and listeners (Senter, 2009).

## **2. Music as a part of the audiovisual components in advertisements**

While Macklin (1998) suggested a classification of three types of commercial music; the lack of music, background music and short signals, most of the advertisements - on average 80-95 percent of them - feature some kind of music (Graakjaer, 2009; Allan, 2008). They can be characterized in different ways in terms of their role and position in commercials. We can basically distinguish basic, underlying music, soundtracks, which have a strong correlation with the events of the film, and short jingles typically featured at the end of the ads.

If we look at the roles of audiovisual components in commercials, we can distinguish the cases in which music plays a leading role in mediating the message of the advertisement and those in which the music is in the background, and the narrator is the main communicator of the message. In the former case, music can directly enter the message of the advertisement - in these cases; a direct or indirect reference may be heard in the lyrics about the product. Examples may also be found when the music does not include such a link to the product - and we can also

encounter solutions where music has no lyrics at all. In cases where the message of the advertisement is conveyed by the narrator, we can usually find typical background music, or in a fragment of the commercial, a short piece of music. There are examples that can be characterized by the complete absence of music (Alpert & Alpert 1990, 1991). In addition, commercials may contain verbal, non-verbal, visual, and musical messages that can have an effect on each other, and thus on the message of the advertising (Alpert & Alpert, 1991). Additionally, verbal information heard in the commercials, may even appear as slogans or in the lyrics of the music, as well (Heckler & Blossom 1997; Chou & Lien, 2010).

Lyrics used in the soundtrack of the commercial can also contribute to conveying information. They can highlight and support the message of the advertisement if they fit well with the subject of the advertisement (Chou & Lien, 2010). Meaningful, communicative lyrics can increase the attention of the listener and can increase the recall of the product (Olsen & Johnson, 2002). However, according to a significant observation of Stewart & Punj (1998), in terms of their effect on recalling the ad or the product, the relation between music and the visual world was more important than the relation of music and verbal information to the memory of consumers. In another study, it was observed that a strong matching of the advertisement message and the background music would not improve or disturb the effect of the message necessarily (Szabó 2010). In the study of Shen and Chen (2006), a similar effect was observed in the field of brand-related memories. Based on their experience, this effect would increase depending on the degree of attention paid to the advertisement.

### **3. Methods**

This paper focuses on examining the type and role of music used in the adverts, as well as the type and strength of audiovisual sync or coordination found in them. The hypothesis of the research was that in the TV ads of top brands, these audiovisual aspects from above would be used consciously. The following characteristics were examined:

- The genre and origin of the music heard in the ad,
- The degree and type of the coordination between the music and the story of the film,
- The types and timings of pauses or breaks featured in the music,
- The music heard at the end of the ad from the perspective of its music used throughout the ad,
- The type of audiovisual inaccuracies, the presence of rough or raw cuts,

- The inclusion of multiple or different pieces of music in each advertisement,
- The types of verbal information heard in the ads.

The sample contained commercials of world brands with the highest calculated values (the estimated value of brands is calculated using financial data and data related to various consumer decisions.) (Brandirectory, 2013; Ranking the Brands, 2013; Millward Brown, 2013). The top lists from above showed significant differences in the ranks and inclusion of certain brands. Brands were omitted that were not listed in at least two top 100 categories according to the three methods. To resolve this phenomenon, a new list and order were generated by comparing the three original lists (Table 1). The sample did not include Google and Facebook ads, as these brands did not use television ads in that period. In this paper, in an exploratory manner, an audiovisual-related analysis was carried out to identify the basic characteristics of 20 most valuable brands' television advertisements, broadcasted in 2012 and 2013, from the perspective of selecting and applying music in them. 5-5 films from each brand, so a total of 100 commercials were examined.

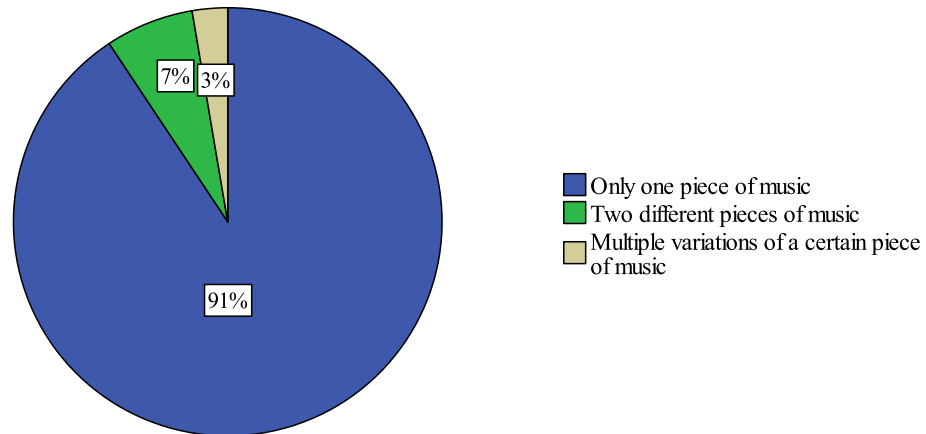
**Table 1:** *The examined brands*

Rank	Brand	Rank	Brand
1.	Apple	11.	BMW
2.	Microsoft	12.	Toyota
3.	IBM	13.	HP
4.	Coca-Cola	14.	Samsung
5.	AT&T	15.	UPS
6.	Verizon	16.	Orange
7.	Amazon.com	17.	Mercedes-Benz
8.	McDonald's	18.	Ford
9.	Walmart	19.	Shell
10.	GE	20.	Nike

Source: own list and ranks, based on the top lists of Brandirectory, a Ranking the Brands and Milward Brown

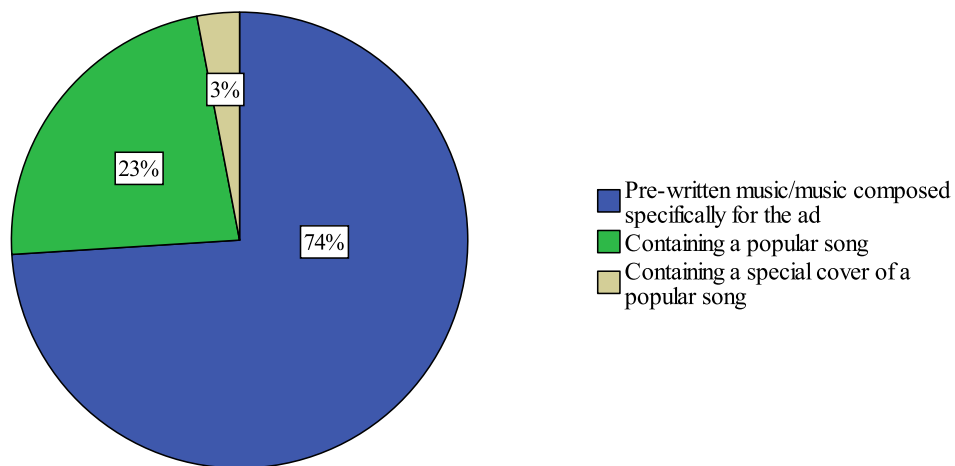
## 4. Results

In more than 90 percent of the commercials, there was one piece of music or some kind of edited version of its present in the advertisements. Only 7 percent of the films contained two different music, and there were also some solutions that featured a variant or a rearranged version of the music heard earlier (Figure 1).



**Figure 1:** *The inclusion of multiple pieces of music in each advertisement*

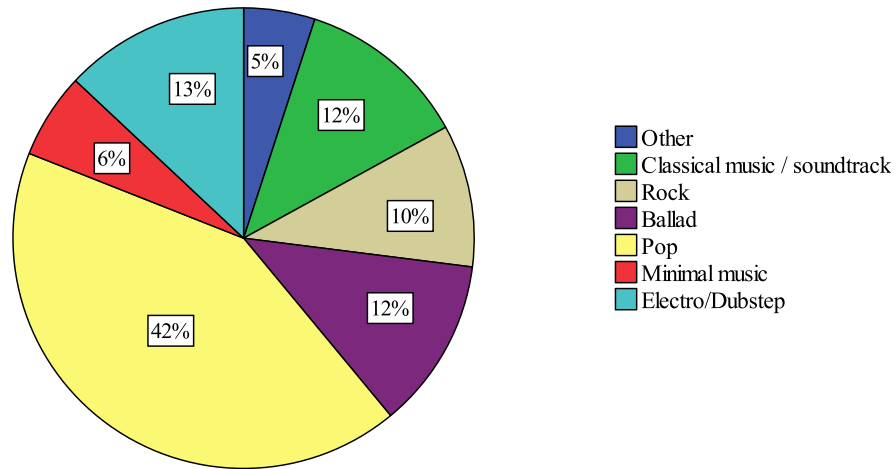
In the vast majority of commercials, some previously unknown, typically instrumental music was to be heard. Nearly a quarter of the music used in the ads of the sample was previously known music. The popularity of songs is, of course, a relative concept, so it is preferable to use previously existing, or pre-existing music as a term (Graakjaer 2015). Typically, these were edited versions, in order to fit the length of the ads. In some cases, rearranged versions of the previously existing music were featured, usually with altered lyrics (Figure 2).



**Figure 2:** *The origin of the music*

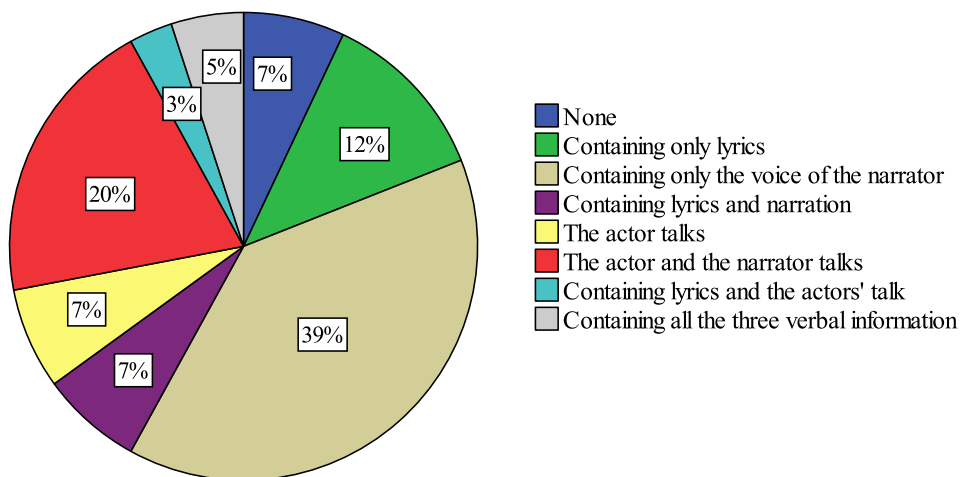
In more than 40 percent of commercials, some sort of pop music was present. Electro/dubstep music was the second most common genre in the sample. Similarly, the more emotional ballads, as well as classical music and soundtracks, represented a similar percentage.

Rock music was featured in 10 percent of commercials. Minimalist music and other genres were also present in the sample, however, with a fairly low percentage (Figure 3).



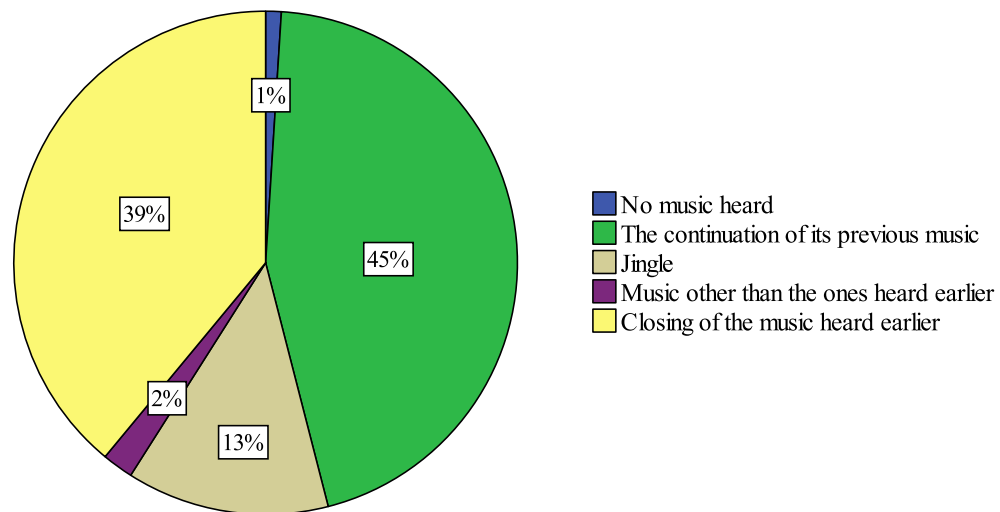
**Figure 3:** *The genre of the music heard in the commercial*

According to the literature, verbal information is considered as important parts of the ads, as well. In television advertising, they can be present in different ways; we can talk about lyrics, narratives, and speech of the actors. In most of the ads, multiple sorts and sources of verbal information were present. By subdividing these categories (Figure 4), almost of two-thirds of the commercials featured the voice of a narrator. The second most common solution - in almost one-third of advertisements - was the verbal information mediated by the actors. Only almost one-quarter of the music had some lyrics.



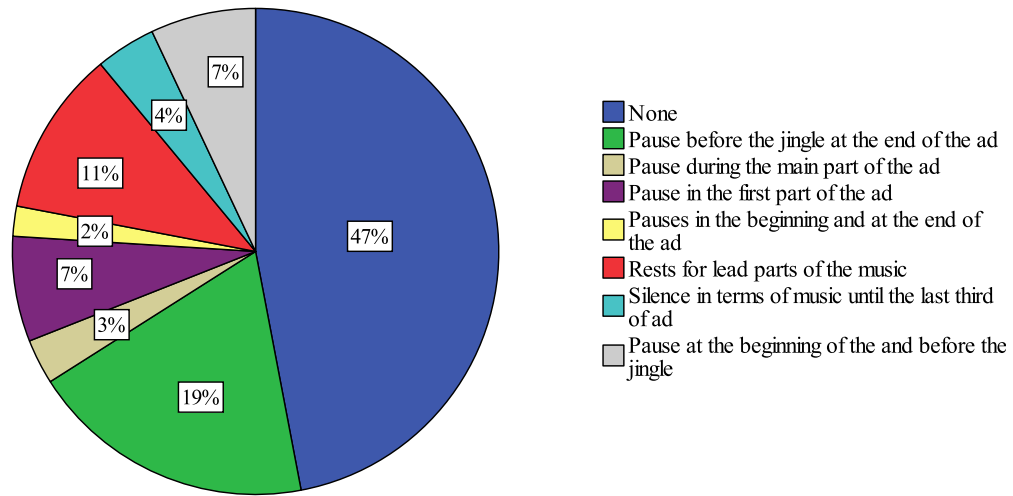
**Figure 4:** *The types of verbal information heard in the ad*

In terms of its potential impact, the end or the final phase is an especially important part of the advertisement. Concerning the use of music, in almost half of the cases, a simple continuation of the earlier music was present in them. Similarly, in close to 40 percent of the sample, a closing or cut-off of the previously heard music was found, supporting the curve and concept of the advertisement. In only 13% of the cases, some brand-specific jingle was featured at the end of ads (Figure 5).



**Figure 5:** *The closing of the ad from the perspective of its music*

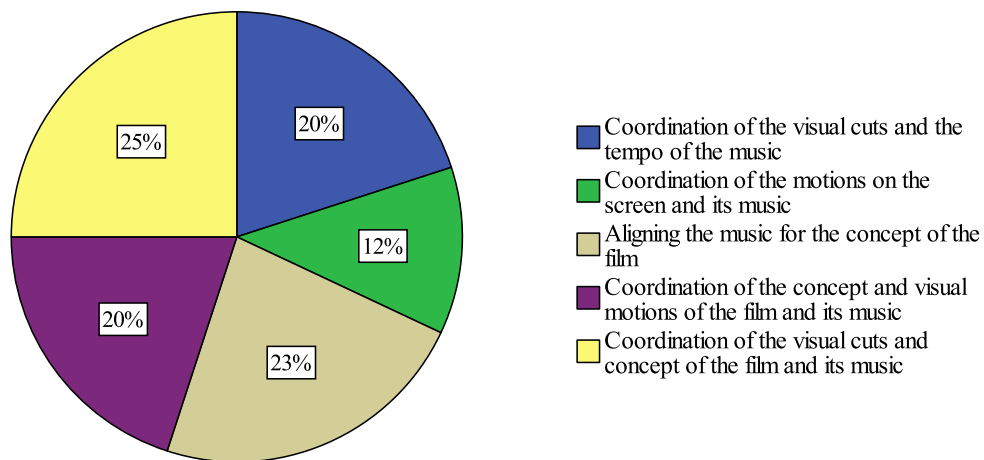
Breaks or pauses, which are pronounced and obvious means of audiovisual congruency were found at multiple locations in advertisements. Nonetheless, in almost half of the advertisements breaks on the music weren't applied at all. Pauses were most commonly heard before the end of the advertisement, typically before the product or the slogan, the brand was displayed or re-highlighted. Pauses in the arrangement were present with a similar occurrence; the lead parts had a break, and by that, music became deemphasized. The pause or break at the beginning or during the main part of the advertisements also appeared in a similar proportion of the sample (Figure 6).



**Figure 6:** The types of pauses or breaks featured in the music of the ads

The most common type of audiovisual coordination was the accompaniment of the story of the film by the concept (i.e. the placement and structure) of the music, which was found in almost 70% of the adverts. The second most common type was harmonization of visual cuts with tempo i.e. beats of the music. This approach was to be observed in more than 50 percent of the sample.

A more intense type of the audiovisual solutions was the coordination of the motions on the screen and music, which was present in almost one-third of the sample. Almost the half of the ads featured two types of the above at the same time, which potentially can further increase the audiovisual impact of the ad. The congruency or sync of the visual cuts along with the concept of the film and its music was identified in almost every fourth advertisement (Figure 7).

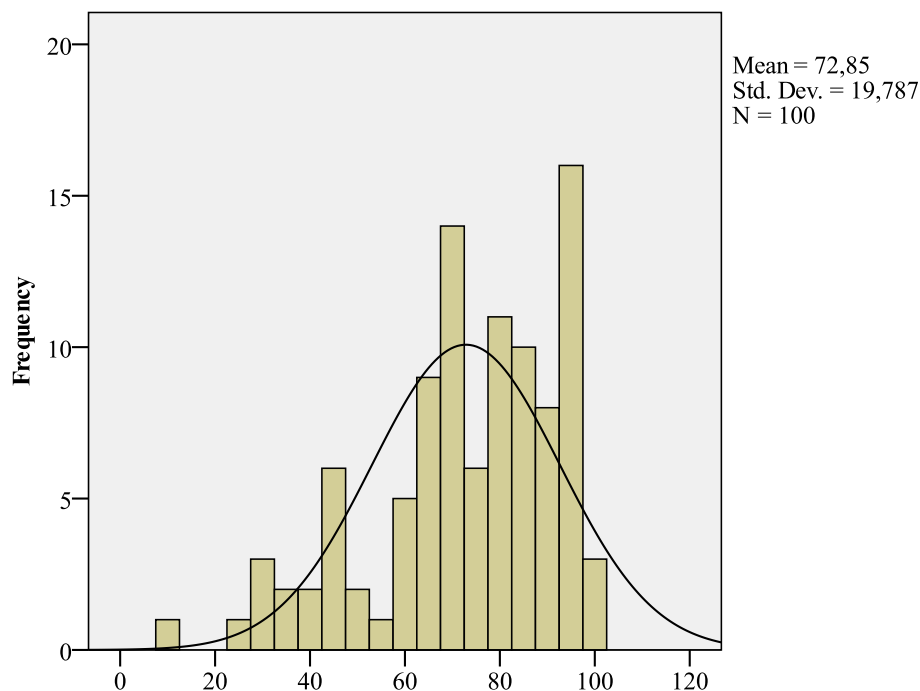


**Figure 7:** The types of the coordination between the film and its music



According to expert estimates, in more than two-thirds of the ads, there was a significant or a very close connection between the music and the story seen on the screen. The average percentage of explicitly expressed relationships was estimated to be over 72.42 percent (Figure 8). The standard deviation of the sample for this aspect is 18.715 percentage points. These values were determined according to the experience gained by previous researches in this field (Szabó, 2013a; 2013b), as well as by studying the present sample, based on the type of audiovisual coordination from above. The consistency of the implementation found in the ads was also taken into account during the classification.

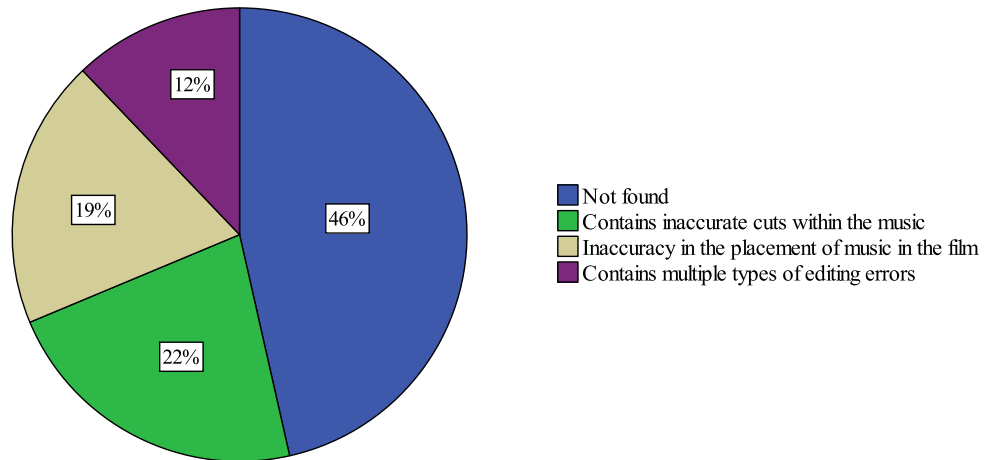
According to these aspects, a value between 0 and 100 percent was determined. Based on the estimates, the distribution of the percentages –ie. the degrees - of audiovisual coordination is shown in Figure 1. As we can see, the distribution of the variable could not be considered to be normal (sig: 0,000), a shift can be observed towards more intense audio-visual alignments. In terms of the impact of the commercials on the viewer, this shift in the direction of stronger relationships or synchronizations is certainly a useful phenomenon as such advertisements are potentially able to strengthen their effect and impact on viewers.



**Figure 8:** *The degree or strength of the coordination between the music and the picture*

However, in addition to the above, it is important to point out that in more than half of the films examined, music-related inaccuracies, rough edits were found (Figure 9). Since these

should be considered as unusual formulas, their raw, forms may have a potentially negative impact on the message of the ad.



**Figure 9:** *The type of audiovisual inaccuracies and incongruities*

Such effects could break the continuity of the film, and by that, distract the attention of the viewers (Szabó 2010). These incongruities and inaccuracies were found in several different forms; the most common type of these were simple cutoff errors, which could also result in unreasonably varying alternating tempi or beats in the music. In more than 10 percent of the sample, multiple types of such inaccuracies were found.

## 5. Conclusions

The audiovisual congruency or coordination was present to a considerable extent and could turn up in several ways. In many cases, not only the story or the concept but also, the events on the screen were emphasized by the music. As highlighted by the literature, such audiovisual solutions can be useful for the success of the advertisement; according to previous studies from above, they could increase and retain attraction and the attention of the viewers.

Among verbal elements, lyrics can be an important means for conveying verbal information (Chou & Lien, 2010), however, they were only present in one-quarter of the music. Breaks or pauses can also support the concept of the advertisement. Despite this, almost half of the sample did not make use of these by the advertisers. Such findings are also relevant in the light of previous studies (Stewart & Punj, 1998) which found that visual and audio contexts are more important than the verbal and musical information in terms of the recall of advertisements. It should be also noted, that the meaning of the lyrics and the message of the songs heard in

altered, edited versions of previously existing music can be interpreted and perceived differently (Graakjaer, 2015).

It's also worth to point out, that more than half of the sample could be characterized as having rough, inaccurate cuts. Different combinations of the above phenomena were observed in a considerable number of the examined ads. Previous experience shows that the lack of audiovisual sync or inaccuracies have an adverse effect on the viewers (Szabó, 2010).

In only a fraction of the sample were previously existing music to be heard. It is surprising since well-known melodies can evoke memories and moods in the listeners (Bode, 2006), which are normally capable of affecting the judgment of the product or the brand (Redker & Gibson, 2009). According to previous experience, these solutions may be able to support later product recall, albeit attracting the attention of viewers (Allan, 2006). However, in addition to the above, their cognitive “weight” on the viewer's interpretation of the music can be significantly lower, as well, due to the fact that they already know that piece of music. The above results show a similar picture to the previous experiences (Allan, 2008), however, in advertisements with pre-existing music were represented twice as much. One of the main reasons for this was the advertising of the largest brands that gave the basis for the sample. We can assume, that these companies tend to use more expressive, intense, and original music instead of earlier recorded, sample music, typically used as a background factor of ads (Scott, 1990). The choice of well known, popular genres suggests that the makers prefer to use usual, rather conventional sounds in advertising. However, definite, modern-sounding genres and minimalistic orchestrations were also present in the sample, too.

In summary, it can be concluded, that in most cases music heard in the most valuable, top brands' ads had a strong audiovisual congruency, by utilizing by various means and approaches. However, in many cases, only some of these were used by them. Additionally, the categorization of the role of the music, as well as the audiovisual congruency found in the ads, used by previous researchers could be further improved or extended, since music can be described by more aspects. A more detailed categorization and several additional aspects should be applied, when we're examining the possible roles of music, as well as the coherence of the audiovisual solutions in the ads when it comes to their potential roles since they can be considered as important and crucial elements of audiovisual communication.

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